



“ALEKSANDËR MOISIU” UNIVERSITY DURRËS
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

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The 8th International Conference

Shaping the Future:
Education & Innovation in a Digital
Society

April 29th – 30th, 2026
Hybrid (on-site and online)



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*Science generates knowledge, internationalization disseminates it
and UAMD Stands as the bridge between them*

Book of Proceedings

8th International Conference

Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society

Volume I

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The 8th International Conference *“Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society”* brings together researchers, and professionals from 18 different countries to explore contemporary challenges and innovations in education and social sciences.

This volume includes selected papers that have undergone a peer-review process and reflect the latest research and practices in the field.

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Digital accessibility as a condition for full access to public services. Analysis of European Union policy in this area.

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Abstract: The role of public institutions (offices, hospitals, libraries, schools, universities) is to provide services to society. Given the diverse needs of people with special needs (wheelchair users, the blind, the deaf, the elderly, parents with young children, and people with neurological disorders), the way these services are provided should be tailored to their needs. Due to the increasing digitization of various spheres of life, digital accessibility is becoming a prerequisite for full participation in social, cultural, political, and economic life. Information, conclusions, and strategies posted on websites, in downloadable files, on social media, and in mobile applications should be accessible to everyone. The aim of this article is to present and analyze European Union activities in the area of digital accessibility. The goals and scope of this policy and the instruments for implementation will be defined.

Keywords: *digital accessibility, European Union, people w special needs, person with disabilities, public services, access*

1. Introduction

World Health Organization (WHO) data (2023) indicates that there are approximately 1.3 billion people with disabilities worldwide, representing approximately 16% of the global population. In the highest-income countries, this percentage is highest (21.2%), in upper-middle-income countries 16.2%, and in low-income countries 12.8%. In Europe, disability affects 20.0% of the population, in the Americas 19.4%, and in Africa 12.9%. In EU member states, 19.6% of residents report some functional limitations, including 7.2% with serious limitations (Eurostat 2025). Among people over 16 years of age, 23.4 % of the European inhabitants declare disability.

Data indicate that the percentage of people with disabilities increases with age. Given the projections of an aging population in many parts of the world, the

number of people with disabilities will continue to grow. People with disabilities are classified within a broader category, namely, those with special needs or functional limitations, which also includes the elderly, pregnant women, parents with young children, people with excessive luggage, and people with temporary limitations caused by illness or injury (Panciszko-Szweda 2024).

Furthermore, the percentage of people living in cities is growing globally, and many rural areas are struggling with depopulation. The United Nations estimates that by 2050, 68% of the world's population will live in cities (United Nations 2018).

These processes influence the provision of and access to public services. Both states and local governments are seeking solutions that can contribute to increased efficiency in public service delivery. Digital solutions and information and communication technologies can be such tools. Their potential has been demonstrated in numerous scientific studies (Kwiliński et al. 2024, Osborne et al. 2022).

However, the ability of people with special needs to access public services via ICTs is contingent on ensuring digital accessibility. This requires considering the needs of various groups (blind, visually impaired, deaf, and those with sensory impairments) in the process of content creation, designing mobile applications, online platforms, and websites. This poses a significant challenge, effort, and cost for developers. Therefore, the policies of national states and international organizations in this area are an interesting research problem

The primary objective of the following research is to identify the European Union's actions in ensuring digital accessibility. The literature on the subject has addressed the issue of EU policy towards people with disabilities (Vindigni 2025, Włodyka 2022), but these were analyses of individual actions undertaken by the EU in this area. At the same time, there is a lack of cross-sectional studies. The study aims to address several key questions:

1. What actions related to digital accessibility have been undertaken by European Community/European Union institutions?
2. Which institution sets the main directions of action in this area?
3. What digital accessibility-related goals have been set for Member States?
4. What legal sources address digital accessibility, and to what extent are the goals set within them binding on Member States?
5. What instruments does the EU use to implement digital accessibility policy?

2. Theoretical Framework

In international law, accessibility is defined as ensuring equal access for all people” to the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communication technologies and systems, and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas „(UN 2006, Art. 9). The European Commission (EC) defines accessibility as a prerequisite for every individual to participate in social, economic, cultural, and political life (European Commission 2010). Therefore, it is a human right (Panciszko-Szweda 2024).

The right to accessibility and access to public services is guaranteed by international and European law (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Art. 9; Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Art. 10; Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Art. 1, 20-21). The concept of public services itself has not been clearly defined at the EU level. This is a consequence of the diverse approaches in Member States To ensure uniformity and increase transparency, the European Commission has proposed the term "services of general interest," which it defined as: "services that public authorities in the Member States classify as being of general interest and which are therefore subject to specific public service obligations." Furthermore, three types of such services have been distinguished:

1. Services of general economic interest – services provided for a fee, e.g., transport, postal services;
2. Non-economic services – educational services, police, justice, primary healthcare, social security, public administration;
3. Social services of general interest – services related to the social protection of economically and socially vulnerable groups and individuals (European Commission 2011).

One of the dimension of accessibility to public services is digital accessibility. It is defined as the ability of everyone, including those with special needs, to use websites, mobile applications, and documents in digital form. This is intended to ensure equal access to information, services, and the opportunities created by ICTs (Accessible Center EU 2023). It is important to emphasize that it enables everyone to independently, fully, conveniently, and securely access all content and functions in the digital world (Enterprise Europe Network 2026).

Skoczylas (2022, p. 127) identifies the following goals of digital accessibility: counteracting the phenomenon of social exclusion, creating procedures and tools that will increase the participation of all citizens (including people with special needs) in e-government, improving the digital competences of staff

employed in public institutions and promoting the idea of equal treatment of all network users.

International standards in the area of digital accessibility have been developed since the 1990s. Technological developments require periodic updates, hence WCAG 2.0, WCAG 2.1, and WCAG 2.2. WCAG consists of 13 guidelines, categorized into four principles: perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. Each guideline is accompanied by measurable success criteria, categorized into three conformance levels: A, AA, and AAA (W3C 2026).

3. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and is based on a content analysis of legal acts and documents published by EU institutions, primarily the European Commission. A normative analysis method was employed, focusing on the content of norms, the structure of individual legal acts, and their hierarchical relationships. This allowed to determine which types of legal acts EU institutions most frequently use in the context of digital accessibility policy. This method also enabled to identify the tools used to achieve the objectives set out in both 'hard law' (treaties, international agreements, directives) and 'soft law' (strategies, communications, action plans). An analysis of legislative changes was also used to determine how regulations concerning digital accessibility evolved over time, from the 1990s to the end of 2025. This analysis allowed to identify several phases of EC/EU policy in this area.

4. Findings and Discussions

The European Community/European Union's digital accessibility policy can be divided into several phases. The first, the initiation phase, involved laying the foundations for activities supporting people with disabilities in the context of the information society. "In 1996, the EC issued a communication highlighting that the organization of the state, society, and economy is primarily oriented toward the 'average' citizen, i.e., an individual without disabilities. As a consequence, a significant percentage of citizens lack access to many services (education, medical care, public transport). (Commission of the European Communities 1996a, p. 3) Due to the ineffectiveness of the current approach based on adaptation, the removal of barriers, and medical methods of restoring abilities to "normal", the EC proposes an integration approach based on the creation of equal opportunities and non-discrimination. To achieve these goals, a number of tools have been proposed: a) mainstreaming disability issues (recognizing them as a priority of social policy), b) establishing mechanisms for cooperation and information exchange

between member states and establishing a group composed of representatives of individual states, c) supporting the activities of NGOs working for people with disabilities, d) recognizing the employment of people with disabilities as a priority, e) recognizing information and communication technologies as an opportunity to improve the situation of people with disabilities, f) financial support from structural funds to counteract exclusion (Ibidem, p. 4). Since the 1990s, funding for projects within European funds aimed at improving the situation of people with special needs has been increasing. Concurrently, the Green Paper on the Information Society addresses the challenges associated with implementing this concept, which include: limited access to the network for residents of less densely populated or peripheral areas, particularly older adults and individuals with disabilities; low or absent digital skills; and the use of the Information Society to promote social cohesion, increase citizen participation, and enhance inclusiveness (Commission of the European Communities, 1996b).

It should be emphasized that the issue of digital accessibility was not addressed in this first phase. The primary focus was on access to ICTs and online networks. At the end of this phase, a discussion on this issue began. This was related to the "eEurope" initiative, one of the priorities of the European Commission, headed by Romano Prodi. This initiative was intended to accelerate Europe's transformation towards an information society. The European Commission identified 10 priorities in this area, including "eParticipation" for people with disabilities. It was assumed that the development of the information society must take into account the needs of this group (European Commission 1999).

The second phase involves the formal adoption of the first commitments regarding accessibility and covers the years 2000-2010. In 2000, in connection with the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy, the EU's plan for 2000-2010, which aimed to make Europe the most competitive economy in the world alongside the United States and Japan. The EC initiated the eEurope 2002 Action Plan, which aimed to increase access to the Internet for European citizens by liberalizing the market for providers, which was supposed to contribute to lower prices for consumers. A series of regulations were introduced to protect users' personal data and allow for the provision of electronic networks and services (European Commission 2002). The plan highlighted the need to analyze and monitor regulations aimed at ensuring digital accessibility in the Community. It was assumed that public sector websites (both those of Community institutions and agencies and those of the Member States) should be designed to ensure their accessibility for people with special needs. Such actions would allow everyone full access to information and the ability to use e-government. The plan included a commitment to adopt the Web

Accessibility Initiative (WAI) guidelines by the end of 2001 (pp. 17-18). Thus, the European Commission began the process of promoting Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 1.0, an international technical standard that facilitates access to websites (Commission of the European Communities 2001). In 2002, a further plan was adopted, with a 2005 perspective (eEurope 2005). It expanded the commitment to ensuring accessibility in the digital sphere. The plan's main goals included: "Interactive public services, accessible for all, and offered on multiple platforms." Therefore, websites/digital platforms through which public services are provided should also be accessible to people with special needs (Commission of the European Communities 2002).

In 2006, the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The European Union signed the Convention in 2007 and adopted it by Council Decision 2009. Article 9 of the Convention put forward the concept of accessibility, including in the digital context. It has become a legal obligation for the EU to real-world implementation the concept of digital accessibility.

Between 2010 and 2015, work was formally undertaken to develop the legal framework for digital accessibility. In 2010, the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe (European Commission 2010) was adopted. It identified eight areas of action: Accessibility, Participation, Equality, Employment, Education and Training, Social Protection, Health, and External Action. In the context of the first area, it was noted that people with special needs have the right to equal access to public services and facilities and to fully participate in social, cultural, and economic life. Particular attention was paid in this context to the low accessibility of websites (approximately 5% of public institution) and television programs. These provisions led to the inclusion of digital accessibility in broader policies for people with disabilities.

In 2012, the European Commission presented a preliminary proposal for a directive on digital accessibility. It should be emphasized that until the 2020s, EU actions were primarily focused on providing incentives for public institutions. The adopted acts and documents were not legally binding; they served as guidelines, providing direction for Member States to follow. In its justification for the proposed legislation, the EC cites the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (European Commission 2012).

From the point of view of public institutions, an important legal act influencing accessibility policy was adopted in 2014. Directive 2014/24/EU on public procurement introduces the provision that "For all procurements intended for use by natural persons, whether general public or staff of the

contracting authority, the technical specifications shall, except in duly justified cases, be drawn up so as to take into account accessibility criteria for persons with disabilities or design for all users" (Article 42 (1)). This regulation requires that the construction and expansion of buildings, services, and supplies be accessible. Therefore, if the contract involves the creation of an online platform, mobile application, or documentation, they must meet digital accessibility criteria. In 2015, a European standard on accessibility was also adopted for public procurement of ICT products and services in Europe (EN 301 549 v1.1.2). This corresponds to WCAG 2.0 (European Commission 2025).

The fourth phase involves introducing digital accessibility principles as a requirement for all public institutions in the EU. In 2016, Directive (EU) 2016/2102 on the accessibility of websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies was adopted. The goal of this legal act is to ensure that public sector bodies take the necessary measures to make their websites and mobile applications more accessible by making them perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust (Article 4). The directive specifies which websites, digital documents, and mobile applications do not have to meet the adopted standards. It specifies the deadlines for public institutions to ensure digital accessibility: 2018 for new public sector websites, 2019 for existing websites, and 2021 for mobile applications. In 2021, the European Commission (EC) introduced digital accessibility requirements in accordance with the WCAG 2.1 standard (Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2021/1339).

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) was adopted in 2019. This directive extends the obligation to ensure digital accessibility to some private entities (Directive (EU) 2019/882).

Since 2020, a phase of strengthening digital accessibility policies and enforcing EU law has been underway. The 2021-2030 Strategy for People with Disabilities, adopted in 2020, reiterates the provisions of the 2010 Strategy. Accessibility is recognized as a factor contributing to the realization of rights and ensuring autonomy and equality. Accessibility of built environments (buildings, roads, sidewalks, paths) and the virtual world (websites, documents, applications), as well as information and communication technologies, goods, and services, is recognized as a prerequisite for the full participation of people with disabilities. The document contains a number of tools that will help implement the concept of accessibility, including digital accessibility (AccessibleEU - a database with examples of good practices, the European Disability Card, guidance recommending improvements on independent living and inclusion in the community, a framework for social services of excellence, a package of solutions aimed at improving the situation of disabled people in the labor market, Disability Platform: for national

authorities and a renewed HR strategy for the European Commission, including actions to promote diversity and inclusion of people with disabilities. In 2022, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a joint declaration in which it was emphasized that the digital transformation cannot ignore any group, including the elderly and people with disabilities (European Commission 2022). In 2025, the process of implementing the EAA provisions was completed.

The analysis of EU digital accessibility policy development presented above confirms the shift from a medical model of understanding disability to a social model in EU member states. In the medical model, disability is viewed through the prism of an individual's personal problem, which arises from an illness, injury, or other medical condition (Twardowski 2019). In this case, individualized treatment by qualified professionals is necessary. Policy development in this approach boils down to reforming the healthcare system. In the social model of disability, this characteristic is attributed to society. It is society that creates barriers and prevents full integration. Therefore, disability is not considered a characteristic of an individual. Society as a whole bears the responsibility for eliminating barriers and enabling full participation for all. Policy in this model boils down to guaranteeing full rights to all members of society (Oliver 1990, Silvers, Francis 2018). EU digital accessibility policy assumes that every individual will have full and independent access to digital content on stationary and mobile devices.

Michael Ashley Stein (2007) demand for a broader scope of rights than those guaranteed by the social model. He argues that a significant limitation of this approach is its excessive focus on first-generation rights (i.e., negative rights in the area of civil and political rights, related to the prohibition of discrimination and the requirement of equal treatment). The social model underemphasizes second-generation rights (i.e., social, economic, and cultural rights), the realization of which would enable the full participation of people with disabilities. Therefore, he postulates the removal of barriers to participation, thus ensuring equality and formal justice. The response to the limitations of the social model is to be found in the human rights paradigm for people with disabilities, which guarantees opportunities and resources for the development of individual talents.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

In the early 2000s, the issue of digital accessibility emerged as a recommendation and best practice. Until the adoption of the Public Procurement Directive, there were no legal mechanisms in the EU that effectively mandated this dimension of accessibility. This change has a real

impact on equal opportunities and ensuring equality of access. Because every purchase made with public funds must meet technical accessibility requirements, the 2016 directive prohibited digital documents, mobile applications, and public institution websites from meeting international standards in the area of digital accessibility.

It should be emphasized that the majority of EU documents and legal acts concerning accessibility and ensuring the rights of people with special needs in the digital sphere are programmatic and strategic in nature (e.g., EC communications, strategies for people with disabilities). Legal acts that produce specific legal effects for both Member States and citizens take the form of directives. These directives are binding in their purpose and must be transposed. This means that the standards contained therein do not apply automatically, unlike regulations. Member States have the freedom to choose how to implement these provisions.

Among the instruments most frequently employed by the European Union to implement digital accessibility policy are soft law measures, action programs, and financial support aimed at developing network infrastructure as well as enhancing competencies for the creation of digitally accessible content and applications.

The analysis presented above has certain limitations. The author focused on the formal and legal aspects of digital accessibility policy. This serves as a prelude to further research related to the actual implementation of the EU's goals and the identification of opportunities and threats related to their implementation.

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Televised Discourse in the Digital Age: Power, Ideology, and Social Transformation

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Abstract: The digital transformation of contemporary society has reshaped the role and functions of televised discourse, which remains a central vector in the formation of public opinion, social values, and power relations. This paper examines televised discourse from a philosophical and socio-communicational perspective, with emphasis on the relationship between language, ideology, and social transformation within the digital society. The objective of the research is to highlight the ways in which televised discourse contributes to the construction of social reality and to the legitimization of specific ideological perspectives. The study is grounded in the premise that televised media discourse operates as a social actor with significant influence on collective representations. The research methodology relies on critical discourse analysis applied to selected news programs and television talk shows. The analysis identifies discursive strategies, mechanisms of symbolic power, and modes of audience influence. The theoretical framework integrates concepts from social philosophy, media studies, and discourse theory. The findings indicate the adaptation of televised discourse to the new dynamics of the digital environment and underline its role in shaping social consciousness. The paper provides a relevant theoretical contribution to the understanding of media discourse in digital society and emphasizes the importance of developing digital citizenship and critical thinking within the contemporary public sphere.

Keywords: *televised discourse, digital society, power, ideology, critical discourse analysis.*

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of contemporary society has profoundly influenced communication environments, reshaping the ways in which information is

produced, disseminated, and received. Television remains an essential channel in the formation of public opinion, the transmission of social values, and the consolidation of power relations, even within a context increasingly shaped by digital platforms and social networks. This study is situated at the intersection of social philosophy, media studies, and discourse theory, examining how televised discourse contributes to the shaping of collective perceptions and the legitimization of specific ideologies.

Recent developments, including media convergence, content digitalization, and instantaneous access to information, generate new challenges for understanding the role of television in society and for conducting critical analysis of the messages delivered to audiences. Within this evolving media landscape, televised discourse continues to function as a structured space of representation and interpretation, influencing social meaning-making processes.

The research identifies a significant gap in the existing literature regarding the function of televised discourse within the contemporary digital context, where media influence intersects with complex social and ideological dynamics. The study seeks to demonstrate how televised discourse operates as an active social actor, shaping the construction of social reality and legitimizing ideological perspectives.

The main objectives include:

- analyzing discursive strategies employed in televised news and talk shows;
- identifying mechanisms of symbolic power embedded in media discourse;
- evaluating the ways in which television contributes to shaping the social consciousness of audiences.

The paper aligns with the conference theme, *“Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society,”* by addressing the digital transformation of televised discourse and its impact on society and media education. The study contributes to contemporary debates on digital citizenship, critical thinking, and public media literacy. It offers innovative perspectives for analyzing communication in the digital era and for understanding the role of media in shaping the future of society.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the relevant literature highlights the central role of televised discourse in shaping public opinion, transmitting social values, and consolidating power relations. Recent studies demonstrate that television continues to influence collective perceptions even within a digital era

dominated by online platforms and social media (Couldry, 2012; Habermas, 1991). Research in media studies emphasizes the importance of critical discourse analysis for identifying persuasive strategies, mechanisms of legitimation, and the ways in which mass media messages structure social reality (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2008).

However, significant gaps remain in the current literature, particularly regarding the ways in which televised discourse adapts to new digital dynamics and how its impact on dominant ideologies and social consciousness is shaped by interaction with digital media environments. Most studies address television and digital media separately, without examining their convergence and its effects on contemporary audiences. This gap justifies the need for an interdisciplinary analysis that integrates philosophical, sociological, and media perspectives on televised discourse within the digital context.

The study is grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which provides analytical tools for examining the relationships between language, power, and ideology. CDA theory, developed by Fairclough and van Dijk, conceptualizes discourse as an active social force capable of influencing collective perceptions and behaviors. This framework enables the identification of discursive strategies, mechanisms of legitimation, and subtle forms of symbolic power embedded in news programs and television talk shows.

The conceptual framework also integrates perspectives from social philosophy, highlighting the relationship between language, ideology, and social transformation, as well as from media studies, which examine the adaptation of television to digital dynamics. The coherence between theory and research objectives supports a rigorous interpretation of the data and strengthens the critical analysis of how televised discourse contributes to shaping social consciousness within digital society.

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is appropriate for investigating the relationship between language, ideology, and social transformation. The selection of a qualitative methodology is justified by the objective of identifying discursive strategies and subtle mechanisms of influence embedded in televised discourse.

This research design enables an in-depth examination of media texts and their contextual frameworks, ensuring an analysis that extends beyond description toward interpretative understanding. Through this approach, the study explores how television contributes to the construction of social reality and the shaping of public perceptions within the digital environment.

The study does not involve human participants in the traditional sense, as it is grounded in qualitative media analysis. The population under investigation consists of televised news programs and political or social talk shows broadcast by major Albanian television channels. The sampling strategy follows a purposive selection model, appropriate for qualitative research, aiming to identify media content that directly addresses themes related to digitalization, social transformation, education, and public policy.

The sample includes selected episodes from three national television programs: *Top Story* (Top Channel), *Fokus* (Vizion Plus), and a prime-time talk show broadcast on News 24. These programs were selected based on their high audience reach, thematic relevance to digital transformation and social issues, and their integration of digital elements such as online audience interaction. Specific segments were chosen when they contained explicit references to digitalization policies, migration and social change in Durrës, or discussions concerning education and media in the digital environment.

This purposive sampling strategy ensures analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness. The selected cases function as illustrative examples that allow in-depth exploration of discursive mechanisms operating within contemporary Albanian televised discourse. The primary research instrument consists of a structured discourse analysis protocol developed in accordance with the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The protocol includes analytical categories such as:

- lexical choices and key-term repetition;
- framing strategies and narrative structures;
- representation of social actors;
- appeals to authority or emotion;
- integration of digital interaction (e.g., online comments, live polls).

Data collection involved the systematic viewing and transcription of selected program segments. Each segment was documented with reference to channel, program title, broadcast date, and thematic focus. Relevant excerpts were transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic accuracy and contextual meaning. Observational notes were recorded to capture visual framing, moderator interventions, and references to digital platforms.

The procedure followed a sequential model: identification of relevant broadcasts, selection of thematic segments, transcription, categorization according to analytical criteria, and interpretative examination. Data analysis was conducted through qualitative thematic and discursive coding within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. The process involved:

1. Identification of recurring themes and dominant narratives.

2. Examination of linguistic features, including modality, evaluative language, and rhetorical devices.
3. Analysis of power relations manifested through representation, source selection, and framing techniques.
4. Interpretation of how digital elements reshape or reinforce discursive authority.

The analysis sought to uncover mechanisms of symbolic power and ideological legitimation embedded in televised discourse. Findings were interpreted in relation to existing theoretical perspectives on discourse, media power, and digital transformation.

The study adheres to established academic and ethical standards. The analyzed material consists exclusively of publicly broadcast television programs available through official media platforms. No private data or personal information beyond publicly accessible content was collected or processed.

All excerpts are referenced accurately, and contextual integrity is preserved to prevent misrepresentation. Since the research does not involve direct human subjects, informed consent procedures were not required. The study respects institutional and national research guidelines concerning media analysis and academic integrity.

The analyzed television programs and formats are part of Albania’s major broadcast media landscape. *Top Channel* consistently ranks as Albania’s most-watched channel, combining news, current affairs, and public debates (Vox News, 2026). News outlets such as *News 24* and channels like *Vizion Plus* are also widely consumed and include both news and discussion programs relevant to political, social and digital transformation themes.

Table 1 provides contextualized examples from major Albanian television programs that illustrate the three analytical dimensions identified in this study: discursive strategies, symbolic power, and digital interaction.

Table 1: *Illustrative Examples of Discursive Dimensions in Selected Albanian Television Programs*

Program (Example)	Dimension Illustrated	Why it Matches
Top Channel – Top Story	Discursive strategies & rhetorical devices	Large news/debate format allows recurring themes, expert sources, framing.
News 24 – Real Story	Symbolic power and ideological legitimation	Talk-show formats position social actors and perspectives as authoritative.

Top Channel/Vizion Plus digital presence	Interaction with digital environment	These channels maintain active YouTube and social media engagement with viewers.

As shown in Table 1, the selected programs exemplify how televised discourse operates simultaneously at rhetorical, ideological, and digital levels within the Albanian media landscape. The examples presented in Table 1 are illustrative and based on representative thematic segments from major Albanian television programs. They reflect recurrent discursive patterns observed in news and talk-show formats related to digitalization, migration, and media education.

Table 2: Representative discursive strategies observed in selected Albanian TV programs

Program	Analyzed Segment	Identified Strategy	Observed Effect
Top Channel – Top Story	Political debate on digitalization	Selection of favorable sources, appeal to emotions	Creation of a dominant perspective on digitalization
Vizion Plus – Fokus	Report on migration in Durrës	Repetition of key terms, moral narratives	Strengthening public perception of social impact
News 24 – Talk-show	Discussion on education and media	Integration of online comments	Increased audience engagement and adaptation of discourse to the digital environment

The table highlights recurrent discursive strategies across the analyzed television programs. Televised discourse consistently legitimizes dominant ideologies through topic selection, source framing, and lexical choices. Subtle persuasive techniques, such as emotional appeals, repetition of key terms, and narrative construction, guide audience interpretations toward specific social and moral conclusions.

These results confirm theoretical perspectives on discourse as a form of symbolic power and a mechanism for constructing social reality. In line with Critical Discourse Analysis, the language used in the programs functions as a tool for meaning making and for orienting collective interpretation. The

integration of digital elements does not reduce the role of television but reshapes its function in the contemporary public sphere, reinforcing influence through multiplatform interaction.

5. Results and Discussion

Critical Discourse Analysis revealed recurrent patterns and consistent discursive strategies across the news programs and talk shows included in the sample. First, televised discourse demonstrates systematic strategies of legitimizing dominant ideologies through topic selection, information hierarchy, and the choice of sources perceived as credible or authoritative. In debates concerning digitalization, institutional perspectives and official expertise prevail, reinforcing a narrative centered on progress, modernization, and administrative efficiency.

Second, the analysis identifies the use of subtle persuasive techniques, including appeals to collective emotions, repetition of key terms, and the construction of stable interpretative frames. In reports addressing migration or local social change, the discourse frequently incorporates evaluative expressions and structured narratives that guide audience interpretation toward specific social and moral conclusions.

Third, the research highlights the explicit integration of digital elements into the structure of televised discourse. References to social media platforms, the display of real-time comments, and the use of online polls transform the program into a hybrid communicative space in which television and digital media interact. This convergence strengthens discursive authority through the simulation of public participation and through the expansion of the communicative framework beyond the strictly televised environment.

The findings can be synthesized along three principal dimensions:

- **Discursive strategies and rhetorical techniques**, including lexical selection, repetition of key terms, appeals to authority, and the construction of interpretative frames;
- **Mechanisms of influence and symbolic power**, including ideological legitimation through selective representation, positioning of social actors, and the naturalization of dominant perspectives;
- **Interaction between televised discourse and the digital environment**, including the integration of online comments, references to social platforms, and the extension of debate through digital tools.

The findings confirm theoretical perspectives that conceptualize discourse as a form of symbolic power and as a mechanism for the construction of social reality. In alignment with the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, the

language employed in the analyzed programs functions as a structuring instrument that shapes meaning and directs collective interpretation. Adaptation to digital dynamics does not diminish the role of television; rather, it redefines its function within the contemporary public sphere. The integration of online environments into televised discourse expands its sphere of influence and consolidates the relationship between traditional media and emerging technologies. This convergence contributes to the formation of digitally mediated social consciousness, within which legitimacy and authority are constructed through multi-platform interaction.

The results support the argument that televised discourse remains a central actor in shaping power relations and modeling dominant ideologies, even under conditions of accelerated digital transformation. The analysis considered representative thematic segments from Top Story (Top Channel), Fokus (Vizion Plus), and the talk shows on News 24, related to digitalization, migration, and media education. The examples in Table 1 are illustrative and reflect recurrent patterns observed in the format and style of the programs. The analysis of televised news discourse identified recurring patterns and consistent strategies across the selected programs.

Example 1 – Interaction with digital & online environment (Figure 1)

Segment: *Vizion Plus – News segment:* “Socialist MP: Territorial reform must start from competencies”

Analysis: The segment integrates live comments and references to social media platforms, creating a hybrid space where television and digital environments interact. Visual and textual cues enhance audience engagement and reinforce authority.



Figure 1: Screenshot from a Vizion Plus news segment titled “*Socialist MP: Territorial reform must start from competencies*”, illustrating political

positioning and normative framing in televised discourse (YouTube, accessed February 2026).

Analysis (Figure 1): The headline “Socialist MP: Territorial reform must start from competencies” serves as a clear example of ideological positioning and normative discourse within televised news framing. The explicit reference to party affiliation, “Socialist MP,” foregrounds the political identity of the actor, signaling authority and ideological orientation to the audience. The modal verb “must” conveys prescriptive and directive authority, reinforcing the normative nature of the statement.

The topic “Territorial reform” represents a major structural and political issue, which, combined with the linguistic framing, positions the actor as a legitimate source of guidance on societal governance. This arrangement illustrates how televised discourse constructs and legitimizes perspectives in the public sphere, demonstrating symbolic power through selective presentation and authoritative voice.

Visually, this example can be analyzed through the on-screen layout: the large headline banner, the logo of the broadcasting channel (Vizion Plus), and the presence of the political actor contribute to the framing effect. The visual hierarchy reinforces the discursive authority, guiding the audience toward a particular interpretation of the issue without requiring comprehension of the Albanian language.

Overall, this news segment exemplifies three key dimensions identified in the study:

- Discursive strategies and rhetorical devices – through lexical choices, framing, and emphasis on political identity.
- Symbolic power and ideological legitimation – by presenting the political actor’s perspective as authoritative and directive.
- Interaction with the digital or visual environment – through visual cues and broadcast design that amplify the message’s social impact.

Example 2 – Discursive strategies & rhetorical devices (Figure 2)

Segment: *Top Channel – Top Story*, news report titled “*Shqiptarët ende besnikë ndaj cash-it, digjitalizimi bankar nën ritmet e vendeve të BE*” (“Albanians still loyal to cash, banking digitalization lags behind EU countries”).

Analysis: This segment illustrates discursive strategies and rhetorical framing in televised news. The headline juxtaposes traditional behavior (“still loyal to cash”) with modernization pressures (“digitalization lags behind EU countries”), constructing a narrative of progress versus delay. Lexical choices, selective emphasis, and the framing of comparative international standards guide audience interpretation and subtly promote normative perspectives on financial modernization.



Figure 2: Screenshot from *Top Channel – Top Story* segment titled “*Shqiptarët ende besnikë ndaj cash-it, digjitalizimi bankar nën ritmet e vendeve të BE*”, illustrating discursive strategies and rhetorical devices in televised news (YouTube, accessed February 2026).

Analysis (Figure 2):

The news segment titled “*Shqiptarët ende besnikë ndaj cash-it, digjitalizimi bankar nën ritmet e vendeve të BE*” exemplifies discursive strategies and rhetorical devices in televised news. The segment frames digitalization as a slow and incomplete process in Albania, juxtaposing the traditional reliance on cash with the pressures of modernization. Lexical choices such as “still loyal to cash” versus “digitalization lags behind EU countries” construct a narrative of progress versus delay.

Key discursive strategies include:

- **Framing through contrast:** Highlighting the gap between Albania and EU digital banking standards to create a sense of urgency and normative pressure.
- **Appeal to authority:** Citing statistics from the digital banking report, percentages of banks at different levels of digitalization, and referencing the World Bank’s recommendations, which legitimizes the discourse.
- **Rhetorical structuring:** Information is organized from general trends to sector-specific observations (payments, loans, risk management), guiding audience interpretation and emphasizing areas needing attention.
- **Symbolic power:** By presenting the banking system’s digital transformation as a societal issue with measurable indicators, the

discourse positions institutions and experts as authoritative actors shaping public perception.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

The study highlights the central role of televised discourse in shaping social perceptions and consolidating power relations within the digital context. The analysis demonstrates that television functions as an active social actor, capable of legitimizing dominant ideologies and influencing collective consciousness through well-defined discursive strategies and persuasive techniques. The adaptation of televised discourse to digital dynamics, including the integration of online audience interaction, underscores the continued relevance of television within a convergent media environment.

This research provides a significant theoretical contribution by integrating perspectives from social philosophy, media studies, and Critical Discourse Analysis, offering a framework for understanding the relationship between language, ideology, and social transformation. From a practical perspective, the study emphasizes the importance of media education and the development of critical thinking skills, contributing to the formation of digital citizenship and the critical evaluation of media messages in contemporary society.

The study presents several limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. First, the analysis focused on a limited sample of national television programs, which may restrict the applicability of the conclusions to international contexts or other types of media. Second, the research employs a qualitative methodology based on Critical Discourse Analysis, which inherently involves interpretative subjectivity, although theoretical and procedural rigor minimizes this concern.

The identified limitations also suggest directions for future research, including expanding the sample to include diverse digital media, comparing televised discourse with online discourse, or applying mixed-method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative analysis to enhance the validity and generalizability of results.

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Roots and Contexts of the Pedagogical Question Regarding the Meaning of Literacy and Reading

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Abstract: This paper examines the philosophical foundations and pedagogical implications of literacy and reading, from ancient Greek philosophy to modern digital challenges. Literacy is a multifaceted issue intersecting human cognition, society, and culture, requiring an interdisciplinary approach across neuroscience, psychology, philology, and philosophy.

Drawing on nonlinear systems theory (Taleb, 2012; Mir, 2024), it warns against simplistic views, advocating humility and bold exploration of boundaries. Insights from Wolf (2007), Dehaene (2021), and Kahneman reveal how reading rewires the brain, enabling abstract, energy-demanding System II thinking that surpasses oral defaults. Historical analyses by Luria (1976), Snell (2013), and Havelock (1986) highlight qualitative cognitive shifts triggered by alphabetic writing and literature. Plato’s critique in the Republic, per Havelock, targets oral pedagogy’s mimetic imitation, favoring literate objectification to build autonomous subjects vital for open societies. Yet, his *Laws* show pragmatic regression to conformity. Socrates’ concerns about writing—memory loss, semantic flattening, and reduced dialogue—are reframed through neuroscience as literacy’s strengths, acting as a cognitive prosthesis (Boyd, 2009; Piper, 2012).

Today, secondary and tertiary orality (Ong, 1982; Logan, 2010; Mir, 2024) in digital media risks “mental obesity” (Kechlibar, 2025) amid falling reading skills (PIRLS, 2023). Relativizing literacy (Duffková, 1997) and orality’s revival (Manoa), the paper calls for adaptive education to sustain non-mimetic, exploratory, and free thinking amid technological change.

Keywords: *literacy, orality, pedagogy, philosophy, mental obesity, media ecology, secondary orality, terciary ora*

1. Introduction

The question of literacy is complex for at least two interrelated reasons: a) it concerns three complex systems and their interactions: the individual, society, and culture; b) understanding it is informed by a range of disciplines, some of which may be very distant from each other, such as classical philology and neuroscience, or classical philology and pedagogy. The first reason should caution us against linear thinking, that is, thinking that assumes proportionality between cause and effect, a smooth progression of development, and the possibility of its prediction, or the absence of sudden (phase) transitions (Taleb 2022, 7; Mir 2024). In other words, when confronted with complex systems, both caution and courage are warranted: epistemic humility and the courage to cross boundaries of expertise, trends, and ideological conformity (Simon 1996; Havelock 1986). This ultimately reflects the second reason, which indicates what we must at least do to meet the demands of nonlinearity with respect to literacy. We need to view it through the lens of the sciences of the human brain and cognition, as exemplified by Marianne Wolf (2007), Stanislas Dehaene (2021), and Daniel Kahneman. The first two agree that reading and writing neurologically (physically) rewire us in such a way that reading allows us to transcend default settings, making us unusual, even abnormal. Daniel Kahneman further warns that using such a structurally organized brain is associated with different energy management. These authors suggest that the thinking of literate and illiterate people differs qualitatively, and that the change in communication media (writing, alphabet) and the preservation of information (literature) caused a phase shift in human cognition. These findings indicate that Kahneman’s aspect of energy costs must be taken into account when evaluating literacy. Certainly, we must also consider the perspective of philosophy and the history of philosophy, for which literacy and its significance could not have gone unnoticed, and indeed, they did not. Moreover, this perspective offers several avenues of inquiry: a) we can ask what influence writing and reading have on human thought, that is, what role reading and writing have played in shaping the quality of cognition, or what “mental software” is developed in the individual (Hartley, 2012); b) we can also ask what political and social relevance reading and writing hold, especially considering that this is an ongoing socio-political issue (Mokyr 2016, 17; Kechlibar 2025). From the latter point, it is evident that the question of the significance of reading and writing will be central to pedagogy, which, in a free society, typically includes the normative goal of

educating autonomous citizens. The urgency of this question is further amplified by the apparent decline in reading competence. The current state can, for example, be documented by the PIRLS 2021 survey, which assessed reading skills (Collective, 2023). Perhaps there is also a third consideration: illiteracy is highly relative (Duffková, 1997), and in the context of contemporary technology, literacy itself may also be relative. A similar shift in the pedagogical paradigm, where education focuses on a bidirectional process of reflection and the development of autonomous skills, can also be observed in the training of social workers (Fabián, 2024).

2. Theoretical Framework

In the following brief text, we obviously cannot exhaust the ambitions or challenges associated with the significance of literacy as outlined above. However, we can highlight, at a suitably chosen point, where the intersections of the issues (cognition, society, pedagogy) occur, along with their related consequences. We suggest that this intersection may be found in the thematization of literacy in Plato, particularly from the perspective of the classicist Eric Havelock, whose interpretation we take the liberty of extending—not only with regard to the development of his thought between *Preface to Plato* and *The Muse Learns to Write*, but also from a developmental perspective in Plato’s relation between the possibilities of realizing the best and second-best polis, as encountered in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. This approach follows the “rearmirror view” offered by Marshall McLuhan as an epistemically humble approach to opaque complex systems. We anticipate three outcomes: a) to show that Plato, who opened up a range of problems that can now be addressed with insights from contemporary neuroscience and psychology, was aware that reading and writing are not just one of many skills, competencies, or technologies, as is commonly assumed today (e.g., T. Sejnowski 2025), but a skill crucial for non-mimetic thinking, that is, thinking which strikingly resembles Kahneman’s System II. Non-mimetic thinking is characterized by the fact that its bearer (the subject) does not personally identify with the content, but understands it as an external object of analysis, which, moreover and entirely in the Socratic spirit, can open new spaces for exploratory analysis (Ridley 2012). B) To show that Eric Havelock’s interpretation complements and expands the contemporary discussion of literacy by providing a significant perspective on the transition from oral to literate culture, a perspective that often escapes modern researchers (e.g., Sejnowski, Pieper), and is also used in attempts to understand processes associated with the influence of new communication technologies (Ong). C) To demonstrate that Plato himself was aware that non-mimetic

(object/subject) thinking is problematic from the standpoint of a closed society, which can conversely be phrased as follows: non-mimetic thinking is indispensable from the standpoint of an open society. This is closely related to the first point, as the distinction between thinking and the content of thought accompanies the constitution of an autonomous subject of action and thought (Snell, Havelock). Appealing to Plato or Socrates in the face of contemporary global trends may seem excessive; however, a historical and philosophical precedent exists for mutual inspiration between McLuhan and Eric Havelock, the leading classicist and communication theorist (Havelock 1986, 17). The effort is also worthwhile for pragmatic reasons. According to M. Kechlibar, modern humans face the danger of “mental obesity” and a slide into illiteracy in an environment that both relies on and presupposes literacy—a situation that inherently conflicts with the demands of inclusivity, equality, and civic participation in political decision-making.

3. Plato: The Significance of the Arts in the Ideal Polis, or the Importance of Literacy for the Ideal Polis

In the *Republic* (Books II, III, X), Plato, in the context of his proposal for the ideal polis, inquires into the significance and role of the *mousikē* arts (primarily epic and drama). His answer is striking for the modern reader, who tends to attribute an almost entirely autonomous value to art: according to Plato, the *mousikē* arts and their public presentation should be significantly restricted and regulated—both in terms of content (377a–378e) and with regard to the goals of the polis (394d–395d). A concrete example is the (scandalous) exclusion of Homer, the cornerstone of contemporary Greek education and pedagogy, from the ideal polis (607a–b). For Plato’s readers, this may serve as a warning against the harmful influence of unregulated (or “incorrect”) art on both the justice of the polis and the soul of the individual, which can thereby easily weaken themselves. The modern (though not necessarily contemporary) reader, confronted with Plato’s view, which suggests that not everyone, including the artists themselves, is competent to judge art and its truth, will inherently disagree based on the presupposition of art’s autonomy. If such a reader is familiar with Popper’s critique of Plato’s proposal for the ideal polis in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, they might dismiss the matter as yet another manifestation of Plato’s anti-democratic, totalitarian tendencies against the open society of citizens (*polis*). However, it seems that the issue possesses further, and perhaps more interesting, dimensions that surpass and potentially soften these announced and apparent totalitarian tendencies.

One of these points is highlighted in his now-famous book *Preface to Plato* by Eric Havelock, who seeks to show that in the *Republic*, Plato is concerned less with art itself and its influence on the justice of the soul and the polis, and more with the form of pedagogy. Specifically, according to Havelock, Plato's polemic in the *Republic* is aimed against the oral form of pedagogy, which relies primarily on imitation (*mimesis*) and identification with the content, in favor of a literate pedagogy, which is rather *diegetic* (*diegesis*), that is, objectifying. In this context, Havelock draws our attention to the fact that traditional oral art, which combined not only entertainment but also pedagogical content, was partly responsible for transmitting relevant information (tradition) across generations (Havelock 1986, 125–126).

If Eric Havelock is correct and his interpretation captures a significant aspect of Plato's thought, then Plato faced the same question as we do: what is the significance of literacy? Therefore, we suggest that knowledge of the parameters of this problem in the history of philosophy and its broader context can also be useful for assessing our contemporary situation.

Plato wrote and composed his texts at a time when Greek society was becoming largely literate. Euripides' play *Hippolytus* from 428 BCE assumes as normal that the main characters, both men and women, can read and write. In this respect, Plato was a child of his time, and unlike his teacher Socrates, who, as we will see below, was not entirely reconciled with the ever-growing influence of writing, he for some reason defended, promoted, and analyzed writing and reading (literate pedagogy), albeit still primarily in dialogical form. However, we cannot forget Socrates for another reason. According to E. Havelock (1986, 4–5), the main reasons for Socrates' condemnation in 399 BCE were not those usually cited, namely, corrupting the youth, introducing new deities, or making political enemies at the instigation of the Delphic oracle, but rather that his discovery of universals disrupted the mimetic flow of tradition within the channels of familial and social transmission (Martin 1996, 35), a reason that falls squarely within the domain of pedagogy.

In connection with Socrates and Plato and their focus on the problem of imitation (*mimesis*), we encounter the first possible contemporary update and justification of our interdisciplinary perspective. Marshall McLuhan, who also inspires our very possibility of a backward-looking view into the history of changes in communication media (rearmirror view), similarly observes the process of imitation in relation to electronic communication: "*Paradoxically, electronic man shares much of the outlook of preliterate man, because he lives in a world of simultaneous information, which is to say, a world of resonance in which all data influence other data. Electronic and simultaneous man has recovered the primordial attitudes of the preliterate world.*" (McLuhan 1974, 49) This observation of McLuhan finds strong empirical support in the work

of Jonathan Haidt, who explicitly emphasizes polarization or tribalization of society as one of the consequences of modern communication technologies, which foster resonance (though not synchronization), imitation, and identification (Haidt 2022, 2024).

To better understand the significance of the shift toward non-mimetic pedagogy—or the pedagogy of universals—in Socrates, or more specifically in Plato, let us focus on the transmission of information in an oral context. The McLuhan passage cited above can also assist in this analysis. This transmission is, in many respects, limited by the capacity of human memory, its reliability, and the influence of chance—for example, that people sometimes die. Accordingly, oral culture is confronted with the problem of the limited amount of information it can transmit to subsequent generations, as well as the problem of recording or storing it. In the first case, economy is essential, meaning that only the most necessary content is remembered. In the second case, techniques must be employed to facilitate and support memory. These techniques can include narrative structures, the rhythm of songs and verse, the use of emotion, and identification with the story or content. We must also not forget an extremely important consideration for us: energy management. Oral pedagogy is an integral part of culture and society, and the transmission of content occurs repeatedly during various festivals and within families. Thus, we are confronted with the integration of the anthropological significance of narrative, song, and dance and their place within the social fabric.

The imitation mentioned above—that is, the resonance with content (story, values, emotions)—is precisely what Plato considers both most natural and most problematic, since imitation as a process of transmitting information is not a reflective and objective mode of learning: *"Have you not observed that imitation, if it occurs continuously from early youth, passes into the nature of the body, voice, and thought?"* (Plato 395d) Contemporary cognitive psychology resonates with this insight. For example, Michael Tomasello demonstrates that higher forms of cultural learning rely on *pointing* (intentionally indicating and explaining), which enables understanding of intent and reflection. Socratic (Platonic) questioning and the attempt to provide definitions of sought-after abstract objects (justice, courage, the good, etc.) is, in effect, this higher form of *pointing* within the space of thought: a constant focusing on the essence of a thing ("what is it in itself?"), which forces the dialogue partner to move from the concrete to the general, manipulate the general, and maintain distance from the emotions necessarily associated with identification with the content. Eric Havelock captures the core of the process that Plato targeted in his critique of oral pedagogy more precisely in the following words: *"The removal of pressure to memorize, ...*

had as its first effect the removal of the corresponding pressure to narrativize all preservable statements. This freed the composer to choose subjects for a discourse which were not necessarily agents, that is, persons. They could in time turn themselves into names of impersonals, of ideas or abstractions or ‘entities’.” (Havelock 1986, 101)

The contemporary Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský, in his essay *Philosophizing in the Age of Our Own Worlds*, written before the massive proliferation of smartphones in 2008, warned readers against powerful forces that pull us out of the shared world. If we were to adopt this term of the shared world in our text, we could say—and Bělohradský ultimately points this out—that impartial (objective) thinking through universals, with its rules, constitutes the fabric or form of this shared world, which resists the dominance of an exclusive narrative tradition.

Let us summarize the key points we have encountered so far: non-narrative thinking of the general is a contingent phenomenon associated with literacy. As B. Snell has already noted, this form of thinking opens new dimensions that can be navigated using various means. Let us add that these dimensions extend not only to the spaces of the mind but also to the spaces of collaboration.

And here the shift in Plato’s thought, which we noted above, can come into play. Although the *Republic* is strongly anti-democratic and proto-totalitarian, its critique of orality is nonetheless conducted from a position of faith in the power of *logos*, that is, general or abstract thinking (*Republic* 607a–d). In the *Laws*, where Plato outlines the second-best ideal polis, this optimism is no longer operative, or at least it is weakened. In particular, in the first book of the *Laws*, Plato no longer seeks to appeal to human reason, but pragmatically aims to manipulate humans through obedience, shame, fear, and conformity—mere ancillary expressions of imitation. This is the imitation of tradition, whose violation through intellectual contamination he proposes to punish by death, and which also led to the death of his teacher.

4. Socrates’ Unprecedented Position in Relation to Writing

From the pragmatic perspective of a closed society, obedience and conformity (resonance) with the ideological status quo are key mechanisms of stability, reflecting skepticism toward the possibilities or value of a shared discursive space. Unfortunately, this is the conclusion of the entire trajectory between Socrates’ discovery of the universal, its overly objectifying implementation in the *Republic*, and its resignation in the *Laws*. This process is extremely information-rich and instructive, as it allows us to observe enthusiasm (reception), attempts (progress) at implementation, and disappointment

(regression). But what could be the cause of this disappointment (regression)? We are of the opinion that the cause lies precisely in the linear approach to the individual, society, and knowledge—a perspective that Socrates, however, avoided through his negative (open, problematizing, non-dogmatic, ironic) philosophy. Regarding writing, the same cannot be said of Socrates, which was primarily due to the fact that he stood at an unprecedented moment of transition between oral and literate culture. Because we apparently find ourselves in a similar transitional period, let us focus on what, for entirely understandable reasons, escaped Socrates' grasp, and what, in consideration of anthropological and political linearity, ultimately also eluded Plato.

According to M. Wolf, Socrates raised three objections to writing that are only seemingly simple (Wolf 2007, 68): a) Spoken and written words function in our thinking in fundamentally different ways; meanings fixed in writing do not correspond to the semantic depth of expressions used in ordinary speech, which is also related to the weakening of memory, as in a written context we do not need to strain it as much. B) A message captured in writing lacks the liveliness and dynamism of dialogue (synchronization), losing its dialogical character and its ability to defend itself. C) Oral communication is essential for the attainment of virtue.

Before we turn to the modern perspective on these objections, we must note two points related to Socrates' concerns: a) As E. Havelock points out, these objections are themselves thinkable and articulable only under the influence of literacy and writing. Socrates seeks definitions primarily of ethical universals. For example, he asks what virtue is in itself, what justice is in itself, or what courage is in itself. According to Havelock, something of this sort is impossible in an oral context. In Socrates' objections to writing, the literate mind therefore reflexively turns upon itself. Were we to judge Socrates very harshly, we could say that the semantic content of the objections is in tension with the conditions that make their formulation possible. B) This fact alone again draws our attention to the exploratory dimension of literacy, which Socrates, in his objections, rather denies or at least problematizes. In comparison with Socrates, Plato takes several steps further toward literacy in his written dialogues: he entrusts speech to the written dialogue and polemicalizes against traditional mimetic pedagogy, as we have seen above. However, the question remains to what extent he truly respects the exploratory (always open-ended) dimension of thinking that was so important to his teacher. We need not resolve this tension between Socrates and Plato through a deeper examination of the history of philosophy. Instead, we can turn to research on the functioning of the human mind, which can help provide a broader background not only for the reception of Socrates' and Plato's responses but perhaps also for our contemporary situation.

Let us begin with Socrates’ concern about the loss of memory. The oral world relied primarily on living memory, and, as we have already noted, the ability to remember was also supported by linguistic tools. To emphasize the significance of this fact, let us add that one reason why humans (and, indeed, elephants and dolphins) have elders is that, from the perspective of intergenerational transmission of information by non-genetic means, they are needed.

At the same time, it can be assumed that the ability to recall significant parts of tradition was a socially highly valued trait associated with prestige. This applied not only to “experts” but also to elders (Renwick, Woolhouse, 2023). Even today, we encounter remnants of this reality when we appreciate knowledge of proverbs, songs, jokes, or sayings. Contemporary studies also suggest that changes in the medium transform the ability to remember tradition. Socrates’ concern was therefore highly justified, and it is difficult to imagine the demanding criteria he himself applied. However, what Socrates was certainly unable to assess is precisely the nonlinear impact of changes in reading on our thinking, as discussed primarily by the neuroscientist M. Wolf. The relief of memory in the sense of reducing the need to retain tradition (the necessary content) released energy for deeper and more exploratory thinking, which would previously have been difficult due to the risk of losing essential information. Metaphorically speaking, culture—that is, information transmitted non-genetically—gained a new foundation and safeguard, making it safe to explore beyond the comfort and security of traditionally transmitted content.

This brings us to the concern about the flattening of meaning in written language. As M. Wolf also cautions, contemporary neuroscience research shows that when reading, the reader does not activate only a single meaning associated with a written word, but rather the entire range of semantic variants with which they are familiar. From this perspective, reading is just as semantically rich and deep as oral communication, with the important difference that reading allows us to transcend the boundaries of time and tradition. Literature, in agreement with Boyd, thus functions as a prosthesis (Boyd 2009). Moreover, as S. Dehaene notes in his book *How to Learn*, particularly with regard to memory, reading improves our memory for discrete abstract concepts—that is, for those elements that, from the perspective of Socratic literate philosophy and ethics, were most important.

We can first approach the problem of the loss of dialogicality by recalling our own experience, not only in preparing texts but also in encountering the resistance this activity often meets among students. We know that having certain beliefs and writing them down are two distinct activities, and that students typically do not appreciate the considerable effort required to engage

in writing. This scientific and pedagogical experience aligns with what Alexander Vygotsky has already pointed out: language in any form, whether in conversation with another, in inner dialogue with oneself, or in dialogue with the text being read, leads to new thoughts and ideas. As M. Wolf notes, writing supports dialogicality, even expanding the field on which dialogical engagement can occur to include new dimensions such as time, cultures, traditions, and philosophy. Very vividly and eloquently Andrew Piper approaches this idea in his book *Book Was There*, when he describes the book (writing) as something akin to a vertebrate equipped with the ability for horizontal exchange of genetic material (Piper 2012, xi).

5. Non-Original Modes of Orality and Mental Obesity in Light of Socrates’ Concerns

In our final chapter, we can return once more to Andrew Piper. In his aforementioned book, he argues that there is no need to fear changes in communication media. Not only is change inevitable, but we keep encountering the same objections that have been raised many times before. What is, however, distinctive about Piper’s book *Book Was There* is that it does not take Socratic objections into account; it overlooks changes in media with respect to literacy/orality and the transformations to which Socrates had already drawn attention, both implicitly and explicitly. Without wishing to paint a dire picture—since we agree that change and transformation due to modern technologies is inevitable, and moreover that the new possibilities offered by artificial intelligence and other technologies may support non-mimetic thinking (Sejnowski 2024)—we nevertheless attempt once again to utilize Socrates’ justified sensitivity to fundamental changes in communication media and examine transformations that do not remain confined to literacy but step beyond it. In other words, we apply the distinction between orality and literacy to contemporary problems, fortunately building on work that has already been carried out.

Walter Ong, especially in his seminal work *Orality and Literacy* (1982), discusses the possibility of secondary orality. This consists in a return to oral parameters of thought within an environment that presupposes literacy. The parameters of secondary orality are already familiar to us: focus on the present (here and now), engagement of the recipient in the action (narrativity), repetition (of slogans, phrases), flattening of semantic richness (unification), associated reduction of semantic nuances and linguistic richness, and conformity. We must note that Ong’s book was published in 1982 and reflected media that are now outdated, such as television and radio. Robert K. Logan responded to this reality by introducing the term tertiary orality, which

reflects the current technological environment. In more recent receptions of the phenomenon of tertiary orality, such as in Mir’s work, its parameters are: focus on the present, engagement of the recipient in the action (interactivity), personalization (content adapted to the recipient according to the provider’s intentions), boundlessness of information (the real ephemerality of information), and emphasis on content consumption (passivity). The term, along with the associated phenomenon of mental obesity, which we adopt from M. Kechlibar, stands somewhat apart, not directly connected to the problem of the orality/literacy relationship, but rather draws attention to: a) the possibility and actuality of a complete loss of literacy in an environment that depends on literacy; b) the civic relevance of the loss or limitation of literacy; c) above all, by analogy with physical obesity, it thematizes the previously rather implicit dimension of costs (energy) in the context of transformations within the media ecosystem.

In the first instance, Kechlibar’s warning seems well-founded. While it is certainly possible to consider that new information technologies, as T. Sejnowski (2025) does, offer enormous potential for non-mimetic thinking, trends in literacy and reading competence are rather concerning. Indeed, for example, thanks to pirated websites (Anna’s Archive), we can technically download almost any text instantly. There are also more demanding platforms on the Internet that support focused reading (Substack), and with artificial intelligence we can conduct very interesting conversations. However, these possibilities say nothing about how they will be used or whether they will be used at all—for example, whether attention will be paid to orality in terms of its role in life, what it provides, and what role technologies offer in this context (Manoa). Furthermore, literacy cannot be understood solely from the perspective of its current state or level, but rather as an ongoing process. This becomes a challenge for the educational system, which plays a crucial role in literacy (Duffková, 1997). Are we able to adapt equally quickly within the educational system to changes and challenges in literacy? Here, the necessity arises to consider information ecology and the associated costs, which are very insightfully captured in the concept of information obesity. Let us, however, approach this phenomenon indirectly and return, so to speak, to non-mimetic thinking.

Non-mimetic thinking requires that we are capable of: abstraction; distance; impartiality; fairness (rules); patience (systematic application of rules); unpredictability with respect to outcomes; transparency; willingness to be exposed to error; self-reflection; courage (nonconformity with the group); and delayed gratification (knowledge itself is a demanding dopaminergic stimulus). Almost all of these parameters can also be found in Daniel Kahneman’s description of System II, with one caveat: this system is

extremely energy-demanding; almost everything listed requires energy. If we then focus on the parameters we could observe in Ong, Logan, and Mir, it appears that secondary and tertiary orality—through the weakening of objectification, immediacy, imagery, and ease of reward—increases the costs of using System II. Under these conditions, the mechanism of mental obesity emerges as a pathological phenomenon, even in an environment where healthy “cognitive nourishment” is readily available.

6. Conclusion

Marian Kechlibar, in the context of mental obesity, asks: is it possible that over time we will encounter “mental gyms” functioning in the same way as today’s physical fitness centers? This question is not only unsettling but also indicates the depth and breadth of change. For two and a half millennia, in a cognitive sense, we have lived in a “mental gym” (a media ecosystem), since education, erudition, and, from the sixteenth century onward, technological competence grounded in the sciences were socially valued traits in the free world, also rewarded with prestige. Today, however, these competencies may be relegated to a peripheral position. Returning to Socrates and Plato, who not only explicitly raised the question of the significance of reading and writing but also placed it within its broader socio-political context, and viewing them through the lens of modern sciences (neuroscience, media theory, etc.), literacy emerges not as one among many skills, nor writing as one among many technologies. Rather, they constitute the conditions for non-mimetic, exploratory, and above all free thinking—provided that they remain living skills and actively used tools.

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Managing the use of artificial intelligence in scientific research: a model for risk control, responsibility, and reproducibility

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Abstract: This paper examines the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence into scientific methodology as a socio-technical and philosophical challenge rather than a purely technological shift.

The study proposes an integrated model of research process governance that combines formal role allocation between human researchers and AI under resource and quality constraints, Bayesian aggregation of evidence from human and machine sources, simultaneous mitigation of algorithmic bias and enhancement of explainability, and strategic experiment planning based on risk- and cost-aware POMDP frameworks. In addition, a conceptual map of the research lifecycle is developed, identifying seven key points of digital integration: planning, data collection, data management, analysis, validation, publication, and implementation.

A structured taxonomy of challenges is substantiated across six dimensions—data, methodology, infrastructure, organization, legal/ethical regulation, and economics. To systematize these challenges, an FMEA-like approach is applied, including risk priority number assessment and the construction of a “Problems×Management Parameters” matrix integrating technical, organizational, and regulatory controls. Typical countermeasures and implementation patterns are identified, such as metadata standardization, data management plans, containerization, infrastructure as code, competence development programs, and ethical impact assessments.

The results demonstrate that the proposed framework improves research efficiency, transparency, and reproducibility while reducing risks associated

with opaque algorithms and data bias. The study substantiates the role of AI as an instrument for augmenting, rather than replacing, scientific judgment and emphasizes the researcher’s responsibility as a critical interpreter. The proposed framework offers a methodological basis for responsible digital transformation of science and supports the transition from digital fragmentation to a coherent and ethically grounded research ecosystem.

Keywords: *AI in research, governance, risk, ethical responsibility, digital transformation, human–AI collaboration*

1. Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of science is reshaping its methodological and organizational foundations as artificial intelligence, large-scale data environments, and integrated platforms become embedded across the research lifecycle. Knowledge production is increasingly a socio-technical process involving human actors, algorithmic systems, and institutional infrastructures. While this hybrid model enhances efficiency and innovation, it also introduces methodological, ethical, and governance challenges.

Despite extensive work on open science, research data management, reproducibility, and AI applications, existing approaches remain fragmented and tool-oriented and rarely provide an integrated framework linking responsibility, risk management, and reproducibility. Consequently, AI adoption is often ad hoc, resulting in limited transparency and inconsistent methodological standards.

This reveals the key research problem — the lack of a comprehensive governance model for AI use in scientific research under resource, quality, and ethical constraints. The aim of this study is to develop an integrated governance model based on a lifecycle approach, a six-dimension challenge taxonomy, an FMEA-like risk prioritization mechanism, and formal decision models using optimization, Bayesian inference, and POMDP planning.

The relevance of the study stems from the role of scientific research as the epistemic foundation of digital competences, education, and innovation ecosystems. In this context, AI is conceptualized not as a substitute for scientific reasoning but as an instrument for its augmentation within explicit accountability structures.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The digital transformation of science is largely driven by the open science and reproducibility agendas. The FAIR principles, the UNESCO

Recommendation on Open Science, and the European Open Science Cloud established lifecycle-based data governance and interoperable infrastructures [1–3], while reproducible computational research introduced standards for transparent and executable workflows [4]. Nevertheless, empirical evidence confirms the persistence of the reproducibility crisis, indicating that technical solutions alone are insufficient [5].

Funding and regulatory policies further strengthened the governance dimension: the NIH Data Management and Sharing Policy institutionalized data management plans, and GDPR together with EDPB guidelines defined the legal framework for processing sensitive research data [6–9]. In parallel, DORA and altmetrics shifted research assessment toward process transparency and diverse outputs [10,11]. However, these normative frameworks still lack operational models that integrate compliance, reproducibility, and resource management in everyday research practice.

A parallel research stream explores artificial intelligence in scientific discovery. AI enables large-scale literature analysis, hypothesis generation, data interpretation, and peer review [12,13], but introduces challenges related to opacity, bias transfer, authorship, and accountability, which led to disclosure requirements for AI-assisted research [14,15]. These studies remain mainly application-oriented and do not address lifecycle integration or formal human–AI role allocation.

Thus, open science provides governance without modeling human–AI epistemic interaction, whereas AI-in-research studies model cognitive augmentation without embedding it in institutional process structures.

This study addresses this gap by developing an integrated governance model for AI-augmented research that operationalizes responsibility, reproducibility, and risk-aware decision-making across the lifecycle within a socio-technical framework combining lifecycle organization, FMEA-based risk governance, Bayesian evidence aggregation, and POMDP planning.

3. Methodology

3.1. Conceptual Map of the AI-Augmented Research Lifecycle and Control Points.

The integration of artificial intelligence into scientific activity transforms the research process from a sequence of loosely connected tasks into a controlled socio-technical system in which human and machine agents jointly participate in knowledge production. To ensure that this transformation leads to increased reliability rather than methodological fragmentation, AI use must be embedded into a lifecycle-based governance structure. For this purpose, the research process is represented as a seven-stage cycle (Figure 1).

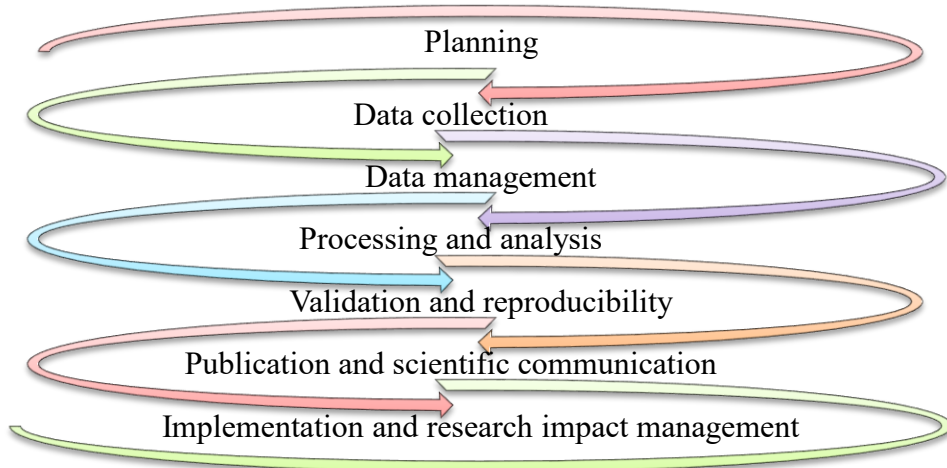


Figure 1. Decomposition of the AI-augmented research lifecycle

Each stage contains a technological integration point (TI₁–TI₇) where AI influences decisions, resources, and research quality, acting as a governance control node for risk, responsibility, and reproducibility.

At TI₁ (planning) AI assists in literature analysis and scheduling but requires preregistration, role clarity, and traceability to avoid biased design.

At TI₂ (data collection) automated systems enable large-scale heterogeneous data acquisition, making ethical compliance and controlled data access central.

At TI₃ (data management) repositories, metadata, and persistent identifiers determine interoperability and reproducibility, necessitating formal stewardship and operational DMPs.

At TI₄ (analysis) ML pipelines introduce risks of leakage, environment drift, and opacity, which must be addressed through versioned and auditable workflows.

At TI₅ (validation) containerized and executable workflows turn reproducibility into a system property based on full evidence traceability.

At TI₆ (publication) AI affects authorship and evaluation, linking Open Science with disclosure and institutional accountability.

At TI₇ (implementation) CRIS-driven monitoring connects research with innovation, requiring alignment of technological and economic strategies.

The lifecycle perspective shows that AI is a cross-cutting factor in knowledge production; therefore, reproducibility, responsibility, and efficiency become systemic outcomes of coordinated governance. This structure forms the basis for the subsequent formalization of constraints, risk prioritization, and decision models.

3.2.Challenge Taxonomy and Feasibility Constraints for AI Integration.

The lifecycle-based model identifies where AI creates value and risk by linking each integration point (TI₁–TI₇) to a multidimensional constraint system. The six dimensions — data, methodology, infrastructure, organization, legal–ethical regulation, and economics — define the feasible space of technological configurations, turning AI integration into a constrained optimization problem under resource, time, quality, compliance, and institutional requirements.

Data constraints concern heterogeneity, missing metadata, and the FAIR–privacy tension; methodological ones involve leakage and environment drift; infrastructural limits relate to computational capacity and pipeline fragility; organizational factors to competences and role clarity; legal–ethical conditions to data protection and auditable access; and economic factors to cost opacity and vendor lock-in. Together, they determine reproducibility, operational viability, and sustainability.

Table 1 operationalizes these interdependencies by mapping lifecycle stages, risks, and countermeasures, transforming the taxonomy from a descriptive scheme into a governance instrument.

Table 1. Classification of integration problems and constraints for digital technologies

Category	TI	Problems (P)	Constraints / Countermeasures (C)
A. Data	TI ₂ –TI ₃	Pd1: heterogeneity of formats and schemas; Pd2: lack of metadata; Pd3: incomplete / noisy data; Pd4: conflict between FAIR and privacy	Cd1: local storage policies; Cd2: quotas / bandwidth limits; Cd3: cross-border data transfer restrictions
B. Methodology	TI ₁ , TI ₄ –TI ₅	Pm1: data leakage in ML; Pm2: low reproducibility; Pm3: incorrect metrics / hyperparameter tuning; Pm4: environment drift	Cm1: preregistration, formal protocols; Cm2: replication requirements; Cm3: environment version fixation
C. Infrastructure	TI ₄	Pt1: GPU/HPC shortage; Pt2: I/O bottlenecks; Pt3: fragile pipelines; Pt4: lack of IaC / automation	Ct1: cloud/on-prem SLA; Ct2: VPN / network restrictions; Ct3: budget quotas
D. Organization	TI ₁ –TI ₇	Po1: heterogeneous digital competences; Po2: resistance to change; Po3: fragmented workflows; Po4: absence of formal roles	Co1: staffing / time constraints; Co2: RACI ambiguity; Co3: lack of SOPs / policies

		(Data Steward, DevOps-for-Science)	
E. Legal/Ethics	All TI	Pl1: IP / licensing uncertainty; Pl2: GDPR / IRB compliance; Pl3: use of LLMs with sensitive data; Pl4: access control / auditability	Cl1: legal restrictions; Cl2: anonymization / pseudonymization; Cl3: logging / traceability
F. Economics	TI ₁ –TI ₇	Pe1: opaque TCO; Pe2: vendor lock-in; Pe3: project-based funding	Ce1: budget limits; Ce2: procurement / licensing constraints

To formalize the feasibility of AI integration, let K denote the set of technological tools, R the available resources, Θ the time constraints, Q the required level of quality and reproducibility, S the security and compliance requirements, and Π the set of organizational policies. The integration is considered feasible if and only if there exists a configuration K^* such that:

Resource constraint: $\text{cost}(K^*, R) \leq B$, $\text{cap}(R)$ sufficient,

Time constraint: $T(K^*, R) \leq \Theta$;

Quality constraint: $\text{QoR}(K^*) \geq Q$ (reproducibility $\geq \tau$);

Compliance constraint: $\text{Sec/Comp}(K^*) \models S$, $K^* \in \Pi$,

In this formulation, the quality-of-research function (QoR) extends beyond classical performance metrics to include workflow traceability, model auditability, and independent replicability, while security and compliance are operationalized as verifiable checklists for data protection, licensing, and ethical approval. This shifts the focus from mere tool adoption to controlled integration under systemic constraints that ensure reliability, accountability, and sustainability. By converting heterogeneous challenges into a unified constraint system, the approach enables quantitative risk prioritization, which is further developed through the FMEA-based model linking each problem to measurable risk indices, management actions, and responsibility roles.

3.3.Risk Governance Model: FMEA-Based Prioritization and the Problems × Management Matrix.

The constraint-based feasibility model defines the boundary conditions for responsible AI integration, but it does not yet provide a mechanism for operational decision-making. For this purpose, the identified challenges must be transformed into a measurable and continuously monitored risk system. This study adopts an FMEA-like approach that allows heterogeneous

methodological, technical, and organizational risks to be expressed within a unified quantitative framework and directly linked to governance actions.

For each problem P_i , three parameters are defined:

- the probability of occurrence p_i ,
- the impact I_i (expressed in terms of time loss, cost increase, quality degradation, or compliance risk),
- the detectability coefficient d_i , reflecting the difficulty of identifying the problem at an early stage.

The integrated risk indicator is calculated as:

$$RPN_i = p_i \cdot I_i \cdot d_i.$$

This formulation makes it possible to compare risks that originate from different domains — for example, data bias, GPU resource shortages, or legal non-compliance — within a single prioritization scale.

The risk register is structured as a dynamic governance instrument rather than a static analytical output. In addition to the RPN value, each entry includes the corresponding lifecycle integration point, the selected countermeasure, the responsible role, the estimated implementation time (ETA), and the current status. Such a structure enables continuous monitoring and aligns strategic planning with operational management.

However, quantitative prioritization alone is insufficient for complex research environments, where risks are distributed across multiple organizational levels. To bridge this gap, the study introduces a Problems $\times$ Management Parameters matrix (Table 2), which links each identified problem to:

- its category within the taxonomy,
- the type of impact (time, cost, quality, or risk),
- the required resources,
- the governance roles according to the RACI model (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed).

This matrix transforms abstract methodological challenges into executable management workflows and ensures traceability of responsibility across the research organization.

Table 2. Problems $\times$ Management Parameters Matrix

Problem	TI	Category	Impact	Planned countermeasures	Required resources	RACI
Pd2: lack of metadata	TI ₃	Data	Quality / risk	Implementation of Data Management Plans; use of DataCite templates; automated	Data Steward (0.2 FTE)	R – Data Steward; A – Lab Lead; C – Research Team;

				schema validation		I – Administration
Pr1: shortage of GPU resources	TI ₄	Infrastructure	Time / cost	Cloud bursting; priority job queues; batch process optimization	Additional budget for GPU hours	R – HPC Administrator; A – CIO; C – Research Team; I – Finance Department
Pr1: shortage of GPU resources	TI ₄	Infrastructure	Time / cost	Cloud bursting; priority job queues; batch process optimization	Additional budget for GPU hours	R – HPC Administrator; A – CIO; C – Research Team; I – Finance Department
PL3: use of LLMs with sensitive data	TI ₂ –TI ₄	Legal / Ethics	Risk	Data classification by sensitivity level; anonymization ; access control; auditing	RBAC system; logging infrastructure	R – Data Protection Officer; A – Compliance Lead; C – Legal Department; I – Research Team
Pe2: vendor lock-in in cloud solutions	TI ₄ –TI ₇	Economics	Cost / risk	Multi-cloud strategy; use of open formats and APIs	Integration time; external consultants	R – IT Architect; A – CIO; C – Procurement ; I – Management

The introduction of the RACI model resolves the lack of role clarity typical for AI-driven research and removes a key organizational barrier to reproducibility by formally linking each governance action to an accountable actor. Integrated with the FMEA-based matrix, it enables risk-based prioritization, resource planning, and real-time monitoring through CRIS-compatible indicators.

By treating issues such as the use of sensitive data not only as legal constraints but as workflow design problems, ethical responsibility is operationalized as a set of auditable procedures. The temporal dimension of the model further shows that high-RPN risks at early lifecycle stages produce cascading effects, making preventive governance systemically more efficient than corrective actions.

In this form, fragmented digitalization challenges are transformed into a measurable risk control system that aligns infrastructure, policy, and accountability and functions as the operational core for the subsequent implementation and multi-criteria decision models.

3.4.Implementation Patterns and Multi-Criteria Decision Model for AI Tool Selection.

The risk governance model identifies control points, whereas its practical realization requires reproducible and transparent selection of technological and organizational solutions under feasibility constraints. High-RPN risks across the lifecycle reveal recurring countermeasures that function as implementation patterns and collectively stabilize the digital research ecosystem. Metadata standardization and persistent identifiers ensure machine-actionable data governance; preregistration and executable workflows transform reproducibility into a system property; containerization and Infrastructure-as-Code eliminate environment drift; formal roles and competence development reduce the gap between policy and practice; DPIA/DPA procedures, access control models, and audit logging operationalize compliance; and TCO analysis with open standards mitigates vendor lock-in. These patterns represent a coordinated response to the constraint system and prioritized risks rather than isolated best practices.

To align tool selection with research objectives, resources, and compliance, a weighted multi-criteria evaluation model is introduced. For each tool k , normalized scores are defined:

$$norm_j(k) \in [0,1], \sum_j w_j = 1.$$

The integrated score is: $Score(k) = \sum_j w_j \cdot norm_j(k)$.

and the optimal solution: $Score(k^*) = \max Score(k)$.

subject to resource, time, security, and institutional constraints.

Table 3. Example of multi-criteria evaluation of digital research tools

Tool	Effectiveness	Cost	Risk	Compliance	Usability	Score(k)
Tool A	0,9	0,6	0,7	0,8	0,9	0,82
Tool B	0,7	0,9	0,8	0,6	0,7	0,75

Tool C	0,8	0,7	0,9	0,9	0,6	0,80

The model makes technological choices traceable, comparable, and adaptable, turning technology adoption into an auditable workflow. Integrated with lifecycle governance, it supports tool selection at planning, data management, analysis, and publication stages and converts procurement decisions into a continuous research management process. By combining implementation patterns with formal evaluation, the framework reduces high-priority risks, optimizes resource allocation, and ensures long-term sustainability while preserving the researcher as the final accountable interpreter.

3.5. Mathematical Models for Human–AI Role Allocation, Evidence Integration, and Risk-Aware Research Planning.

To operationalize the governance framework, the key decision processes are formalized as a system of interconnected models describing task allocation, evidence aggregation, bias–explainability trade-offs, and adaptive research planning under uncertainty.

Optimization model for human–AI role allocation. Each task i is executed in human, AI, or hybrid mode:

$$x_i^{(H)}, x_i^{(A)}, x_i^{(HA)} \in \{0, 1\}, x_i^{(H)} + x_i^{(A)} + x_i^{(HA)} \leq 1,$$

$$\max \sum_{i=1}^n v_i \cdot \alpha_i (1 - r_i) - \lambda (1 - \iota_i).$$

$$\sum_{i=1}^n \bar{d}_i \leq T_{max}, \quad \sum_{i=1}^n \bar{c}_i \leq C_{max}, \quad \sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_{ik} x_i \leq R_k.$$

This yields a resource- and risk-aware distribution of human and AI functions.

Bayesian aggregation of human and machine evidence. For hypothesis $\theta_i \in \{0, 1\}$ with prior π_i :

$$P(\theta_i = 1 | D^{(H)}, D^{(A)})$$

$$= \frac{\pi_i L^{(H)}(D^{(H)} | 1) L^{(A)}(D^{(A)} | 1)}{\pi_i L^{(H)}(D^{(H)} | 1) L^{(A)}(D^{(A)} | 1) + (1 - \pi_i) L^{(H)}(D^{(H)} | 0) L^{(A)}(D^{(A)} | 0)}$$

This enables explicit reliability weighting and probabilistic publication decisions.

Bias–explainability regularization. In the process of training the AI model, the function is minimized: $\min_w \mathcal{L}_{task}(w) + \mu R_{bias}(w) + \eta R_{expl}(w)$,

where R_{bias} represents the penalty for statistical bias and R_{expl} for insufficient interpretability, thereby balancing predictive accuracy with ethical and transparency requirements.

Research lifecycle as a POMDP. The scientific process is modeled as a partially observable Markov process (POMDP) problem, where the state s_t reflects the current level of hypothesis validation, resources, and risks.

The reward is defined as:

$$s_t = (\text{knowledge}, \text{resources}, \text{risk}), \quad R(s_t, a_t) = \Delta \text{epistemic value} - \text{cost} - \kappa \cdot \text{risk}.$$

This defines adaptive experiment sequences and optimal resource allocation.

Integrated architecture. The models form a unified system (Figure. 2):



Figure 2. Integrated architecture of the mathematical governance framework

The developed mathematical approaches to integrating AI into the methodology and organization of scientific research have practical potential in various aspects of the research process. To confirm their feasibility, we will consider several scenarios that illustrate the operation of models in real conditions (Table 4)

Table 4. Examples of application of models in different industries

Model	Application	Effect
Task allocation	Large-scale literature analysis	Time reduction
Bayesian evidence	Biomedical research	Reliability increase
Bias regularization	Social sciences / education	Fairness and transparency
POMDP planning	Interdisciplinary projects	Adaptive resource management

Thus, mathematical models are not purely theoretical, but have direct applied significance. Their integration into research practice allows us to make the process more efficient, transparent, and ethically sound.

4. Discussions

The findings confirm that the effectiveness of artificial intelligence in scientific research depends not primarily on its analytical performance but on the presence of a structured governance framework that regulates its integration. This aligns with reproducibility studies emphasizing standardized

workflows and controlled computational environments as key determinants of reliable results [4,5], as well as with the FAIR and Open Science paradigm, where data and infrastructure function as systemic elements of knowledge production [1–3].

At the same time, the proposed approach extends existing research by integrating methodological, organizational, legal, and economic dimensions into a single decision system. In contrast to tool-oriented or data-centric models, reproducibility is formalized as a constraint-satisfaction problem and operationalized through risk-based governance, thereby bridging the gap between normative requirements and actual research practice.

The role allocation model contributes to the debate on the epistemic status of AI by showing that optimal configurations preserve human control over interpretation-intensive and ethically sensitive tasks, supporting the concept of AI as a cognitive augmentation instrument rather than an autonomous epistemic agent.

The Bayesian aggregation model introduces a probabilistic interpretation of reproducibility as the stability of posterior belief under repeated evidence generation, enabling the integration of heterogeneous human and machine outputs within a unified decision framework.

The bias–explainability regularization model demonstrates that ethical and transparency requirements can be embedded directly into analytical optimization, making fairness and interpretability measurable parameters rather than external constraints.

The POMDP-based representation of the research lifecycle shows that adaptive experimental planning increases epistemic return while reducing resource consumption, which is particularly relevant for digitally transformed research environments with limited funding and high infrastructure costs.

From a practical perspective, the framework enables the integration of governance indicators into research information systems for real-time monitoring of digital transformation and alignment with Open Science principles.

At the theoretical level, the study conceptualizes scientific research as a controllable socio-technical system in which epistemic value, resources, risk, ethical constraints, and organizational roles are formally interconnected, shifting the focus from AI tool usage to the governance of AI-augmented knowledge production.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study developed a governance-oriented model for managing the use of artificial intelligence in scientific research and demonstrated that the

effectiveness of AI is determined not by its analytical capacity alone but by the conditions of its integration into the research lifecycle. The results show that when digital tools are embedded in a constraint-based and risk-controlled environment, reproducibility becomes an infrastructure-level property, technological decisions become transparent and auditable, and responsibility for AI-assisted outputs remains clearly attributable to the researcher.

The main contribution of the paper is the integration of lifecycle structuring, feasibility constraints, risk prioritization, and formal decision models into a single methodological framework. This approach extends existing reproducible research and Open Science practices by linking data, infrastructure, organizational roles, and analytical models within a unified governance logic. The formalization of human–AI interaction further demonstrates that hybrid configurations preserving human interpretative control represent the optimal mode of AI use under epistemic and ethical constraints.

The implications of the study are both methodological and institutional. At the methodological level, the proposed framework provides a reproducible mechanism for selecting tools, allocating tasks, and validating results. At the organizational level, it supports the transition from fragmented digitalization to a coherent and strategically managed research ecosystem aligned with the principles of FAIR data and responsible research.

The study is limited by its conceptual and model-based character, and the validation performed is structural rather than empirical. Consequently, the generalizability of the results depends on further testing in specific disciplinary and institutional contexts. Future research should focus on the quantitative operationalization of governance indicators, empirical evaluation of the proposed models, and their integration into research information systems.

In summary, the proposed framework establishes a methodological basis for the responsible and controlled use of artificial intelligence in scientific research and supports the transformation of digital technologies into a transparent, reproducible, and accountable cognitive infrastructure.

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Family Law in the Digital Era and Constitutional Guarantees

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Abstract: Digitalization has significantly influenced the functioning of family relationships and the manner in which the rights and obligations arising from them are exercised. The use of digital technologies and social networks has generated new legal situations that challenge the traditional regulation of family law and require interpretation in accordance with constitutional and legal principles.

This paper analyzes the impact of the digital era on the institution of the family, focusing on the constitutional protection of the family, the right to privacy, and children's rights. Particular attention is devoted to the role of constitutional principles, such as human dignity, equality, and the best interests of the child, in resolving family-law issues arising from the use of digital technologies. Through an analysis of constitutional norms and relevant legislation, the paper highlights the need for a harmonized approach between family law and constitutional law in order to ensure effective protection of the family in contemporary digital reality.

Keywords: *family, digitalization, constitutional protection, children's rights*

2. Introduction

In recent decades, ways of living have changed as a result of the growing use of technology and advanced modes of communication. This development has also affected communication among family members, altering both their relationships and their degree of closeness. The use of social networks, online communication, and other forms of technology has influenced the upbringing of children, their education, and the exercise of family rights and obligations.

Like every other country in the world, Kosovo has experienced a broad expansion in the use of technology. This use has affected not only adults, but also younger age groups, namely children. According to certain studies, approximately 96.6% of the population uses the internet, while around 877 thousand user identities were recorded in Kosovo in 2025 (Kemp, 2025).

On the other hand, according to the official population census, of the 366,595 families registered in Kosovo, 355,848 have internet access, whereas only 196,911 possess a computer or laptop, indicating that the remaining households primarily access the internet through mobile phones (CNA, 2026) (ASK, 2026).

Such a widespread diffusion and expanded use of technology demonstrates that digitalization has also affected patterns of everyday life, including family relationships. It is beyond dispute that the use of technology has facilitated family communication and has enabled parents to exercise parental responsibility more efficiently by remaining closer to their children through communication tools. At the same time, however, there is a risk that children may be continuously exposed to data and content capable of harming their development and well-being. This development therefore undoubtedly creates new legal challenges relating to privacy, the protection of children’s rights, and their security in general.

Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of digitalization on family relationships in Kosovo and to assess how these changes may also affect the constitutional protection of children’s rights, the right to privacy, and the legal regulation of family relations within digital spaces. The paper therefore focuses on the analysis of constitutional and legal norms, as well as data related to the use of technology in Kosovo.

3. Literature Review

The family and family relationships are regulated by constitutional and legal norms, and such legal regulation dates back to the earliest times. Given that the family is the oldest and most natural institution of human community, it differs from other forms of organization precisely because of the specific bond that exists among family members (Aliu, 2012).. At the same time, however, the family is also a dynamic institution because it has changed throughout history. In the broader development of society, the refinement of ways of living has had an undeniable impact, and in particular this refinement has come as a result of technological development and other digitalized means.

According to Singh and Dua, the protection of privacy, especially within family relationships, must be strengthened further, since individuals generally exchange data among themselves that is protected by law (Akanksha Singh,

2024). In addition to the dissemination of legally protected personal data, which is endangered in the digital age, special protection must also be afforded to data that may be disclosed through children’s use of and exposure to technological means. Dethloff emphasizes that the legal regulation of family rights must be aligned with children’s development in digital environments and with the legal regulation of parental rights in relation to digital development (Dethloff, 2023).

Another issue highlighted by certain scholars concerns the increasing complexity between the constitutional protection of certain children’s rights and the impact of technology on their violation or limitation. According to Yadav and Tyagi, constitutional rights such as privacy, freedom of expression, and the protection of personal data acquire a different meaning in the digital age, because their interaction within family relationships becomes more complicated and may ultimately lead to their violation (Yadav, 2026).

A further concern that requires attention relates to evidence in judicial proceedings involving the regulation of family relationships, more specifically divorce proceedings. The protection of privacy and constitutional rights becomes more complex when private communications conducted through social networks or other platforms are used as evidence in divorce proceedings, thereby increasing the possibility of privacy violations (Akshita Singh, 2023).

In this context, given the importance of the family within society and the impact of digitalization on family relationships—an impact that inevitably affects rights protected by the Constitution and by law, such as privacy, the protection of personal data, and the protection of children—it is necessary to reconsider the current legal framework in order to prevent violations and create an appropriate balance between technological development and the constitutional protection of these rights.

4. Protection of Human Dignity, Privacy, and Family Relationships in Kosovo

The family is regarded as one of the fundamental structures of social organization and, at the same time, constitutes one of the most important institutions within family law. Its importance is also reflected in the fact that the family enjoys special protection at both the constitutional and statutory levels in Kosovo. Under the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, the family is treated as the basis of society and, for that reason, the state is obliged to ensure its legal protection (Constitution of the Republic of Kosova, 2008). This protection is realized through the guarantee of a range of rights, as well

as through constitutional principles that directly influence the regulation and functioning of family relationships.

In the context of digital spaces, where interaction and communication among individuals are carried out predominantly through technological means, certain constitutional principles acquire particular importance with respect to the protection of the family. Among these principles, the protection of human dignity and the guarantee of the right to privacy are especially noteworthy, as they play an essential role in preserving the integrity and autonomy of family life in the digital environment.

Pursuant to Article 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, human dignity is proclaimed as one of the most important principles, establishing that human dignity is inviolable and constitutes the foundation of all fundamental human rights and freedoms. In this way, this constitutional standard creates the legal basis upon which state institutions must guarantee respect for and protection of the personality, integrity, and autonomy of every individual. According to the commentary on the Constitution, the state exists for the sake of the human person, and the guarantee of human dignity is the starting point for all other rights, such as the right to life, inviolability, integrity, and other fundamental rights (Hasani). Si. As one of the core constitutional values, human dignity is inviolable.

Despite this constitutional protection afforded to human dignity, in an era of technological expansion and rapid digitalization, the protection of human dignity assumes a new and more complex dimension. The use of social networks and various communication platforms has increased the possibility of endangering human dignity. One of the forms that most seriously threatens human dignity is the exposure of private life on social networks and the exchange of data in various forms through the internet (Dewangan, 2023). Owing to limited understanding of the precise functioning of the internet and the possibility of communicating through different platforms, whether secure or insecure, people face risks to their dignity and to the dignity of other family members on a daily basis.

Continuous online exposure—whether through the publication of photographs and videos or through the sharing of various, often uncontrolled, information about children and other family members—may lead to violations of human dignity and integrity. For this reason, human dignity, as one of the principal values guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, must be adapted to the new challenges posed by the digital era through the establishment of mechanisms that ensure the protection of every individual in the digital sphere.

In such circumstances, where human dignity is a fundamental value guaranteed by the Constitution and digitalization simultaneously creates risks

of violating that right, especially in parental relationships, there is a need not only for legal and institutional protection but also for greater awareness regarding the education of parents and children in the use of technological tools and the ways in which children’s dignity should be protected in digital spaces. Strengthening parents’ capacities to manage personal and family information is indispensable in the digital age in order to secure robust protection of children’s dignity (Livingstone, 2017).

Another fundamental human value, which is also a constitutional category aimed at protecting the individual against arbitrary interference in personal and family life, is the right to privacy. Under Article 36 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, “Every person enjoys the right to have his/her private and family life respected, the inviolability of the residence, the confidentiality of correspondence, telecommunications and other communication.” On the basis of this constitutional provision, citizens are protected also in relation to telecommunications and the secrecy of correspondence, including electronic communications. This constitutional protection has also been interpreted through a number of judicial decisions emphasizing that no person’s telephone correspondence may be disclosed without a court order. One of the most important judicial decisions in this regard is that of the Basic Court in Prishtina, which clarified that access to and examination of correspondence on a telephone, or of the telephone itself, without a court order is unconstitutional (Prishtina, 2025). Such a decision, grounded in the Constitution, further strengthens the constitutional protection afforded to private life and the confidentiality of correspondence, especially correspondence conducted through technological means. Moreover, in 2025 the Constitutional Court also provided direct protection of privacy by setting limits on the seizure and processing of personal data from mobile phones during criminal proceedings. That decision stipulated that any other data discovered on a phone as evidence in criminal proceedings must be destroyed if it is unrelated to the subject of the investigation (Constitutional Court of Kosova, , 2025).

In this context, in addition to the constitutional and legal protection afforded to human dignity and privacy, it becomes clear that these human and family values require a balanced approach between technology and their protection and, above all, a legal review aimed at strengthening these protections. Given that Article 36 of the Constitution of Kosovo grants legal protection to private and family life, it also creates the legal basis for protecting communication among family members and intimate family life. Owing to dynamic lifestyles and long working hours, technology has enabled family members to maintain communication through its use. Accordingly, mobile phones are not used only for communication among family members, but also contain substantial family data, photographs, and personal information, thereby making them

highly personal devices that should remain protected from intrusion by others. Unauthorized interference with such devices therefore constitutes a violation of the right to privacy. The protection of the right to privacy through judicial standards has also been developed in accordance with international standards established under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The constitutional and legal protection of the right to privacy plays an important role in safeguarding dignity and privacy, both of which are of central significance to family relationships in a time of technological development. Yet, given that communication among family members is increasingly conducted through different digital platforms, it is important that family legislation also incorporate the digital dimension of family life. In this sense, digital technology may create new forms of interference in the personal lives of family members, thus requiring stronger mechanisms of protection against potential risks (Bernal, 2014).

5. Protection of Children’s Rights in the Digital Era

Children are regarded as the most distinctive category of society, but at the same time as the category most vulnerable in digital environments. The protection of children’s rights is ensured not only at the national level, but also at the international level; however, in the digital age, and with growing exposure to technology, new concerns and challenges have emerged regarding their protection. The use of technology, whether for communication or for obtaining information of various kinds, affects their growth, education, and well-being. Accordingly, children’s exposure to a wide range of materials available through social networks and different applications has created a new reality that is directly related to child protection. In its report on protecting children online, the OECD emphasized the need for the protection of children from digital risks to be addressed within the legal framework as well (OECD, 2020). The report presented not only the advantages of internet use, but also the risks that children may face from inappropriate content, contact with unknown persons, and the possibility of exploitation.

Another concern raised by scholars of children’s rights relates to protecting children from the unconscious or inadvertent dissemination of personal data on social networks or other platforms, thereby jeopardizing the protection of their own personal data or that of the family in general.

Parents, motivated by the desire to share images and information about their children with friends or with society through social networks, often disclose information relating to their children or to family life in general, thereby creating what has been described as a social digital identity (Berg, 2024). As

a result, such data remain online for a long period of time, and the likelihood of their misuse is considerable.

In addition to other rights, children also enjoy the right to privacy and the protection of personal data. The guardians of these rights are undoubtedly their parents or legal custodians; however, in the digital age these rights are often endangered or violated precisely by those same parents. The publication of various data by parents about their children not only puts the children's personal data at risk, but may also endanger their well-being and security in everyday life. Such data may be accompanied by comments capable of affecting children's welfare, while photographs may be used to create false or alternative identities (Steinberg, 2017).

Accordingly, notwithstanding the fact that the protection of children's rights is guaranteed at the constitutional and legal levels, there is a need for greater parental awareness so that parents exercise caution regarding the data they publish on social networks or exchange through different platforms. Awareness must also be increased with respect to the education of children by parents and school institutions concerning internet use by children themselves. Children, too, may use the internet to publish or exchange legally protected data without understanding that such conduct entails risks of misuse and threats to their security in general. Therefore, in addition to awareness-raising on multiple levels, the legal framework must also be further strengthened in order to ensure the effective protection of children's rights in the digital era.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The development of technology and the broad use of various platforms have influenced the way in which people communicate and remain close to one another. Despite the advantages that technology has brought to human life, such transformation has also created challenges in the manner in which the fundamental values of the individual are protected within family relationships. Human dignity and the protection of privacy are fundamental values guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws in force, and they are also protected through international instruments. However, their protection must also be ensured in the context of digital reality. Accordingly, the extensive use of technology and other means of communication among family members must not only be carried out responsibly, but also requires greater awareness, especially on the part of parents in relation to their children and to one another, as well as with regard to the publications made and the information exchanged. In addition to raising awareness aimed at preserving family relationships in the digital era, state institutions and the justice system as a whole must strengthen mechanisms for the protection of fundamental constitutional values

in a more concrete manner within the digital environment. Given that the legal framework in Kosovo lacks sufficient protection of fundamental values in the context of digitalization, especially within family law, its improvement would ensure that the regulation of family relationships appropriately takes into account the importance, utility, and risks that digitalization presents for family relations. In conclusion, the triangle that could contribute to the protection of family relationships in the digital era should consist of digital education in family relations through awareness of the risks of uncontrolled use of technology, the strengthening of the legal framework, and the safeguarding of human dignity.

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Abuse of Duty in the Digital Age: Ethical Challenges and Social Trust in a Transforming Society

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Abstract: In the context of rapid digital transformation, societies are experiencing profound changes in communication, governance, professional responsibility, and public accountability. While technological innovation has increased efficiency and transparency, it has also introduced new ethical challenges. Among these challenges, abuse of duty emerges as a critical issue that affects trust, social cohesion, and moral responsibility within contemporary digital environments.

This paper examines abuse of duty not only as a legal concept but as an ethical and social phenomenon shaped by the dynamics of the digital age. The expansion of digital platforms, data management systems, and automated decision-making processes has transformed how authority is exercised and monitored. In such contexts, deviations from assigned responsibilities can have amplified consequences, influencing public trust, professional integrity, and social stability.

Using a conceptual and interdisciplinary approach grounded in ethical theory and social analysis, the study explores how accountability, transparency, and ethical awareness function as essential pillars in sustaining trust in a transforming society. The paper argues that addressing abuse of duty in the digital era requires not only regulatory frameworks but also a renewed emphasis on ethical education, civic responsibility, and professional standards. Strengthening ethical culture in digital society is fundamental for fostering social trust and supporting sustainable social development.

Keywords: *digital society, abuse of duty, ethics, social trust, accountability, social transformation*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation is reshaping contemporary societies at an unprecedented pace. Digital platforms, automated decision systems, and large-scale data infrastructures are redefining governance processes, professional responsibilities, and citizen–state interactions. These technologies promise efficiency, transparency, and improved access to services, yet they also introduce complex ethical challenges (Floridi, 2013; European Commission, 2020).

Within this evolving landscape, abuse of duty has emerged as a critical concern. Traditionally understood as the misuse of authority or failure to fulfill professional responsibilities, abuse of duty now manifests in digitally mediated systems where decisions are executed through databases, platforms, and algorithms. In such contexts, deviations from professional responsibility can affect large populations rapidly and often invisibly.

Consequently, abuse of duty in the digital age is not solely a legal matter; it is an ethical and social phenomenon that directly influences institutional legitimacy, public trust, and social cohesion. This paper examines how digital transformation reshapes accountability and responsibility, explores the ethical implications of abuse of duty, and argues that sustaining trust in digital societies requires regulatory safeguards, ethical awareness, and strengthened professional standards.

2. Digital Transformation and the Reconfiguration of Responsibility

Digital governance systems have transformed decision-making processes across public administration, healthcare, education, and social services. Automated procedures, algorithmic screening, and digital databases are increasingly used to allocate resources, evaluate eligibility, and manage public records.

While these systems enhance efficiency and consistency, they also complicate accountability. Decisions may be influenced by algorithmic logic, data inaccuracies, or automated workflows, making responsibility diffuse and difficult to assign (Floridi & Taddeo, 2016). Harmful outcomes may be attributed to technical systems rather than human decision-making.

Moreover, digital infrastructures amplify the consequences of misconduct. Errors in databases, unauthorized data access, or negligent oversight can affect thousands of individuals simultaneously (Eubanks, 2018). Thus, digital transformation does not diminish responsibility; it requires clearer accountability frameworks adapted to technologically mediated environments.

3. Abuse of Duty in the Digital Era: Legal and Ethical Dimensions

In legal terms, abuse of duty involves misuse of official authority or failure to perform professional responsibilities. In digital environments, this concept extends beyond traditional misconduct to include ethical failures related to data governance, transparency, and technological oversight.

Digital-era abuse of duty may involve:

- unauthorized access or disclosure of personal data,
- manipulation or selective withholding of digital information,
- negligent oversight of automated systems,
- misuse of administrative access privileges,
- lack of transparency in digital decision-making.

These practices violate ethical principles such as fairness, accountability, and respect for human dignity (Floridi, 2013).

Importantly, digital misconduct often remains invisible. Unlike traditional misconduct, digital abuse may occur within databases, algorithmic processes, or administrative platforms, limiting public scrutiny and increasing systemic risks.

From an ethical perspective, abuse of duty represents a failure of professional integrity and moral responsibility. Deontological ethics emphasizes adherence to duty and fairness, while virtue ethics highlights integrity and trustworthiness as essential qualities for public service (MacIntyre, 1984).

4. Transparency, Accountability, and Digital Governance

Transparency and accountability are foundational principles of democratic governance. Digital technologies can enhance transparency through open data systems, traceable processes, and improved access to information (Meijer, 2013).

However, transparency does not automatically ensure accountability. Complex digital infrastructures may obscure decision-making processes, particularly when algorithms operate as opaque “black boxes” (Pasquale, 2015). Citizens may receive decisions affecting their rights without understanding how those decisions were generated.

This lack of clarity challenges procedural justice and democratic accountability. When individuals cannot understand or contest decisions affecting them, institutional trust weakens.

Effective digital accountability requires:

- clear responsibility frameworks,
- auditability of automated systems,
- ethical oversight mechanisms,

- accessible explanations of decisions.

Without these safeguards, digital governance risks becoming unaccountable rather than transparent.

5. Documented Cases of Ethical Failures in Digital Governance

International experience demonstrates how digital administrative systems can enable ethical failures when oversight and accountability mechanisms are insufficient.

The **Dutch childcare benefits scandal** revealed how algorithmic risk assessment systems wrongfully accused thousands of families of welfare fraud, exposing issues of discrimination, lack of transparency, and procedural injustice (Amnesty International, 2021).

Similarly, the **United Kingdom’s Horizon IT scandal** showed how reliance on faulty digital records led to wrongful prosecutions of postmasters, raising serious concerns about institutional accountability and technological trust (UK Parliament, 2020).

In Australia, the automated **Robodebt welfare recovery system** generated inaccurate debts affecting hundreds of thousands of citizens, illustrating the risks of automated decision-making without human review (Royal Commission, 2023).

Beyond public administration, the **Cambridge Analytica data misuse scandal** exposed the ethical implications of unauthorized data harvesting and political profiling, emphasizing the importance of data governance and professional responsibility (Isaak & Hanna, 2018).

These cases demonstrate that digital systems can amplify ethical risks when transparency, oversight, and accountability are insufficient.

6. Abuse of Duty and Social Trust

Social trust is essential for democratic stability, institutional legitimacy, and civic participation (Putnam, 2000). When citizens perceive institutions as fair and responsible, they are more likely to comply with regulations and engage in civic life.

Abuse of duty undermines trust. Research shows that perceived corruption, lack of transparency, and unethical professional conduct significantly reduce confidence in public institutions (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005). In digital environments, where decision-making may appear impersonal and opaque, ethical failures can have amplified social consequences.

Erosion of trust may result in:

- skepticism toward public institutions,

- resistance to digital governance systems,
- decreased civic participation,
- reduced compliance with regulations.

Conversely, transparent and ethical practices strengthen trust and support social cohesion.

7. The Albanian Context: Digitalization and Accountability Challenges

Albania has made significant progress in digital governance through the expansion of e-government services and online administrative platforms. Digitalization has improved efficiency, reduced bureaucratic procedures, and increased access to public services.

However, digital transformation also presents new challenges. Rapid adoption has not always been accompanied by adequate training, ethical guidelines, or oversight mechanisms. Variations in digital literacy and infrastructure can affect equitable access to services.

Challenges may include:

- inaccuracies in digital records affecting citizens' rights,
- limited transparency in automated administrative processes,
- unequal access to digital platforms among vulnerable populations,
- insufficient training in data protection and ethical digital practice.

While these issues may not always stem from intentional misconduct, they can undermine trust and institutional credibility. Strengthening accountability and ethical awareness is essential to ensure equitable and trustworthy digital governance.

8. Ethical Awareness, Education, and Professional Responsibility

Addressing abuse of duty in the digital age requires more than legal enforcement. Ethical awareness must be integrated into professional training, institutional practices, and educational systems.

Professional ethics frameworks emphasize responsibility, integrity, and accountability (Banks, 2012). In digital contexts, professionals must understand both technological systems and their ethical implications.

Educational institutions play a critical role in fostering ethical awareness. Integrating digital ethics, civic responsibility, and data protection principles into curricula strengthens responsible professional conduct and digital citizenship (Floridi, 2019).

Ethical education promotes moral reasoning, professional integrity, and awareness of the social consequences of administrative decisions.

9. Strengthening Ethical Culture in a Transforming Society

Building trust in digital societies requires a strong ethical culture supported by institutional policies, professional standards, and civic engagement.

Key priorities include:

- strengthening ethical guidelines for digital governance,
- ensuring transparency and auditability of digital systems,
- integrating ethics and digital responsibility into education,
- enhancing professional training in data protection and accountability,
- promoting inclusive access to digital services,
- encouraging civic participation and awareness.

An ethical digital culture ensures that technological innovation serves human dignity and social justice rather than undermining them.

10. Conclusion

Digital transformation is redefining authority, responsibility, and accountability in contemporary societies. While digital technologies offer opportunities for efficiency and transparency, they also introduce ethical risks that can undermine institutional legitimacy and social trust.

Abuse of duty in the digital age extends beyond legal misconduct to include ethical failures related to data use, transparency, and professional responsibility. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach combining regulatory safeguards, ethical education, professional standards, and civic engagement.

In Albania and beyond, strengthening ethical culture and accountability mechanisms is essential to ensure that digital transformation promotes justice, trust, and sustainable social development.

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From history to Western Standards: the effect of single-gender education on school success

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Abstract: This article examines the development and role of single-gender education from a historical perspective, analyzing its impact on students' academic performance and its contribution to the formation of Western civilization. Research and historical accounts of education indicate that single-gender schools have provided a specialized learning environment where academic and social skills can be cultivated in a focused manner, minimizing distractions associated with gender mixing. The article explores different historical periods of education, from traditional institutions to modern schools, analyzing changes in teaching methods and pedagogical strategies that have influenced high academic achievement.

A particular section of the study focuses on the connection between single-gender education and the values of Western civilization, including the development of critical thinking, intellectual discipline, a culture of dialogue, and active civic participation. The article compares student performance in single-gender and coeducational schools, highlighting factors that influence academic success and the development of social and cultural skills necessary for civic engagement and societal development.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the historical, pedagogical, and cultural significance of single-gender education, showing that this model has contributed not only to improved academic performance but also to preparing individuals to integrate the values and skills that characterize Western civilization.

Keywords: *Single-gender education; academic performance; history of education; Western civilization; pedagogical methods; academic development; civic skills.*

1. Introduction

The debate over the most appropriate forms of organizing school education has accompanied the development of educational systems since the early

stages of formal education institutionalization. Among the most discussed issues, particularly over the past two centuries, is single-sex education, which has experienced extended periods of dominance, significant decline, and, more recently, a contentious resurgence within the context of contemporary educational reforms. Single-sex education, defined as the organization of the teaching process in classes or institutions separated by gender, is not a novel phenomenon but a historically consolidated practice shaped by cultural, social, religious, and political factors [Sota, 2024].

Historically, single-sex schooling has been the dominant form of education, particularly in secondary and higher education, until the late 19th century. In Western societies, this model was primarily built on the principle of excluding girls from formal education, reserving learning opportunities for boys, whereas in certain Eastern and Islamic cultures, the education of girls was recognized as a natural and universal right. However, the social and ideological developments of the 19th and 20th centuries - particularly feminist movements, the process of secularization, and the expansion of mass education - led to the institutionalization of coeducational schools, which came to be perceived as an expression of gender equality and social progress. In this context, coeducation emerged as the dominant standard, particularly within public education systems, while single-sex education remained largely associated with private or religious institutions. However, in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a renewed interest in single-sex schools was observed, especially in the United States and in several other countries with developed educational systems. This resurgence was driven by growing concerns over declining academic performance, disciplinary issues, gender disparities in educational attainment, as well as neuroscientific studies highlighting structural and functional differences in brain development between genders.

At the core of this contemporary debate lies the fundamental question of whether gender-segregated education constitutes an effective mechanism for enhancing academic success and improving the social and academic well-being of students, or whether it reinforces gender stereotypes and undermines the principle of equality. Proponents of single-sex education argue that segregated environments allow teachers to tailor instructional methods to the distinct learning styles of girls and boys, reduce distractions, improve discipline, and enhance students' self-confidence. Conversely, critics of this approach view single-sex education as regressive, selective, and potentially discriminatory, questioning the scientific validity of studies reporting academic benefits. This article aims to analyze the impact of single-sex education on academic achievement by examining this phenomenon from both historical and contemporary perspectives, drawing on empirical studies, institutional reports, and comparative analyses of educational practices,

primarily in the United States and other developed countries. The analysis focuses on the influence of this educational model on academic performance, school discipline, students’ socio-emotional development, and perceptions of gender equality in education. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute to the enrichment of the scholarly debate on single-sex education by offering a balanced perspective between supporting and opposing arguments, while also reflecting on the potential adaptation of this model to contemporary Western standards of inclusive and high-quality education.

2. Single-sex education in historical and institutional perspective

Can one imagine entering a school and finding only girls or only boys? This was the reality of single-sex schools, entirely normal until the late 19th century, when it was a common practice in education, particularly in secondary and higher levels, as a characteristic of the traditional old-school model. In fact, in the Western world, males were the only ones with broad access to schooling, even though in many countries organized education was limited and not widely available to most children, especially girls [Sota, 2024].

The situation was different in the East. Women in ancient India, for instance, enjoyed a high social status, and among them were many renowned intellectuals. The *Rig Veda* mentions the names of female poets, and by 800 BCE, several learned women are also referenced in the *Upanishads* [Ibid]. In medieval Islamic countries, the education of girls was considered a universal human right. The first Quranic command, “Read...”, applied equally to boys and girls, who were not only educated but also became founders of universities of that era. One of the oldest universities in the world was founded in Morocco in 859 by Fatima al-Fihri¹, a Muslim woman. It began as a mosque with a school and gradually developed into a center of higher education. The first schools established in America by Puritan colonists were modeled after schools in England, which were not necessarily single-sex but were primarily designed for the education of white, Christian males [Chen, 2022 May 20]. Although few in number, feminist movements made it possible to open

¹ The University of Al-Qarawiyyin, founded in 859 in Fez, Morocco, by Fatima al-Fihri, is considered one of the oldest institutions of higher education in the Islamic world and beyond. Initially organized as a mosque with an educational function, it developed over the centuries into an important center of study for Islamic theology, jurisprudence, linguistics, philosophy, and the natural sciences. According to UNESCO and Guinness World Records, Al-Qarawiyyin is recognized as the oldest continuously operating institution of higher learning in the world. [Source: Makdisi, G. (1981). *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh University Press, pp. 63-64].

educational institutions for girls, who had until then been considered inferior to boys. The “Seven Sisters Colleges” and “Salem College” (North Carolina) were the first single-sex schools for girls in America, founded in 1772 [*Ibid*], followed by the first medical institutions, the “Female Medical College” in New England (1848) and the “Woman’s Medical College” in Pennsylvania (1850)². These institutions offered women an opportunity for education at a time when access to conventional educational institutions had been denied to them, as had previously occurred in Switzerland. The nineteenth century brought modern ideas that framed education as a right rather than a privilege reserved for a small elite. The rise of secularization in the twentieth century significantly contributed to the adoption of coeducational schools, which operated depending on the religious, social, and financial conditions of specific regions. Although coeducational schools emerged in America in the 18th century, becoming more prominent after the Revolutionary War (1763-1783), girls’ participation remained limited until 1918, when laws were enacted requiring primary school-age students to attend school [*Sota, 2024*]. By the 1970s, public single-sex schools eligible for federal funding could operate as long as they offered parallel classes for both genders or coeducational classes. Furthermore, such schools had to meet several conditions and criteria: each single-sex class had to be based on a significant educational objective, the objectives had to be implemented equally, student enrollment in a single-sex class had to be entirely voluntary, and equivalent single-sex parallel classes had to be provided [*Norfleet, 2003*].

The issue fundamentally changed in 1972, when the United States enacted the Education Amendments, specifically Title IX, which clarified and modified the rules concerning schools, classes, and extracurricular activities in public elementary and secondary schools [*New York Times Magazine, 2008*]. This milestone was largely due to feminist groups, who argued that it would prevent “discrimination” on the basis of gender in educational programs and activities in federally funded public schools [*Zernike, 2006 October 25*]. As a result, single-sex public schools were closed or began integrating coeducational programs, leaving only private and religious institutions as the dominant providers of single-sex education in the United States.

3. The effect of single-sex education on academic achievement: debates, evidence, and controversies

Public coeducational schools faced various disciplinary issues and low academic performance. In the 1990s, the “American Association of University

Women” released a report titled *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, which raised public awareness about the underachievement of girls in mathematics and science in coeducational classrooms. Similar evidence emerged from the study conducted by the *National Association for Single-Sex Public Education* in June 2005, originating from Cambridge University [Sax, 2008]. Public attention also began to shift toward how boys were underperforming and struggling in public coeducational schools, and how they lagged behind girls in graduation rates, both at the secondary school and college levels. *The New York Times Magazine* published a report indicating that the brains of boys and girls attending single-sex classes developed more positively, providing further arguments for why the education system needed to evolve differently from the traditional coeducational model [New York Times Magazine, 2008].

The 1996 Supreme Court decision took into account appeals regarding the authorization of single-sex schools. Subsequently, in 2001, the *No Child Left Behind Act*, aimed at reforming the educational system, declared that single-sex education could receive federal education funding, while leaving the details to be developed in regulations. These regulations were issued in 2006, clarifying the conditions for providing single-sex classes and extracurricular activities [Ibid]. This development reflected growing concern, advocacy, and demand for such single-sex schools. The Act authorized local school districts to use federal funds for “innovative assistance programs”, including fully single-sex public schools or single-sex classroom programs [Chen, 2023 May 24]. Thanks to these reforms, the number of public single-sex schools in the United States increased significantly.

The number of parents seeking voluntary single-sex education for their children indicated that this movement was likely to continue growing. They did not wait for lengthy studies or debates; they were convinced that a single-sex educational environment would provide their children with better opportunities for success.

Parents, teachers, and students in Greene County School District, Georgia (USA), were surprised to learn that their schools were embracing single-sex education on a large scale. The school board unanimously decided that, starting in the fall of 2008, all classes in all district schools would be single-sex [U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2017]. This measure was taken to address significant challenges faced by this rural school district, such as low-test scores, rising dropout rates, student arrests, and teenage pregnancies. The district ranked 332nd, significantly below Georgia’s average of 369. According to the plan, girls and boys in grades 7 through 12 would attend separate classes [Ibid]. Greene County

became the first entire school district in the United States to convert fully to single-sex education [*Ibid*].

In the same year (2008), the first public single-sex school opened in Hartford, Connecticut. According to *The New York Times*, this initiative significantly impacted coeducational public schools and provided a controversial approach to addressing disciplinary issues and improving the extremely low graduation rates. Educators justified this decision as a response to existing gaps, the need to reduce distractions, and the goal of enhancing the very low educational performance levels. *The New York Times* reported that 48 public schools with single-sex classes were operating, representing an increase of more than 200 percent compared to 1995, when the entire country had only two public single-sex schools [*National Association for Single-Sex Public Education (NASSP), 2005*].

These initiatives were met with mixed reactions, both in favor and against. While one side was optimistic that the change would improve the performance of both girls and boys, the other side was outraged, even threatening to withdraw from the district.

Nevertheless, single-sex schools spread across the country. According to federal data from the National Center for Education Research for the 2014-2015 school year, there were 283 public single-sex schools in the United States, with Texas and Florida leading with 29 each. By 2017, more than 1,000 such public single-sex schools were in operation, excluding juvenile schools, alternative schools, special education institutions, and vocational schools. According to this analysis, only seven states lacked such public schools. Federal data analysis from the National Center for Education Research on November 2, 2017, indicated that 75 percent of public single-sex schools were located in urban and rural areas, while only 12 percent were in suburban regions [*Science Daily, 2012*]. Out of the 283 schools, 170 were for boys and 113 for girls; however, girls outnumbered boys enrolled in these public schools: 21,000 compared to 17,000 [*Ibid*].

A study involving 4,944 students found that 39 percent of those attending single-sex schools experienced fewer issues related to staff shortages, higher student-teacher ratios, and increased levels of parental involvement. Similar results were reported by a government-sponsored study in the United States in 2008, which outlined the benefits of public single-sex schools: reducing sexual harassment among students, decreasing gender biases in teacher-student interactions, fostering a sense of comfort between students and staff, lowering behavioral problems, improving students' self-esteem, enhancing academic achievement, providing greater leadership opportunities, and offering increased avenues for social and moral guidance [*Younger & Warrington, 2005*].

The two opposing “camps” regarding single-sex schools attempted to present their facts and counter-facts on the advantages and disadvantages of such institutions. According to the first camp, the theory of single-sex education, for both boys and girls, proved to be positive due to current differences and the way their brains function. When students are in separate classes, teachers can tailor their teaching methods to capitalize on the specific learning techniques of boys and girls. For example, girls tend to prefer collaborative work, whereas boys are more motivated by competition. Furthermore, students are not constantly distracted by members of the opposite sex, nor influenced by their clothing or behaviors, as data show that adolescent boys are more easily distracted than girls in coeducational settings [*American Association of University Women (AAUW), 2015*]. An analysis conducted in England explained this as follows: “There is a viewpoint that girls, if boys are around, will focus only on them and not on their lessons, and if boys have girls around, they will do the same ...” [*Chen, 2023 May 24*].

The Chicago Urban Preparatory Academy proudly reported some remarkable statistics regarding the improvement of single-sex classes in a public school in one of the city’s neighborhoods. In 2006, the first year of its opening, the participating students had a dismal reading level of only 4 percent [*New York Times Magazine, 2008*]. By the time the school was converted to a single-sex model and the students graduated four years later, 100 percent of them were admitted to colleges or universities, and many were offered academic scholarships [*McGrath, & Sammons, 2011*]. Although other factors may have contributed to this improvement, the outcome was nonetheless positive. This was also confirmed by the 2023 school report, which highlighted positive results from the experience at Jefferson High School in Illinois, where after only half a semester of voluntary single-sex classes for 7th and 8th grades, higher grades, better attendance, and fewer disciplinary problems were reported for all students. Moreover, girls showed significant improvement in science and mathematics, while boys improved in reading and writing [*Gaucher & Hafer & Kay & Davidenko, 2010*].

Tom Carroll, chairman and founder of the “Brighter Choice Charter School for Boys” and the “Brighter Choice Charter School for Girls” in Albany, states that recently published test results from single-sex classrooms demonstrated significantly better performance compared to coeducational classes [*Chen, 2023 March 27*]. Similar outcomes were observed in Ireland in 2018, where a high percentage of students in single-sex secondary schools showed surprisingly high achievements in science, literature, and arts, compared to their peers in coeducational classes [*Hurry & Fridkin & Holliman, 2022*].

Michael Gurian and Kathy Stevens, in their study “*With Boys And Girls In Mind*” published in *Educational Leadership* (2004), discuss how single-sex

classrooms facilitate teachers in preparing lessons tailored to students’ needs and foster closer teacher-student relationships. According to their findings, while boys learn more effectively through physical activities, girls tend to prefer interactions and discussions. The study notes that “new PET and MRI scanning technologies reveal structural and functional differences in the brains of boys and girls. With more cortical areas dedicated to verbal functioning, sensory memory, sitting posture, listening, tonal perception, and reflective thinking, reading and writing complexities are easier for the female brain. Boys, who often bypass reflective thinking, require rest periods to recharge and engage more cortical areas for spatial-mechanical functioning” [Jackson, & Smith, 2000].

There is another reason why researchers consider single-sex classrooms to be necessary and effective. A 2007 study, led by a team of scientists from the National Institute of Mental Health, identified an interesting phenomenon related to brain development in children. Using 829 brain scans collected over two years from 387 subjects aged 3 to 27, the researchers found several remarkable differences [Sax, 2008]. For instance, the occipital lobe, which is primarily associated with visual processing, shows rapid development in girls between ages 6 and 10, while in boys it develops after age 14. Other studies have also demonstrated disparities in language processing between genders, concluding that the language areas of the brain in many 5-year-old boys resemble those of many 3-year-old girls [Menghini, & Finzi, & Carlesimo, & Vicari, 2011].

A similar evidence has been presented by Phd. Carol Dweck from Stanford University in her research. According to her, different gender-based mindsets allow for positive outcomes only in single-sex classrooms. Teachers can employ distinct instructional strategies for girls and for boys, but this possibility is feasible only in single-sex settings, as specific performance needs require gender-specific approaches. As a result: “Single-sex schools create more relaxed environments, with fewer gender stereotypes, and provide better-aligned opportunities for students’ interests” [The 74, 2022 January 31]. The rationale behind this is that boys and girls are neurologically different and learn in significantly different ways. According to the study *How The Brain Learns: New and Exciting Findings*, presented at the ASAIHL conference, boys develop visual, spatial, and temporal skills faster than girls, whereas in Singapore in 2014, Phd. Sousa argued that girls acquire spoken language skills earlier than boys [Singh, & Ma, 2014]. In a single-sex classroom, girls can explore their abilities at their own pace without needing to compete with boys, and vice versa.

Phd. Leonard Sax, in his book *Girls on the Edge*, highlighted “that single-sex education has proven successful in broadening students’ horizons and

encouraging them to explore their tendencies and interests without feeling constrained by gender stereotypes” [Sax, 2020]. Furthermore, as psychologist Phd. Lisa Damour notes, “students appear much more focused in school; they are not distracted by a cute boy in the hallway and do not worry about how they look or what they are wearing” [Martínez Besteiro, & Julián Quintanilla, 2017]. Similarly, a 2003 study conducted by the University of Virginia, led by Phd. Abigail Norfleet James, found that in single-sex classrooms, boys were twice as likely to pursue interests in subjects such as art, music, drama, and foreign languages compared to those attending coeducational schools [Norfleet James, A. 2003].

Opponents naturally hold contrasting views. They consider the evidence supporting the advantages of single-sex schools as inconsistent and unclear, presenting their own “evidence” which often finds no significant differences. Moreover, research in this field tends to focus on a small number of locations, given that in most countries single-sex schools are selective and attended by a limited number of students [U.S. Department of Education, 2008]. According to critics, single-sex classrooms are “gender-specific policies” that may become problematic when the need arises for integration rather than separation, since “learning exclusively with peers of the same sex may pose difficulties when students must interact with the opposite gender” [Jauregui, & Goienetxe, & Vidales, 2017]. They argue that purported academic benefits are overstated. Single-sex education may take a step backward, reinforcing gender stereotypes and potentially leading to inequality in the workplace, undermining the progress achieved by feminist movements [Sax, 2010]. Separate classrooms, they contend, may hinder students not only in their professional careers but also in their personal adult lives. A study titled “*Sex segregation in schools detrimental to equality*”, published in *Science Daily*, claims that “such separations do not socialize students to be less sexist” [National Academy of Sciences, 2011 June 23]. In this context, *Science* magazine cites psychologists and educators who dismiss the purported benefits of single-sex education, asserting that such institutions encourage sexism, which “impedes a positive learning environment” [Ibid]. This debate also encompasses “strong evidence of the negative consequences of gender segregation” and the “collateral harm” caused by such separation. Civil rights organizations have even argued that single-sex education is unconstitutional and have filed lawsuits against schools that offer this option.

The issue of single-sex education remains controversial for many Americans, as the number of such schools is still relatively small. Nevertheless, the trend toward single-sex education continues, along with ongoing debates about whether it represents the best approach to educating children. Today, single-sex education is more widespread in English-speaking countries such as

Malaysia, England, Hong Kong, South Africa, and Australia, where it is primarily associated with the private sector. It is also present in Muslim countries, where both public and private schools are segregated by gender. Recently, there has been a significant expansion in countries such as Chile, Ireland, Israel, and Singapore³. In Thailand, Trinidad, and Tobago, single-sex schools tend to attract wealthier female students [Zajda, & Rust, & Majhanovich, 2006]. The question remains open: “Why do single-sex schools produce better outcomes?” and “Should our institutions follow this model of success?”.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the historical and contemporary development of single-sex education, along with a comprehensive review of empirical studies and institutional reports, demonstrates that this educational model represents a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be evaluated unilaterally. Single-sex education is neither a universal solution to the problems of educational systems nor an outdated practice devoid of pedagogical value. On the contrary, it emerges as a didactic alternative that, under certain conditions, can positively influence academic achievement, scholarly development, and the socio-emotional well-being of students.

The data presented in this study indicate that single-sex schools and classrooms, particularly in public contexts where they are applied voluntarily and with clear pedagogical criteria, have demonstrated significant improvements in academic achievement, school discipline, attendance, and student engagement. In many cases, this model has contributed to increasing girls’ confidence in science and mathematics, as well as enhancing boys’ literacy and language skills. These results suggest that a single-sex environment may provide more favorable conditions for addressing individual and gender-based differences in learning.

One of the main conclusions of this article relates to the role of differentiated instruction. Single-sex education provides teachers with the opportunity to tailor teaching methods, pace, and strategies according to the dominant learning styles of girls and boys, making the learning process more effective and targeted. The included neuroscientific and psycho-pedagogical studies reinforce the idea that differences in brain development, information processing, and emotional responses to the school environment can directly impact academic performance. In this sense, single-sex education does not aim

³ Zajda, J., Rust, V. D., & Majhanovich, S. (2006). *Globalisation, education and development: Comparative perspectives*. Springer, pp. 81-52.

to reinforce gender divisions, but rather to create more suitable conditions for the development of each student’s individual potential.

However, the study also highlights that the positive outcomes of single-sex education are neither automatic nor guaranteed. The effectiveness of this model depends on a range of factors, including the quality of teaching, the professional preparation of teachers, school infrastructure, institutional support, and parental involvement. In the absence of these elements, gender-based separation risks becoming a formal practice without a real impact on improving the quality of education. Furthermore, concerns raised by critics regarding the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and challenges in socialization remain issues that require continuous attention and careful pedagogical management.

An important conclusion of this study is that single-sex education should not be viewed as a counterpoint to coeducation, but rather as a complementary alternative within a flexible and inclusive educational system. The choice of this model should remain voluntary, grounded in rigorous scientific analysis, and responsive to the specific needs of school communities. Experiences from different countries indicate that educational policies allowing diversity in organizational models, while respecting principles of equality and non-discrimination, are more likely to produce sustainable outcomes.

In conclusion, this article argues that the resurgence of single-sex education in some Western educational systems does not represent a step backward toward traditional practices, but rather an effort to find alternative solutions to contemporary educational challenges. The debate on this issue remains open and calls for further long-term, comparative, and cross-cultural studies to more fully assess the impact of single-sex education on academic achievement, social development, and gender equality. Only through a balanced and evidence-based approach can the true place of this model in 21st-century education be determined.

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The role of parenting in the formation of children’s identity in the digital society

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Abstract: Studies support the role that parents play, through their behavior, in shaping a child’s identity. Various authors and researchers have explored what parenting essentially is and how it influences the formation of a particular identity, drawing on theoretical perspectives and empirical studies. The purpose of this study is to highlight the relationship that exists between parenting dimensions and identity status among adolescents. A sample of 100 individuals (59 females and 41 males) was used for this study. Participants’ ages ranged from 16 to 18 years. Two instruments were used to collect the data. Correlation results supported the hypothesis that specific parenting dimensions are associated with the formation of different identity statuses. The analyses also showed that different parenting styles are linked to different identity statuses. Regression analysis indicated that the prediction of identity statuses based on parenting practices was significant. Further studies and deeper investigations into other factors influencing identity statuses of children in the digital era are recommended.

Keywords: *Identity statuses, parenting styles, adolescence, digital society*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a chronological period between puberty and the beginning of adulthood (Steinberg, 2014), and it includes a stage of life in which the individual undertakes important explorations in order to make commitments (Marcia, 1966). The study of adolescence begins with G. Stanley Hall (1904), who viewed the period of adolescence as the best period of life. Konopka (1973) sees adolescence as an important segment of the continuity of human development. She divides it into: early adolescence (10–12), middle adolescence (15–18), and late adolescence (19–22). According to Erikson, some of the main tasks of adolescence are: body control, identification with peers, social sensitivity, self-organization, internal interests (fantasies), and

self-regulation. Despite the large amount of time adolescents spend outside the family environment with their peers, parenting remains an important influence in the formation of the identity process (Hill, 1983).

Identity development involves active exploration and firm commitment to individual values, viewpoints, and life aspirations (Erikson, 1968). Parents may facilitate or hinder this process through their behavior. A parent is the one who practices parenting—through behaviors that protect the child and support development. Parenting is the capacity to carry out the parental role by adopting behaviors that include nurturing, care, providing warmth and support, education, and promoting autonomy and independence of ideas. According to Greca and Maniglia (2009), a parent is the person who has internalized the purpose (set by nature and society) to care for and autonomously pursue the child’s autonomous and personal development. Caring for a child is a complex task because it requires adaptation between stages of development and the environment, between children’s needs and the opportunities offered by the social context.

According to Bornstein (Bornstein, 2012), parenting practices vary, and some of the main causes of these differences include culture, personality, family size, parental background, socioeconomic status, level of education, and religion. Certainly, the parenting approaches of each parent combine to create a unique mixture in every family. The effects of different parenting styles were investigated by Baumrind (1980), who divided them into three different parenting styles.

The authoritarian parenting style attempts to control children’s behavior by setting rules. The decision made by the parent cannot be questioned. The word of the authoritarian parent is law. These parents set strict norms to maintain order and do so without expressing much love and warmth. They tend to set strict standards of conduct and are usually very strict with the child who does not follow these standards (Baumrind, 1980). Authoritarian parents place great importance on obedience and conformity, demanding respect for themselves and for family values. Rules are set without being explained or justified and must be accepted without discussion. Autonomy is not encouraged, and taking a position is interpreted as a sign of rebellion and lack of respect, hindering and interfering with the process of individualization. Children with authoritarian parents usually do not learn to think for themselves or to understand why, because their parents require certain behaviors from them (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Permissive parents ask fewer questions of their children. They are not punitive, are open to communication, and do not aim to shape the child’s behavior. Permissive parents give up excessive control over their children. They set few or no rules, and the rules that are set do not rely on force. They

do not want to be tied to routines and want their children to feel free. They do not set clear boundaries or expect much from their child's behavior. Therefore, they tend to accept with love and warmth whatever the child does. Permissive parents give their children as many choices as possible, even when the child is not able to make the right choice. It has been observed that children of these parents, in some ways, resemble those of authoritarian parents. They are often impulsive, immature, and out of control (Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

Authoritative parents encourage reciprocal exchange and explain the reasons for family rules and manners within the family. Both autonomy and discipline are valued. Limits are set, but the child's individuality is taken into consideration. Parents are warm. Children of authoritative parents are more self-confident, self-controlled, exploratory, and satisfied (Baumrind, 1980). They help their children be responsible for themselves and think about the consequences of their behavior. They do this by providing clear and reasonable trust in the child, explaining why they expect their child to behave in a particular way. They monitor their child's behavior to ensure that the child follows norms and beliefs, and they do this warmly and with love. Children of these parents are usually more curious, more self-confident, and more independent (Maccoby & Martin).

No one has had a greater impact than Erik Erikson (1968), through his theory of development, on the study of adolescence and identity formation. Referring to his theory, each chronological period in the life cycle contains a developmental issue. In adolescence, the main task is identity formation.

In contemporary digital society, adolescents increasingly construct and express their identities within online environments shaped by social media, digital communication, and virtual peer networks. These spaces expand opportunities for self-expression and exploration, but they also intensify peer influence, social comparison, and pressures related to self-presentation (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Livingstone, 2014). In this context, parenting plays a crucial role in guiding adolescents' navigation of digital environments and supporting healthy identity development (Clark, 2011).

2. Literature review

Parenting is the capacity to perform the parental role through the adoption of behaviors that include nurturing, care, providing warmth and support, education, and the promotion of autonomy and independence of ideas. According to Greca and Maniglia (2009), a parent is the person who has internalized the purpose (set by nature and society) of caring for and autonomously supporting the child's autonomous and personal development. Caring for a child is a complex task because it requires adaptation between

developmental stages and the environment, between children’s needs and the opportunities provided by the social context.

In some theoretical models of family interaction, communication—together with cohesion and adaptability—is considered one of the central dimensions of family functioning and is referred to by authors as a “facilitating element (Olson, 2000). Identity formation during adolescence requires communicative support from parents that functions as an organizing force and enables adolescents to explore parts of themselves that were previously unknown. Research has highlighted clear gender differences: mothers tend to communicate more effectively with children compared to fathers, and adolescents often experience greater difficulty communicating with both parents (Noller & Callan, 1991) . Adolescents’ negative perceptions of communication with parents are often linked to discomfort with the idea that parents might know everything about them. On the other hand, parents may struggle to accept that their child is growing up and that they are losing control, which can lead to conflict between them.

Digital technologies have transformed family communication patterns and adolescent socialization processes. Online interaction, social networking platforms, and digital media exposure influence adolescents’ self-concept, peer relationships, and identity exploration (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). Research suggests that parental monitoring, digital mediation, and open communication about online experiences can reduce risks and support positive identity development in digital contexts (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Clark, 2011).

As adolescents grow older, their sense of family involvement decreases for both boys and girls, while their sense of differentiation from parents increases. Adolescents report seeking parental help for moral and material problems, while friends are the primary source of support for emotional issues. Adolescents tend to follow parental advice regarding future-oriented decisions, whereas when decisions relate to present identity issues, they are more likely to follow the advice of peers. One achievement of adolescence is separation from parents, accompanied by identification with peers and characterized by the formation of close relationships outside the family (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Erikson (as cited in Coleman & Hendry, p. 14) states that “when one has an identity, one has incorporated a uniqueness as an individual and a sense of solidarity with the ideals of a group.” Adolescents develop greater emotional autonomy, leading to reduced submission to authority; they begin to see parents as individuals who can make mistakes, whose opinions and beliefs can be discussed, and whose values are not absolute truths but rather perspectives.

2.1 The concept of parenting according to Erikson

Caring for a child is a complex task because it requires adaptation between developmental stages and the environment, between children’s needs and the opportunities provided by the social context. It is also connected with instinctive, cognitive, and affective capacities and requires the organization of the couple’s relationship and the parental role. Parenting can be understood as an evolutionary stage in Erikson’s framework: “The strength gained at each stage appears in the need to risk at the next stage and constitutes the most vulnerable element of the previous stage.” Erikson emphasizes that the stage he termed *generativity* is the most important aspect influencing all developments that make human beings entities who “care for others.”

2.2 Parenting styles according to Maccoby and Martin

Unlike Baumrind, Maccoby and Martin identified four parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, authoritative, and neglectful. The neglectful model ranks as the weakest across all areas of human development. Children raised in this way tend to have low self-control, low self-esteem, and are less competent than their peers (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The neglectful or rejecting style is characterized by disengagement in both control and emotional responsiveness. These parents are neither responsive nor demanding; they do not guide or monitor their children’s activities and do not provide support. Instead, they use very limited instruments for introducing children to social norms and rules. Children with neglectful parents tend to be less mature cognitively and socially and often display insecurity in social relationships.

Parenting styles significantly influence child development (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Children of authoritative parents—who balance rules with love and respect—demonstrate greater self-control and satisfaction (Lamborn et al., 1991). According to psychologist Diana Baumrind, “authoritative parenting is the best predictor of successful development.” Although it may seem that being authoritative guarantees healthy child development, this is not always the case. One factor that makes parenting partially confusing is that what works well for one child may be less effective for another.

2.3 Classification of parental discipline according to Becker

It is important for both parents to share a common philosophy regarding child management. This promotes consistency and facilitates the child’s adaptation to parental approaches. The parent–child relationship at any time is a function of multiple factors that require explanation. In his classification of parental discipline, Becker (1964), through factor analysis, identified three major dimensions: restrictive versus permissive, warm versus hostile, and calm

detachment versus anxious emotional involvement. Different types of parents can be classified according to combinations of these traits and their levels. The effects of parents on children are immeasurable. Self-concept is influenced by parental models. Poor parent–child relationships are associated with aggression and discipline problems. Affection, acceptance, and warmth are associated with adjustment and high academic achievement, as well as creativity and leadership (Walters & Stinnett, 1972).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between parenting and identity statuses. Specifically, it investigates how maternal and paternal care relate to different identity statuses and how maternal and paternal overprotection influence the formation of specific identity statuses. The study adopts a quantitative research design. Two questionnaires were used to collect the data.

The paper begins with an introduction and a literature review addressing adolescence, identity formation, parenting, theoretical perspectives on identity, and studies examining the relationship between parenting styles and identity types. The methodology section describes the sample and its characteristics, the sampling procedure, the instruments used, and the data analysis procedures. The paper continues with results, discussion, and statistically supported analyses. Conclusions and recommendations conclude the study, suggesting directions for future research.

The importance of this study lies in exploring the relationship between parenting and identity statuses, particularly how parental care and overprotection influence the formation of different identity statuses. This study may serve as a stimulus and starting point for further research in this field.

A sample of 100 participants was used in this study. Of these, 59 were female and 41 were male. The age range of the sample was 16–18 years: 33 participants were 16 years old, 31 were 17 years old, and 36 were 18 years old. The sample was purposive, meaning it reflects only certain aspects of the population and is not representative of the entire population, due to time and financial constraints.

Sampling was conducted in three high schools located in three cities—Tirana, Kavaja, and Fier—specifically in the second and third grades. The average duration of questionnaire administration was 15–20 minutes. Participants were initially provided with information about the questionnaires and were then invited to participate voluntarily. Data remained confidential and anonymity was ensured.

The first questionnaire included 25 statements concerning how adolescents perceived their parents during their upbringing. The questionnaire was administered separately for each parent (mother and father). It consisted of two scales: care and overprotection/control. Twelve statements referred to care and thirteen to overprotection. The coding of items followed the same direction.

For mothers, a score of 27.0 indicated care and 13.5 indicated overprotection. For fathers, a score of 24.0 indicated care and 12.5 indicated overprotection. The results were then coded into variables to construct parenting styles. High care combined with low protection was associated with excessive parental affection. High care combined with low protection was also linked to optimal parenting style. Low care combined with high protection was associated with a controlling parenting style. Low care combined with low protection was associated with a neglectful parenting style. This questionnaire has been tested for validity and reliability.

The second questionnaire represents an alternative to a clinical interview and is primarily used as a self-report instrument for classifying subjects into identity statuses. The questionnaire contains 64 statements related to commitments, family roles, lifestyle, friendships, beliefs, values, and related areas. Specific items correspond to particular variables, and the data were recoded to generate the final results.

4. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a statistical software package, version 20. The database was constructed based on the data obtained from the instruments used. Analyses were performed through correlation and regression procedures in order to examine the relationship between parenting dimensions and identity statuses. Frequencies, percentages, and graphical representations were also included to analyze relationships among additional variables.

Study Limitations

1. The sample was not selected through random sampling.
2. Given the size of the sample, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire population.

5. Discussion

Correlation analyses revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between maternal care and identity achievement (identity synthesis). A positive correlation was also found between maternal care and moratorium status, indicating that increased maternal care is associated with a greater

likelihood of identity synthesis or moratorium. The results showed no correlational relationship between maternal care and identity foreclosure or identity diffusion.

The study also identified a positive correlation between maternal control/overprotection and moratorium, as well as a positive relationship between maternal overprotection and identity diffusion. No statistically significant correlation was found between maternal overprotection and identity foreclosure or identity achievement. Thus, the findings align partly with expectations: maternal care is associated with moratorium and identity synthesis, whereas maternal overprotection is linked to identity diffusion and, less expectedly, to moratorium. A positive correlation was observed between paternal overprotection and moratorium, as well as between paternal overprotection and early identity foreclosure. However, no significant relationship emerged between paternal overprotection and identity diffusion, despite this being anticipated. Likewise, no correlation was found between paternal overprotection and identity achievement.

In the digital era, identity exploration often extends into online environments where adolescents experiment with self-presentation and social roles. Supportive parenting may therefore be particularly important in helping adolescents critically navigate digital influences and maintain a coherent sense of identity (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

In summary, moratorium status correlates with both parenting dimensions for mothers and fathers. As it is well known from Marcia, 1966, moratorium represents a stage of exploration and involvement in various experiences in the search for self-identity. These findings suggest that increases in both parental care and overprotection may be associated with greater adolescent exploration and self-searching. While the positive influence of parental care is understandable, the positive association of overprotection is less expected. Nevertheless, the correlation with the care dimension is stronger than with overprotection.

The results also show correlations between both maternal and paternal care and identity achievement. At this stage, adolescents tend to internalize parental values while continuing to affirm elements of their earlier identity development. It might have been expected that overprotection would correlate with this identity status; however, the findings indicate otherwise. The correlation with maternal care is stronger than with paternal care.

As emphasized in the literature, parenting styles exert a significant influence on identity formation. Each parenting style contributes differently to identity development stages. Research has consistently shown that the authoritative parenting style—represented in this study by the optimal parenting style—has the strongest positive impact on identity development (Steinberg et al., 1994).

The results of this study support this conclusion, indicating that this parenting style demonstrates the highest correlation with positive identity outcomes. This suggests that a balance of autonomy and discipline supports adolescents in navigating identity stages effectively and in forming a stable identity. The literature also indicates that the authoritarian parenting style does not support healthy identity development or identity achievement. Consistent with previous findings, this study found a negative influence on identity stages. Similarly, the neglectful parenting style showed negative effects. Excessive authority combined with a lack of care and attention reduces the likelihood that adolescents will reach moratorium and identity achievement statuses, both of which are associated with healthy identity formation.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the existence of a relationship between specific parenting dimensions and the four identity statuses. In the context of an increasingly digital society, understanding how parenting supports adolescents in navigating both offline and online identity formation is essential (Livingstone, 2014). Based on the analysis of the results and subsequent discussion, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Maternal care is associated with identity achievement (identity synthesis).
2. Maternal overprotection is associated with identity diffusion and moratorium.
3. Paternal care is associated with identity achievement.
4. Paternal overprotection is associated with early identity foreclosure.
5. Excessive maternal affection shows a positive correlation with identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement.
6. Optimal parenting (for both mother and father) correlates positively with identity diffusion, moratorium, and identity achievement.
7. The controlling parenting style (mother and father) correlates negatively with moratorium and identity achievement. In the case of the mother, it also correlates negatively with identity diffusion.
8. The neglectful parenting style (mother) correlates negatively with moratorium and identity achievement.
9. Identity status can be predicted based on parenting dimensions.

7. Recommendations

- Further studies are recommended to explore additional factors influencing identity statuses.

- Future research should continue to examine the relationship between parenting and identity development.
- The findings of this study should be considered in order to better understand how specific parenting dimensions influence the formation of particular identity statuses in adolescents.

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Justice in the Digital Age: Philosophical Reflections on International Crime and Social Transformation

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Abstract: Digital transformation has reshaped contemporary society, challenging traditional philosophical and legal understandings of crime, responsibility, and justice. This paper explores how digital innovation influences international crime and the institutional responses of modern criminal justice systems. The purpose of the study is to analyze the ethical and philosophical implications of cybercrime, digital surveillance, and algorithmic governance for societies in transition.

The research applies a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology that integrates philosophical analysis with perspectives from criminology and international law. Conceptual examination is used to investigate key issues such as the erosion of territorial boundaries in digital crime, the growing reliance on data-driven decision-making, and the tension between security and individual rights. These developments are interpreted as indicators of a broader transformation in which technological progress increasingly outpaced ethical and institutional adaptation.

The findings reveal significant gaps between existing legal frameworks and the realities of digitally mediated crime, creating risks for privacy, accountability, and social trust. The study recommends the adoption of ethically grounded policies and human-centered institutional reforms that balance innovation with the protection of fundamental rights. The paper contributes a critical philosophical perspective to contemporary debates on digital justice and responsible governance in the digital age.

Keywords: *digital transformation, ethics, international crime, criminal justice, digital society*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has become one of the defining characteristics of contemporary society. The widespread adoption of digital technologies has reshaped communication, economic systems, governance, and social

interactions. These developments have also transformed the nature of crime, enabling new forms of criminal activity that operate across national borders and challenge traditional legal frameworks (Brenner, 2010).

Unlike conventional crimes, digital crimes do not require physical proximity between the offender and the victim. Cybercrime, identity theft, digital fraud, and transnational hacking illustrate how criminal activity has evolved in response to technological innovation (Wall, 2007). As a result, traditional legal systems, which are based on territorial jurisdiction, face increasing difficulties in regulating and prosecuting digital crime.

At the same time, digital technologies have transformed criminal justice institutions themselves. Governments and law enforcement agencies increasingly rely on digital surveillance, data analytics, and algorithmic systems to monitor and prevent crime (Zuboff, 2019). These technologies offer significant benefits but also raise fundamental ethical concerns regarding privacy, accountability, and human rights.

Despite technological progress, ethical and legal frameworks have struggled to adapt to the realities of digital crime. This creates a gap between technological capabilities and institutional responses, raising important questions about justice and responsibility in the digital age. The primary research question addressed in this paper is: *How does digital transformation challenge traditional philosophical and legal understandings of crime, responsibility, and justice?*

The objectives of this study are:

- To analyze the ethical implications of cybercrime and digital surveillance;
- To examine how digital technologies challenge traditional legal frameworks;
- To explore the philosophical implications of algorithmic governance;
- To propose ethically grounded approaches to justice in the digital age

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Digital Transformation and the Evolution of Crime

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the structure of society, creating what Castells (2010) describes as a “network society,” in which digital communication technologies play a central role in social organization. While these technologies provide significant benefits, they also create opportunities for new forms of crime.

Cybercrime represents one of the most significant consequences of digital transformation. Brenner (2010) explains that cybercrime challenges traditional legal systems because it operates across jurisdictions and often

involves anonymous actors. This creates difficulties in identifying perpetrators and enforcing legal accountability.

Similarly, Wall (2007) argues that cybercrime reflects broader social and technological transformations that require new legal and institutional responses.

2.2 Philosophical Perspectives on Justice in the Digital Age

Philosophical theories of justice provide important insights into how societies should respond to digital transformation. Rawls (1971) emphasized fairness, equality, and the protection of individual rights as fundamental principles of justice. These principles remain relevant but must be reconsidered in the context of digital societies.

Foucault's (1977) analysis of surveillance is particularly relevant to digital technologies. He argued that surveillance represents a form of social control that shapes behavior and reinforces institutional power. Digital surveillance extends this concept by enabling continuous monitoring of individuals through technological systems.

Floridi (2014) introduced the concept of information ethics, which emphasizes the ethical responsibilities associated with digital technologies. He argues that digital transformation requires new ethical frameworks that protect human dignity and autonomy.

2.3 Algorithmic Governance and Ethical Challenges

Algorithmic decision-making has become increasingly common in criminal justice systems. Algorithms are used in predictive policing, risk assessment, and surveillance (O'Neil, 2016). While these systems improve efficiency, they also raise concerns about transparency, fairness, and accountability.

Zuboff (2019) describes the growing influence of digital technologies as “surveillance capitalism,” in which personal data is used to monitor and influence human behavior. This raises significant ethical concerns about privacy and institutional power.

Although previous research has examined cybercrime and digital governance, there is limited philosophical analysis of how digital transformation reshapes the concept of justice itself. This study addresses this gap by providing a philosophical analysis of digital crime and institutional responses.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary research approach based on philosophical and conceptual analysis. This methodology is appropriate because the research focuses on examining ethical, philosophical, and

institutional implications of digital transformation rather than measuring empirical variables (Floridi, 2014). Conceptual analysis allows for critical examination of normative principles, legal frameworks, and institutional responses to emerging forms of digital crime.

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a conceptual and analytical research design grounded in philosophical inquiry. This approach enables systematic examination of ethical concepts such as justice, responsibility, privacy, and accountability in the context of digital transformation. Conceptual analysis is widely used in philosophical and legal research to clarify theoretical frameworks and evaluate normative assumptions (Floridi, 2014).

3.2 Data Sources

The analysis is based on a structured review and examination of three main categories of sources:

- Academic literature in philosophy, criminology, and digital ethics, including foundational works by Rawls (1971), Foucault (1977), Floridi (2014), and contemporary research on cybercrime and digital governance (Brenner, 2010; Wall, 2007; Zuboff, 2019).
- International legal frameworks, including principles and conventions addressing cybercrime, digital surveillance, and international criminal responsibility, such as the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention, 2001).
- Policy and institutional documents, including international policy guidelines related to digital governance, privacy, and data protection, particularly those developed by international organizations such as the European Commission and the United Nations.

These sources were selected based on their relevance, academic credibility, and contribution to understanding the ethical and institutional challenges of digital justice.

3.3 Data Analysis

The study uses philosophical and conceptual analysis to examine how digital transformation challenges traditional legal and ethical frameworks. The analysis focuses on key themes, including:

- The erosion of territorial boundaries in digital crime;
- The ethical implications of digital surveillance;
- The role of algorithmic decision-making in criminal justice;
- Institutional limitations and ethical risks associated with digital governance.

Concepts were critically examined and interpreted in relation to existing philosophical theories of justice and contemporary legal and institutional developments.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on publicly available academic and legal sources and does not involve human participants. All sources have been properly cited in accordance with APA guidelines. Academic integrity, originality, and ethical standards in research and publication have been strictly maintained.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the philosophical and conceptual analysis, organized in direct relation to the research question and objectives of the study. The analysis examined how digital transformation challenges traditional philosophical and legal understandings of crime, responsibility, and justice.

4.1 The Erosion of Territorial Boundaries and the Transformation of Crime

The analysis reveals that digital transformation has fundamentally altered the territorial nature of crime. Traditional criminal justice systems are based on jurisdictional boundaries, where criminal acts occur within specific geographic locations. However, digital technologies allow criminal activities to be conducted remotely, often across multiple jurisdictions simultaneously. This finding supports the argument that digital crime challenges foundational legal principles based on territorial sovereignty (Brenner, 2010). As Wall (2007) explains, cybercrime exists in a decentralized environment where offenders, victims, and digital infrastructure may be located in different countries. This creates legal and institutional uncertainty regarding responsibility, jurisdiction, and enforcement.

From a philosophical perspective, this transformation challenges traditional conceptions of responsibility, which assume clear relationships between actors, actions, and consequences. Digital environments disrupt these relationships, making attribution of responsibility more complex.

This finding directly addresses the research objective of examining how digital transformation challenges traditional legal frameworks.

4.2 Ethical Tensions Between Digital Surveillance and Individual Rights

A second key finding concerns the ethical implications of digital surveillance. Digital technologies have enabled unprecedented levels of monitoring through data collection, artificial intelligence, and predictive systems. These technologies are increasingly used by governments and institutions to prevent and investigate crime.

However, the analysis reveals a fundamental ethical tension between security and individual freedom. While surveillance enhances institutional efficiency, it also creates risks for privacy and autonomy. Zuboff (2019) argues that digital surveillance has become a structural feature of modern governance, raising concerns about institutional power and individual rights.

This finding aligns with Foucault’s (1977) analysis of surveillance as a mechanism of social control. Digital surveillance extends this concept by enabling continuous monitoring beyond physical environments.

This finding directly addresses the research objective of analyzing the ethical implications of digital surveillance.

4.3 Algorithmic Governance and the Challenge of Accountability

A third finding concerns the growing role of algorithmic systems in criminal justice decision-making. Algorithms are used in risk assessment, predictive policing, and surveillance.

While algorithmic systems improve efficiency, the analysis reveals significant ethical and philosophical challenges related to transparency and accountability. O’Neil (2016) demonstrates that algorithmic systems may reproduce social inequalities and lack transparency, making it difficult to evaluate their fairness.

This creates a situation in which decision-making authority is partially transferred from human agents to technological systems. From a philosophical perspective, this raises fundamental questions about moral responsibility and institutional accountability.

Floridi (2014) argues that digital technologies require new ethical frameworks that reflect the realities of the information age.

This finding directly addresses the research objective of examining algorithmic governance.

4.4 Institutional and Ethical Gaps Between Technological Innovation and Legal Adaptation

The analysis also reveals a significant gap between technological innovation and institutional adaptation. Legal systems and ethical frameworks have not fully adapted to the rapid pace of technological change.

This finding confirms that technological development often progresses faster than legal and institutional reform (Brenner, 2010). As a result, digital crime creates risks for privacy, accountability, and public trust.

This gap highlights the need for institutional reforms that integrate ethical considerations into digital governance.

This finding directly addresses the research objective of proposing ethically grounded approaches to justice.

4.5 Philosophical Implications for Justice in the Digital Age

The final finding concerns the broader philosophical implications of digital transformation for justice itself. Traditional theories of justice emphasize fairness, responsibility, and institutional accountability (Rawls, 1971). However, digital transformation challenges these principles by introducing new forms of technological mediation.

Digital justice requires new ethical frameworks that address:

- distributed responsibility,
- technological decision-making,
- and institutional accountability.

Floridi (2014) argues that the information age requires a redefinition of ethical responsibility that reflects technological realities.

This finding directly answers the research question by demonstrating that digital transformation requires a philosophical re-evaluation of justice.

5. Conclusions

This study examined how digital transformation challenges traditional philosophical and legal understandings of crime, responsibility, and justice. Using a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodology grounded in philosophical and conceptual analysis, the research explored the ethical and institutional implications of cybercrime, digital surveillance, and algorithmic governance. The findings demonstrate that digital transformation has fundamentally altered the nature of crime by eroding traditional territorial boundaries and creating new forms of transnational criminal activity. This development challenges existing legal frameworks, which remain largely based on geographically defined jurisdiction. As a result, assigning responsibility and ensuring accountability in digital environments has become increasingly complex.

The study also identified significant ethical tensions between digital surveillance and the protection of individual rights. While digital technologies enhance institutional capacity to prevent and investigate crime, they also raise concerns regarding privacy, autonomy, and institutional power. Furthermore, the increasing reliance on algorithmic systems in criminal justice introduces

new challenges related to transparency, fairness, and accountability, raising fundamental philosophical questions about responsibility and justice in technologically mediated environments.

Another key conclusion is that technological innovation has outpaced the adaptation of legal and ethical frameworks. This gap creates institutional vulnerabilities and risks undermining public trust in justice systems. Existing institutions are not yet fully equipped to address the ethical and legal challenges posed by digital transformation.

From a philosophical perspective, the study concludes that digital transformation requires a re-evaluation of traditional theories of justice. Justice in the digital age must incorporate new ethical principles that address distributed responsibility, algorithmic decision-making, and the protection of fundamental rights in digital environments.

The study contributes to contemporary academic and policy debates by providing a philosophical framework for understanding justice in the digital age. It highlights the importance of developing ethically grounded policies and human-centered institutional reforms that balance technological innovation with the protection of human dignity, privacy, and accountability.

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Digital citizenship education in Albania: a theoretical analysis of policy, practice, and democratic values

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Abstract: The rapid spread of digital technologies has transformed how individuals access information, communicate, and participate in social and civic life. Equipping learners with the competencies required for responsible digital citizenship has therefore become a central objective for contemporary education systems. This study analyses the conceptual foundations of digital citizenship and assesses the extent to which these principles are embedded in Albania’s national education policies and practices. The study uses a qualitative approach, analyzing key national and international policy documents related to digital citizenship, digital competence, and democratic engagement. Through thematic analysis, the study highlights core aspects of digital citizenship, including digital skills, responsible online behavior, civic participation, media and information literacy, and online safety. The findings suggest that Albania has made progress in promoting digital transformation and developing technical digital skills through its national education policies. However, broader dimensions of digital citizenship such as ethical awareness, critical media literacy, and democratic participation, still receive limited attention. The article emphasizes the importance of fully integrating digital citizenship education into Albania’s schools to foster responsible, informed, and critically engaged participation in today’s digital society.

Keywords: *Digital citizenship; Digital competence; Media and information literacy; Digital education policy; Democratic participation; Albania.*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has altered the ways people access information, communicate, and participate in social, political, and economic spheres. While digital environments create unique opportunities for learning, collaboration, and civic engagement, they also introduce significant challenges, including misinformation, online safety risks, digital inequalities, and the ethical use of technology. Consequently, education systems worldwide are increasingly tasked with developing not only technical digital skills but also the critical, ethical, and civic competencies essential for responsible navigation of digital spaces.

Within this context, digital citizenship has emerged as an important concept in contemporary education. Digital citizenship includes the responsible, ethical, and participatory use of digital technologies, balancing individual rights with collective social responsibilities (Ribble, 2017; Isin & Ruppert, 2015; UNESCO, 2018). It extends far beyond technical proficiency to include critical thinking, media literacy, civic engagement, respect for diversity, and awareness of digital rights and responsibilities. As digital technologies increasingly mediate democratic participation and social interaction, the cultivation of these competencies has become an crucial educational priority. International organizations and policy frameworks have consistently emphasized the integration of digital citizenship education into formal learning environments. Global initiatives such as global citizenship education highlight the importance of critical thinking, ethical awareness, and responsible participation in diverse, interrelated societies (UNESCO, 2015). Similarly, European frameworks stress digital competence, responsible technology use, and safe online participation as essential skills for citizens in the digital age (Vuorikari et al., 2022; European Commission, 2025).

In Albania, digital transformation and the development of digital skills have gained importance in national education policy. Strategies such as the Digital Agenda 2022–2026 and the National Strategy for Education 2021–2026 seek to enhance digital competencies, expand digital infrastructure, and integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) into teaching and learning (Council of Europe, 2025; Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, 2021). At the same time, the rising use of digital platforms by young people has increased concerns regarding online safety, cyberbullying, and exposure to harmful content, reinforcing the need for digital literacy and citizenship education (Dine & Hazizaj, 2024).

Despite these developments, the integration of comprehensive digital citizenship education within Albanian schools remains at an early stage. Many initiatives continue to prioritize technical digital skills, while broader

dimensions (ethical awareness, critical media literacy, and democratic participation) receive comparatively limited attention (UNESCO, 2022; United Nations, 2022).

Against this background, the present study examines the conceptual foundations of digital citizenship and analyses how these principles are reflected in Albania’s national education policies and digital development strategies. It further identifies key challenges and opportunities for more effective integration of digital citizenship education into the Albanian school system. The study is guided by three research questions:

1. How is digital citizenship conceptualized in contemporary international educational frameworks and academic literature?
2. How are the principles of digital citizenship reflected in Albania’s national education policies and digital development strategies?
3. What challenges and opportunities exist for integrating comprehensive digital citizenship education into the Albanian education system?

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative document analysis to explore how digital citizenship education is defined in international frameworks and how these principles are reflected in Albania’s educational context. The analysis draws on a range of key international and national policy sources related to digital citizenship, digital competence, and democratic participation. These include frameworks from UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the DigComp digital competence framework, as well as national policy documents addressing digital transformation and online safety in Albania.

A thematic analysis was then conducted to identify the main dimensions of digital citizenship such as digital skills, responsible online behavior, civic engagement, media and information literacy, and online safety, and to examine how these dimensions are incorporated into Albania’s educational policies and strategies.

3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Developing critical thinking and media literacy is fundamental to enabling learners to evaluate information sources, identify misinformation, and participate responsibly in digital and media environments (UNESCO, 2015). Contemporary educational frameworks increasingly position global citizenship education as a means of preparing learners for life in complex, interconnected societies. According to UNESCO (2015), global citizenship education seeks to foster the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes required

for responsible and active participation in democratic and multicultural contexts. This approach emphasizes critical thinking, media literacy, ethical responsibility, and respect for diversity, thereby equipping learners to assess information critically and engage constructively in social and civic life. These competencies are particularly vital in digital environments, where citizens must navigate complex information networks and contribute responsibly to online communities.

The concept of digital citizenship has attracted increasing attention in both educational policy and research. The Council of Europe’s digital citizenship framework underlines the importance of responsible, ethical, and participatory engagement in digital spaces. Richardson and Milovidov (2019) define several interconnected dimensions of digital citizenship education, including online well-being, respect for digital rights, responsible online behavior, and active participation in digital communities. These dimensions illustrate that digital citizenship extends well beyond technical proficiency to include the social, ethical, and civic capacities required for meaningful participation in digital society.

This perspective is further reinforced by the Council of Europe’s Competences for Democratic Culture framework (Council of Europe, 2016), which highlights the importance of critical thinking, respect for diversity, responsibility, and active participation in sustaining democratic societies. Citizenship education, therefore, transcends the transmission of civic knowledge; it cultivates the values, attitudes, and skills that underpin democratic participation. In the digital era, these democratic competencies are linked to digital citizenship, demanding responsible and ethical conduct online.

Digital competence constitutes a central component of digital citizenship. Vuorikari et al. (2022) define digital competence as a multifaceted set of abilities including information literacy, communication, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving. The European DigComp 2.2 framework organizes digital competence into five key areas: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety, and problem-solving, providing a structured lens for evaluating national digital education policies and identifying skill-development gaps.

European policy frameworks also underscore the ethical and rights-based dimensions of digital transformation. The European Digital Rights and Principles affirm that digital initiatives must respect human rights, promote inclusion, and empower citizens, particularly young people, to participate safely and informatively in digital spaces (European Commission, 2025).

Together, these perspectives frame digital citizenship as the responsible, ethical, and participatory use of digital technologies, integrating technical

competence with ethical awareness, civic engagement, media literacy, and critical participation in digital environments (Ribble, 2017; Isin & Ruppert, 2015; UNESCO, 2018). A foundational model is provided by Ribble (2015, 2017), who identifies nine interrelated elements: digital access, digital commerce, digital communication, digital literacy, digital etiquette, digital law, digital rights and responsibilities, digital health and wellness, and digital security. These elements collectively offer a practical framework for assessing the scope and quality of digital citizenship education.

The civic dimension of digital citizenship can be further irradiated through Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) models of citizenship education. Their framework distinguishes three approaches: personally responsible citizenship (emphasizing ethical behavior and rule-following), participatory citizenship (focusing on active collaboration and community involvement), and justice-oriented citizenship (encouraging critical reflection on inequalities and advocacy for systemic change). Together, these theoretical lenses provide a strong foundation for understanding digital citizenship as an integration of ethical responsibility, civic participation, and critical engagement in digital contexts.

4. Albanian Context

The theoretical perspectives outlined above offer a valuable lens for examining how digital citizenship and digital competence are addressed in Albania’s national education policies and practices. Recent policy initiatives and educational reforms in Albania increasingly align with global and European approaches to digital education.

Digital citizenship education has gained importance within Albania’s national policy landscape. Initiatives such as the Digital Agenda Strategy 2022–2026 and the National Strategy for Education 2021–2026 prioritize the development of digital skills, teacher training, and awareness of online risks, including cyberbullying (Council of Europe, 2025; Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, 2021). These strategies aim to enhance digital education, improve access to digital public services, and strengthen both students’ and teachers’ digital competencies.

A further significant development is the adoption of the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2030 (Council of Ministers of the Republic of Albania, 2024), which explicitly addresses citizen protection and the promotion of a cyber-culture. Policy Goal 2 of this strategy focuses on “Online Protection of Citizens and Promotion of Cyber Culture,” outlining six specific objectives that directly intersect with digital citizenship education. Supplementing this is the National Youth Strategy 2022–2029 (Minister of

State for Youth and Children, 2022), which places youth at the center of sustainable development and explicitly links youth policy to digital transformation, civic participation, and democratic values.

Empirical evidence from the Albania Digital Agenda Observatory Country Report and Roadmap 2020 (Mjaft!, 2020) further exposes the state of digital transformation. Additional insight is provided by the analysis of the Albanian education system and measures to prevent brain drain (Partners Albania, 2023). Enrolment in all levels of education has declined sharply since 2017, with pre-university participation dropping 13.2% by 2021 and tertiary enrolment reaching only 21.7% of 18–29-year-olds. Vocational education remains marginal (17–18% uptake), while outbound mobility ratios stand at 9%, with 94% of students who study abroad choosing to remain there. Quality differences such as outdated curricula, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and weak career guidance, intensify these trends, fostering low trust in public education and motivating families to opt for private or foreign institutions. Gender gaps persist, with female graduates concentrated in traditionally “feminine” fields, while male graduates dominate engineering and ICT. Recent reforms, including the Education Strategy 2021–2026, the Vocational Education and Training Law, the National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2023–2030, and the draft National Strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation 2023–2030, signal commitment to digital upskilling, career orientation, and research infrastructure. However, implementation gaps in digital literacy, ethical online behavior, and inclusive participation continue to undermine the civic and democratic dimensions of digital citizenship.

The growing frequency of internet use among children and adolescents has, however, heightened concerns about online safety. A national report by CRCA Albania (Dine & Hazizaj, 2024) documents multiple online risks faced by children, including cyberbullying, exposure to inappropriate content, privacy violations, and hate speech. In 2024, 407 serious online incidents involving children were reported, with adolescents aged 15–18—particularly girls—most affected. These findings highlight the urgent need for stronger institutional safeguards, legal frameworks, and digital literacy programs, priorities now explicitly advanced by the Cyber Security Strategy, the Youth Strategy, the Digital Agenda Observatory, and education-sector measures.

In response, Albania has begun integrating Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into formal education. Initial efforts included teacher training and pilot curricula in primary schools designed to build critical skills for navigating complex information environments (UNESCO, 2022). More recently, with UNESCO support, MIL concepts have been incorporated into the national curriculum framework, and extensive training programs have been delivered to teachers across regions. Approximately 48 training sessions have reached

some 720 teacher trainers, signaling a growing national commitment to media and information literacy (UNESCO, 2025).

Despite these advances, current policies and practices continue to emphasize technical digital skills, with comparatively limited attention devoted to broader dimensions of digital citizenship such as critical media literacy, ethical awareness, and democratic participation (UNESCO, 2022; United Nations, 2022; Mjafti, 2020; Partners Albania, 2023). Several structural challenges persist. The digital divide, particularly between urban and rural areas, continues to impede equitable access to digital infrastructure and learning opportunities (International Telecommunication Union & National Agency for Information Society, 2024). Teacher professional development often lacks sufficient focus on ethical, participatory, and critically oriented digital practices (UNESCO, 2022). Furthermore, although Albanian youth are highly active online, this engagement does not consistently translate into informed or ethically responsible participation.

Albania’s broader digital development strategy, as outlined by the International Telecommunication Union (2022, 2024), emphasizes infrastructure expansion, digital skills development, public-service digitalization, and innovation ecosystems. The National Strategy for Education 2021–2026 serves as the principal instrument for aligning the education system with European standards, prioritizing digital and civic competencies, ICT integration, teacher digital pedagogy, and digital literacy (Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, 2021).

Taken together, these policy developments, including the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2030, the National Youth Strategy 2022–2029, the Digital Agenda Observatory 2020, education-sector measures to prevent brain drain, and empirical insights indicate that Albania is progressively constructing a digital ecosystem that integrates infrastructure, skills, governance, and citizen protection. This evolving framework offers a promising foundation for advancing comprehensive digital citizenship education.

5. Conclusion

The rapid evolution of digital technologies has reshaped information access, communication, and civic engagement, making digital citizenship an essential component of contemporary education. This study has examined the conceptual foundations of digital citizenship within international frameworks and assessed their reflection in Albania’s educational and policy context. International frameworks from UNESCO and the Council of Europe conceptualize digital citizenship as a multidimensional construct that

integrates digital competence with ethical responsibility, media literacy, civic engagement, and democratic values. The DigComp framework, for instance, underscores a broad spectrum of competencies—including information literacy, communication, safety, and problem-solving—that enable responsible participation in digital societies (Vuorikari et al., 2022).

In Albania, recent policy initiatives demonstrate a clear commitment to digital transformation and the development of digital skills within the education system. National strategies focus on ICT integration, infrastructure expansion, and competency-building for both students and teachers. Concurrently, reports on online safety reveal increasing risks for children and adolescents, reinforcing the imperative for strengthened digital literacy and citizenship education (Dine & Hazizaj, 2024). The adoption of the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2030, the National Youth Strategy 2022–2029, the findings of the Digital Agenda Observatory 2020, and education-sector reforms to prevent brain drain further strengthen this trajectory. Taken together they explicitly targeting citizen protection, cyber-culture promotion, youth participation, digital skills, and democratic engagement, elements that directly support the ethical and civic pillars of digital citizenship education.

Nevertheless, the analysis reveals that Albanian educational efforts remain predominantly oriented toward technical digital skills. Broader dimensions of digital citizenship—ethical awareness, critical media literacy, and democratic participation—are not yet systematically embedded in policy and practice. Closing these gaps will require a more holistic approach that combines technical proficiency with critical thinking, civic engagement, and responsible online behavior. Strengthening digital citizenship education in Albania will require sustained policy development, enhanced teacher training, improved digital infrastructure, and the regular integration of media and information literacy across curricula. By aligning national efforts with international frameworks, Albania can cultivate digitally competent, responsible, and critically engaged citizens equipped to participate meaningfully in contemporary digital societies.

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Rethinking leadership in a digital society: collective approaches to educational and social change

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Abstract: With the rapid transformation of our world through digital media, traditional forms of leadership based on the individual in isolation are being challenged by the growing complexity of social transformations. Drawing on existing leadership theory, current practice in social work, and contemporary research, this paper examines how collective leadership, defined as leaders working together toward shared goals, can support social intervention efforts as societies adapt to a new digital environment.

The research question explores how collective leadership practices translate into the digital world and how they enable the development of innovative strategies to address challenges in education and social services. A qualitative and exploratory methodology was adopted, focusing on the integration of theoretical perspectives with contemporary examples in order to analyse in depth the benefits and barriers associated with collective leadership as a strategy for improving social interventions in a digitally transforming society. The findings indicate that collective leadership enhances innovation, resourcefulness, and the empowerment of individuals by incorporating diverse perspectives and strengthening community agency both essential elements for addressing complex issues in education and social services. However, the evolution of leadership and social intervention strategies aimed at implementing collective leadership is also challenged by digital transformation, particularly due to power imbalances and the need for new competencies related to digital technologies. The implications discussed in this paper highlight the relevance of these findings to broader discussions on education and innovation in a digital society.

Keywords: *Collective leadership; Digital society; Social intervention; Community empowerment; Education; Agency; Social change*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation is profoundly reshaping the way organizations, communities, and leadership operate. The spread of advanced technologies, from social media to artificial intelligence, has accelerated the flow of information and strengthened the interconnection among different actors, significantly transforming traditional leadership dynamics (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampi, 2019).

In this context, many of the most pressing challenges of contemporary society, such as climate change and social and educational inequalities, are complex and systemic problems. They involve multiple sectors and a wide range of stakeholders, making it difficult to address these issues adequately through traditional leadership approaches. Such approaches often prove insufficient, highlighting the need to develop more collective forms of leadership that emphasize inclusiveness in the decision-making process (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015).

Furthermore, social intervention strategies in fields such as education and social work increasingly rely on collaborative, interdisciplinary efforts and the innovative use of digital tools. This paper aims to analyse collective leadership and social intervention in the era of digital transformation, examining how collaborative leadership models can enhance social change initiatives in modern society through digitally mediated processes.

1.1 Research Problem and Objectives

This study examines the impact of digital transformation on the practice and effectiveness of collective leadership in promoting social interventions, with particular emphasis on the fields of education and social work. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How does digital transformation reshape the way collective leadership is exercised, and how effective is this leadership model in addressing contemporary social challenges?

This issue is both timely and significant, as educational institutions and social service agencies are increasingly confronted with pressure to innovate and adapt to the demands of the digital era (McCarthy, Maor, McConney, & Cavanaugh, 2023).

The objectives of the study are threefold. First, it seeks to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the concept of collective leadership and its role in social interventions. Second, it critically analyses how processes of digital transformation can facilitate or constrain the functioning of collective leadership. Third, it identifies implications for leadership development and policy, with the aim of shaping more sustainable approaches to education and social innovation in a digital society.

Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to the academic debate while also providing practical insights for leaders, educators, and change agents operating within the complex social context of digital transformation.

1.2 Relevance to the Conference Theme

This paper closely relates to the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society.” Today, educational systems are not only facing technological changes in teaching and learning processes, but also deeper transformations in the way leadership is practiced and institutions are managed. In this context, the concept of collective leadership helps explain how leaders and other influential actors in the field of education can work together more effectively in increasingly digital environments.

Moreover, social innovation in a digital society often emerges from collective action, for example through online communities that engage in initiatives for social change. By linking leadership theory with concrete practices of the digital era, this paper offers a perspective on how innovation and social progress can be encouraged through collaborative leadership approaches. In this way, the study contributes to ongoing debates about shaping a future in which leadership is characterized by inclusiveness, active participation, and the capacity to adapt to social change in a constantly evolving social context (Buonocore, Annosi, de Gennaro, & Riemma, 2024).

2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach by exploring a wide range of existing literature and empirical studies in order to develop a coherent understanding of the topic. The main sources include academic research on collective leadership, social work, and community leadership, as well as studies on digital transformation, drawing on theoretical approaches related to leadership theories and agency.

The methodology is based on a critical review of the literature combined with conceptual analysis. Through theoretical examination, the paper investigates phenomena such as collective leadership in digital-era interventions through multiple perspectives, including educational leadership, organizational studies, and social innovation.

The interpretive analysis of the study is guided by a critical perspective on power and inclusion, aiming not only to describe but also to question existing leadership paradigms. Overall, the methodology provides a solid analytical foundation while remaining flexible and responsive to emerging ideas.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Collective Leadership: Theoretical Foundations and Relevance

3.1.1 Definition and Characteristics

Collective leadership is broadly defined as a leadership paradigm in which individuals share responsibility and collaborate in order to achieve common goals. This definition contrasts with traditional leadership models that focus on a single heroic leader. One description portrays collective leadership as “a management model that emphasizes collaboration, shared responsibilities, and active participation from all members of the organization, making use of everyone’s skills and ideas while fostering an inclusive and innovative work environment” (Faris, 2022).

Unlike hierarchical models, where decision-making is concentrated at the top, collective leadership distributes influence and encourages contributions from different stakeholders at various levels. Its core principles include creating a shared vision that aligns the efforts of the group, empowering individuals to take initiative, and promoting open communication and trust across the team or community. Inclusion and diversity are considered fundamental principles, based on the idea that integrating different perspectives leads to more sustainable and innovative solutions while also strengthening the sense of shared ownership over outcomes.

Collective leadership is closely related to concepts such as shared leadership, distributed leadership, and team leadership, which are widely discussed in the literature, although each presents its own specific nuances and *emphases*. In educational contexts, for example, collective leadership has been described as “the practices through which teachers and administrators influence students, colleagues, policymakers, and others in order to improve student outcomes”, highlighting that leadership is embedded in social interactions throughout the school community rather than limited to formal positions (Eckert & Morgan, 2023).

3.1.2 Theoretical Rationale

The shift toward collective forms of leadership is supported by the argument that complex social problems require joint action rather than solutions centered on a single individual. Deep social change cannot be achieved through isolated authority, but rather through the coordination of different actors who share responsibilities, knowledge, and resources (Day & Antonakis, 2012). Collective leadership increases the capacity for innovation and problem-solving because it brings together multiple perspectives and encourages the collective intelligence of the group. This plurality of

perspectives creates space for more innovative ideas and more balanced decision-making.

At the same time, it enhances organizational flexibility, as authority and responsibility are distributed rather than concentrated in a single point, allowing organizations to respond more quickly and effectively to change. In essence, collective leadership is seen as a more suitable model for addressing systemic challenges, since it is based on collaboration, inclusion, and the sharing of power in pursuit of common goals.

3.1.3 Benefits and Challenges of Collective Leadership

Contemporary literature increasingly views leadership not as an individual attribute but as a social process and a collective practice that develops through interactions among different actors. Raelin (2020) argues that leadership should be understood as leadership-as-practice, meaning a distributed process that takes place within spaces of collaboration rather than as the function of a single authoritative figure (Raelin, 2020). From this perspective, the capacity for change and innovation emerges from group dynamics and from the coordination of diverse forms of expertise.

From a post-heroic perspective, Crevani, Lindgren, and Packendorff (2020) question the traditional model of the “heroic leader,” arguing that leadership should instead be understood as a relational and collective process. According to them, organizational effectiveness does not stem from individual charisma, but from the ways in which relationships, communication, and shared meanings are built and maintained within a network of actors. This approach supports the idea that addressing complex challenges, such as digital transformation or broader social change, requires continuous interaction and shared responsibility (Crevani, Lindgren, & Packendorff, 2007).

Empirical studies also link collective leadership to greater organizational flexibility and higher levels of member participation. When authority is distributed and decision-making becomes more horizontal, organizations tend to respond more quickly to change and create greater space for innovation. However, the transition toward this model is not always straightforward. Lumby (2019) emphasizes that bureaucratic structures and hierarchical cultures often create tensions that hinder the real implementation of distributed leadership. Even when collaboration is encouraged in discourse, institutional practices may still favour centralized control and formal authority (Lumby, 2019).

In this sense, collective leadership requires not only cultural willingness but also structural reconsideration. Clear roles, transparent decision-making processes, and the development of collaborative capacities are essential conditions. Without these elements, there is a risk that collective leadership

remains only a rhetorical concept while actual practices continue to be centralized.

3.2 Social Intervention and Collective Agency

Social intervention refers to intentional and structured actions aimed at transforming social systems and relationships by addressing complex problems through policies, programs, and professional practices. Contemporary approaches place particular emphasis on the role of agency, understood as the capacity of individuals and groups to act consciously within existing structures and to contribute to more sustainable and long-term processes of change (Rothman, 2008). Within this framework, leadership is conceptualized as a distributed and relational process, where collaboration among different actors increases the capacity for innovation and effective problem-solving.

Effective social interventions require the coordinated mobilization of communities, professionals, and institutions, positioning the community as a co-creator of solutions rather than merely a beneficiary. However, these approaches often face limitations in contexts where hierarchical structures and formal control remain dominant, highlighting the need for both organizational and cultural transformation (Ospina, Foldy, Fairhurst, & Jackson, 2020). In this context, collective agency plays a crucial role in processes of social change, as it relates to the ability of groups to act in a coordinated way toward shared goals and to influence the transformation of existing structures. At the same time, social interventions require careful attention to issues of power and inclusion, recognizing and valuing the resources, knowledge, and capacities within communities, particularly in marginalized contexts, in order to build more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable processes of social change (Hood, Campbell, & Baker, 2023). In this way, social intervention becomes not only a technical process but also a transformative and empowering one.

3.3 Digital Transformation and Leadership Dynamics

Digital transformation, characterized by the widespread use of technologies such as the internet, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms, is reshaping how leadership is understood and practiced within organizations and communities. In this context, traditional hierarchical structures are gradually being replaced by more flexible and networked forms of organization, where collaboration becomes essential. Leadership is shifting from a command-based model toward a more facilitative role, in which leaders create conditions that support innovation, continuous learning, and cooperation among different actors. At the same time, the concept of e-leadership highlights the influence of technology on leadership processes, requiring leaders to build trust,

engagement, and performance in virtual environments while also supporting the development of their teams’ digital skills (Raelin, 2016).

Digital transformation has also encouraged new forms of organization, such as decentralized networks and digital communities, where leadership appears in more distributed and collective forms, often based on contribution and interaction rather than formal position. However, these developments also bring important challenges, including information overload, difficulties in building trust, and ethical risks related to privacy and digital inequality. For this reason, leadership in the digital era requires not only technological competence but also inclusive, ethical, and collaborative approaches, making digital transformation not merely a technological process but also a social and cultural one (Vial, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the importance of e-leadership, as schools and organizations around the world were forced to shift toward remote operations. Educational leaders, for example, faced the pressure of implementing well-structured digital transformation in order to ensure the continuity of the learning process. This required a shift in mindset, recognizing technology not simply as an additional tool but as a fundamental element that enables development. According to a 2023 analysis by McCarthy and colleagues, leaders of educational systems must move beyond fragmented approaches to digital innovation, often described as “isolated technological initiatives”, and instead integrate technology into a comprehensive strategy for improving education. Key elements for success include a clear vision, the involvement of key stakeholders, continuous training, and the gradual management of change, all closely connected to the role of effective leadership (McCarthy et al., 2023).

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Digital Transformation as a Catalyst for Collective Leadership

The analysis shows that digital transformation is not only a technological process but also a catalyst for more collaborative forms of leadership. The complexity of digital initiatives requires the involvement of multiple actors, making individual leadership insufficient and encouraging collective models of decision-making. In this context, leadership shifts toward coordination, facilitation, and the development of collaborative networks, where innovation and problem-solving emerge from the interaction of multiple stakeholders (Cortellazzo et al., 2019).

In particular, within the education sector and social organizations, digital transformation has accelerated the emergence of collective leadership. Collaboration among professionals, users, and institutions increases the

capacity for adaptation and innovation, moving away from hierarchical models toward more flexible and network-based structures (McCarthy et al., 2023). However, technology alone does not guarantee collective leadership; without intentional practices, it may also reinforce inequalities and the centralization of power. For this reason, it is essential to develop organizational cultures that support transparency, knowledge sharing, and active participation.

4.2 Strengthening Social Interventions through Collective Leadership

The findings indicate that collective leadership significantly increases the effectiveness of social interventions, particularly in complex and interconnected contexts. Social problems require collaboration among different sectors and actors, where each contributes specific knowledge and resources. Interventions based on co-creation tend to increase legitimacy, participation, and the sustainability of outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

Within this framework, the community is no longer viewed as a passive beneficiary but as an active actor in the process of change. This perspective aligns with social work practices that emphasize empowerment, local ownership, and capacity building. Collective leadership also encourages continuous learning and adaptation, as decision-making becomes more open to feedback and diverse experiences.

However, one challenge remains the balance between collaboration and the need for effective coordination. Collective leadership does not imply the absence of direction; rather, it requires a dynamic distribution of roles and responsibilities based on expertise and context.

4.3 Implications for Education and Social Work in a Digital Society

The findings suggest that leadership development in the educational and social sectors should be reoriented toward collective and critical models that emphasize collaboration, critical reflection, and the conscious management of power relations. Within this framework, training programs should develop competencies related not only to coordination and collaboration among different actors, but also to the inclusive and ethical use of technology. From this perspective, leadership is understood as a relational and dynamic process that develops through social interactions rather than as an attribute concentrated in a single individual (Fletcher, 2004).

At the practical level, this implies the creation of structures and mechanisms that support participation and collaboration, such as professional learning communities, inter-institutional networks, and shared decision-making processes. In the field of social work, this translates into a more facilitative

role for professionals, who aim to strengthen community agency and gradually enable the transfer of leadership to the communities themselves.

Overall, the intersection of digital transformation and collective leadership creates new opportunities for innovation and social change. However, these processes require a conscious, critical, and inclusive approach in order to avoid risks related to social exclusion and the concentration of power.

5. Conclusions

This study highlights that digital transformation and collective leadership are interconnected processes that are reshaping the way social interventions are developed and institutions are organized in an increasingly interconnected society. The findings show that the complexity of contemporary challenges, particularly in education and social work, makes traditional leadership models focused on the individual increasingly insufficient, thus requiring more collaborative and distributed approaches. In this context, digital transformation emerges as a factor that not only supports but also reinforces the need for collective leadership by facilitating collaboration, knowledge sharing, and joint decision-making (Cortellazzo, Bruni, & Zampi, 2019).

One of the main conclusions is that collective leadership significantly improves the effectiveness of social interventions by strengthening inclusion, legitimacy, and long-term sustainability through the development of social capital and the mobilization of collective action (Gisevius, Niesters, & Braun, 2025).

The active involvement of communities and diverse actors not only enriches decision-making processes but also contributes to the development of more sustainable and collaborative forms of change. At the same time, this approach encourages flexibility and continuous learning, both essential elements in a rapidly evolving digital environment.

However, the study emphasizes that collective leadership does not develop automatically as a result of technological adoption. Instead, it requires deliberate cultural and organizational interventions in order to ensure transparency, power sharing, and meaningful participation. Without these conditions, digital transformation may deepen existing inequalities and reinforce new forms of centralization.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest the need to rethink leadership development in education and social work by integrating skills related to collaboration, complexity management, critical reflection, and the ethical use of technology. Institutions should create structures and processes that support distributed leadership and the empowerment of different actors, shifting the focus from control toward facilitation. In conclusion, collective

leadership in a digital society represents not only a more effective approach for addressing complex challenges but also a more democratic and inclusive model of social organization. However, the full realization of this potential depends on the ability to balance technological advancement with the social, ethical, and cultural dimensions of change.

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Personal identity between the past, the narrative and the digital era

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Abstract: The problem of personal identity constitutes one of the most fundamental issues in philosophy, addressing the question of what makes and individual remain the same over time. From J. Locke’s empiricist theory of the continuity of consciousness, to D. Hume’s skepticism and I. Kant’s transcendentalist turn, the debate has evolved toward more complex approaches in contemporary philosophy. Against this backdrop, developments in the digital age have reopened this classic problem, challenging traditional concepts of self.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the historical and conceptual development of personal identity, from modern philosophy to contemporary approaches, and to assess how these theories can interpret the transformation of identity in the digital context. The paper is based on critical and comparative philosophical analysis of classical and contemporary texts. Through the conceptual interpretation of the main authors (Locke, Hume, I. Kant, D. Parfit, B. Williams etc.), the main arguments and their limitations are examined. The method also includes theoretical reflection on the impact of technology, including artificial intelligence and virtual identities. The analysis shows that no single theory is sufficient to fully explain personal identity. Reductionist approaches emphasize psychological continuity, while bodily and narrative theories highlight other essential dimensions. In the digital age, identity appears fragmented, multiple, fluid, and mediated by technology, reinforcing the idea that it is a dynamic process rather than an unchanging entity.

This paper aims to: develop interdisciplinary approaches that combine philosophy and technology in the study of identity; reconsider traditional concepts of the self in the light of digital developments and AI; promote critical understanding of identity in education, to address the challenges of fragmentation and authenticity in virtual spaces and deepen research on the ethical implications of digital identities.

Keywords: *personal identity, theories on the self, digital era, narrative.*

1. Introduction

The issue of personal identity is one of the important aspects of modern and contemporary philosophy. Whenever we talk about personal identity, the question arises; what makes a person remain the same throughout time? Philosophers have been dealing with the issue of personal identity for a long time, trying to find something special; those essential characteristics that make a person maintain their identity throughout time and through all the changes that come with it. This is not only a metaphysical question, but also a moral and existential one, as it is directly related to the responsibility, consciousness and meaning of human life. From Locke's empiricism to David Hume's scepticism, Immanuel Kant's transcendentalism to Derek Parfit's reductionism and Bernard Williams's bodily approach, the concept of personal identity has undergone a profound theoretical evolution. In contemporary philosophy, this debate is enriched by narrative and cognitive approaches, while in the digital age it takes on a completely new dimension. There are five main stages in which the concept of personal identity evolves:

- a) The theory of memory elaborated by John Locke,
- b) The identity as a psychological experience from David Hume to Derek Parfit,
- c) The theory of the body represented by Bernard Williams,
- d) The narrative and cognitive approach and finally,
- e) The fragmentation of identity in the digital age.

2. Literature review

2.1 Identity as a continuity of consciousness in the thought of John Locke

One of the earliest and most convincing theories on personal identity is presented by John Locke, who in his work “*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*” (1975), formulates a theory that marks a decisive moment in the philosophy of identity. He argues that identity does not depend on physical characteristics, but on consciousness, stating that as far as a person's consciousness can go back to any past action or thought, that is how far that person's identity reaches. Locke thus develops an innovative theory that detaches identity from traditional notions of substance and connects it with consciousness and memory. At the beginning of his analysis, Locke (1975; 312) makes a fundamental distinction between different types of identity, arguing that we must distinguish between the identity of material objects, the identity of living organisms, and the identity of persons (Locke, Op. Cit. II – XXVII; 335).

As regards material objects, identity depends on the continuity of the same mass of matter. As regards objects, an object is the same as long as it is composed of the same material substance. For living organisms, such as plants and animals, identity does not lie in unchanging matter, but in the continuity of life and functional organism. By setting out these distinctions, Locke has prepared the ground for the main thesis on personal identity.

Thus, according to Locke, the "person" is not simply a body or a spiritual substance, but a conscious being that has the ability to reflect on him as the same in different times and spaces. He defines the person as a thinking, intelligent being, endowed with reason and reflection, and who can consider himself to be the same thing he thinks in different times and places (Locke II –XXVII; 336). This definition places consciousness at the centre of personal identity.

The core of Locke's theory lies in the idea that personal identity consists of the continuity of consciousness. An individual is the same person as long as his consciousness can extend to past experiences. This continuity is realized through memory, which makes it possible for past experiences to be recognized as "mine". In this sense, memory is not simply a psychological function, but the fundamental criterion of personal identity (Locke II – XXVII; 338).

One of the most influential consequences of this theory is the separation of personal identity from the identity of the soul or mental substance. Locke argues that even if there were an unchanging soul, this would not guarantee personal identity as long as consciousness was not continuous. Bodily changes do not violate personal identity as long as consciousness remains connected to the identity of the soul. This leads to a clear departure from the Cartesian tradition, associated with Descartes, which based identity on mental substance. To illustrate this idea, Locke gives us an example known as the Prince and the Cobbler. He says; if the consciousness of a prince were transferred to the body of a cobbler, the resulting person would be the prince, since personal identity follows consciousness and not the body. This example shows us that our intuitions about responsibility and identity are related to internal experience and not to physical composition (Locke II –XXVII; 339).

Another essential aspect of Locke's theory is the connection between personal identity and moral responsibility. He argues that an individual is responsible only for those actions that he remembers as his own. This has important implications for justice and ethics, because punishment is just only if the individual is aware of the action he has committed. Thus, personal identity becomes the foundation for the notion of responsibility.

Despite its solid foundation and many defensive arguments, Locke's theory is subject to criticism. One of the most famous criticisms is that of Thomas Reid

in "*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*" (2002), who materializes the opposition to Locke through the paradox of the "brave officer".

Reid (2002; 266-267) argues that if an old person remembers the actions of a young officer, and the young officer remembers his childhood, then according to Locke, the identity must be transitive. But if the old person no longer remembers his childhood, Locke's theory seems to lead to the absurd conclusion that he is not the same person. This creates a violation of the logical principle of continuity; if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then A must be $=C$. Thus, for Reid, this shows that Locke's theory is insufficient. Another aspect of Reid's theory (2002; 278) that conflicts with Locke's views is the connection between personal identity and moral responsibility.

He argues that the notion of responsibility presupposes a stable identity of the person over time. If an individual were not the same person who committed an action in the past, then it would make no sense to hold him responsible for that action. This makes personal identity fundamental to ethics and justice. Reid therefore defends the concept of a stable and indivisible entity. Another strong criticism comes from David Hume, who questions the existence of a stable self, arguing that consciousness is a stream of experiences without an unchanging content. David Hume radicalized Locke's empiricism, denying the existence of a stable consciousness. In "*A Treatise of Human Nature*" (2000), he points out that I can never catch myself at any moment without a perception, and I can never observe anything but perception.

According to Hume, (2000; 252), consciousness is a set of perceptions that are constantly changing, so there is no stable essence that unites them, therefore personal identity is a construct of the imagination.

Despite criticism, Locke's theory laid the foundations for modern psychological approaches to identity, influencing contemporary philosophers who further advance the idea of psychological continuity as the basis of identity.

The problem of personal identity is treated in a profoundly sceptical and revolutionary way in Hume's philosophy. In contrast to the philosophical tradition that sought a stable substance (soul or mind) as the basis of identity, Hume rejects this idea and proposes a theory according to which the self is nothing more than a set of changing experiences.

Hume (2000. I – IV; 12) starts from a fundamental principle of his empiricism that every idea must derive from a corresponding impression. Applying this principle to the question of the self, he asks from which impression the idea of a stable "self" derives. His answer is radical; *there is no such impression*. When we introspect (analyse ourselves), we do not find an unchanging substance, but only a continuous stream of perceptions – feelings, thoughts, desires – that are constantly changing. In this way, Hume arrives at the well-

known conclusion that the “self” is just a collection of perceptions. He writes that the mind is “a theatre” where perceptions are constantly appearing and disappearing (Hume, 2000 I – IV; 13).

However, unlike a real theatre, there is no stable stage or foundation that supports these experiences. This metaphor is intended to show that the unity of the self is an illusion, not a metaphysical reality. The question that arises from this theory is if the self is just a stream of perceptions, then why do we believe in a stable personal identity? Hume explains this through the psychological mechanisms of the imagination. According to him our mind has a natural tendency to connect different perceptions through relationships of similarity, continuity, and causality. These connections create a sense of unity and continuity, even though in reality the perceptions are separate and temporary.

Memory plays an important role in this process, but not in the same way as Locke did. While Locke considered memory to be the foundation of personal identity, Hume argues that it is only a factor that helps to create the illusion of identity. Memory allows us, says Hume (200; 13), to recall past experiences and to connect them with the present, but this connection does not prove the existence of a permanent self; it only strengthens our belief in it. Another important aspect of Hume's theory is the criticism of the notion of substance. Earlier philosophers had assumed that experiences must rest on an unchanging base/foundation, such as the soul or mind. Hume (2000 I – IV; 14) counters this by arguing that we have no direct experience of such a foundation. The idea of a “self” as a substance is therefore a construct of the imagination, not a verifiable fact. This approach has profound philosophical implications.

First, it challenges the traditional notion of personal identity as something stable and unchanging. Instead, identity becomes a dynamic process based on connections between perceptions.

Second, it raises serious questions about moral responsibility. If there is no stable “self,” in what sense can anyone be held responsible for his past actions? Hume does not deny responsibility entirely, but suggests that it is based on psychological continuity and causal connections between experiences, not on an absolute identity.

As noted above, Hume's theory has been met with much criticism. Some philosophers have argued that it fails to fully explain the unity of conscious experience. Others have pointed out that even in order to experience a stream of perceptions; there must be some kind of subject experiencing them. This criticism was further developed by Immanuel Kant, who argued that unity of consciousness is a necessary condition for experience. The essence of Hume's theory of personal identity lies in the denial of a stable "self" and in the interpretation of the self as a set of perceptions connected by imagination.

In contrast to Hume, who argues that the self is merely a collection of perceptions without a stable unity, Kant in the *"Critique of Pure Reason"* (2010), argues that every experience requires a unity of consciousness. This unity is expressed in the concept of the "transcendental unity of perception," which represents the mind's ability to unite diverse experiences under a single consciousness. According to him (2010; 246–247), every representation must be accompanied by the idea "I think," otherwise it cannot be part of our experience.

In contemporary philosophy, one of the most important developments in the problem of personal identity is discussed by Derek Parfit, particularly in his work *"Reason and Persons"*, published in 1984. Building on the findings of David Hume, Parfit develops a theory that challenges the importance of personal identity as a fundamental fact and replaces it with the notion of psychological continuity. Parfit begins by criticizing traditional theories that require a stable basis for personal identity - whether in the form of a body, a brain, or a spiritual substance. He argues that these approaches are insufficient to explain our intuitions about complex mental cases, such as split brains or teleportation. Instead, Parfit (1984; 215), in *"Reason and Persons"*, Part III, proposes that what matters is not identity per se, but the psychological relationship that links different phases of a life.

The core of Parfit's theory (1984; 215) involves psychological continuity and connection. This relationship consists of elements such as memory, intentions, beliefs, and character, which are causally related to one another. Unlike Locke, who places memory as the main criterion of identity, Parfit extends this idea to include a wider network of psychological connections. One of Parfit's most radical claims is that personal identity is not what matters, because in many cases, we can have psychological continuity without strict numerical identity. For example, in his famous thought experiments on brain splitting, an individual can "continue" into two different people, each with strong connections to the original. In this case, identity cannot be preserved in the traditional way (because one person cannot be numerically identical to two others), but there is something that does matter - psychological continuity.

These experiments lead Parfit to a conclusion that resonates strongly with Hume's theory. Just as Hume denied the existence of a stable self and reduced the self to a stream of perceptions, Parfit argues that personal identity is not a deep metaphysical fact, but a construct that can be broken down into more basic elements. He describes this as a "reductionism" of personal identity: that is, facts about persons are reduced to facts about psychological experiences and connections. An important aspect of Parfit's theory concerns its implications for ethics. If personal identity is not essential, then the way we understand self-interest and moral responsibility must be rethought. Parfit

(1984; 217) suggests that we should be less concerned with "ourselves" as a distinct entity and more concerned with the continuity of experiences and well-being in general. This leads to a more impersonal and utilitarian approach to ethics. Parfit's theory also challenges our general intuitions about death and survival. If what matters is psychological continuity, then survival does not require full identity, but only the preservation of these connections. This idea fundamentally changes the way we conceive of the fear of death and the importance of individual life.

However, Parfit's theory can be criticized because he underestimates the importance of identity as a fundamental category for our thought and language. Moreover, even if psychological continuity is important, it cannot completely replace the notion of personal identity. Nevertheless, the issue of identity is very complex and Parfit certainly has a great influence on it.

2.2 Contemporary approaches.

The issue of personal identity in contemporary philosophy receives a critical and analytical treatment in the work of Bernard Williams, who challenges some of the most widespread intuitions about the nature of the self. In his essays entitled “*Personal identity and individuation*” of 2009 and “*The self and the future*” of 1970, Williams analyses psychological theories of identity and highlights the crucial role of the body and direct experience in the understanding of our self.

He begins his analysis in a context where dominant theories, inspired by J. Locke, link personal identity to psychological continuity, especially to memory. According to these theories, a person remains the same as long as there is a continuous connection between his mental states.

However, Williams argues that this approach does not fully correspond to our intuitions, especially when faced with extreme hypothetical situations. One of Williams’s most important contributions is the use of thought experiments to test theories of personal identity. In his essay “*The Self and the Future*” he presents a scenario in which a person's memories and character are transferred to another body. According to psychological theories, identity would not follow these mental contents. But he modified the scenario by adding the element of future pain; that is, when a person is informed that he will be tortured and before that, his memories will be transferred to another body. Under these conditions, a question arises: should he fear torture?

Williams argued that our intuition would lead us to understand that the individual would have reason to fear his current body, regardless of the transfer of memories. This suggests that personal identity cannot be reduced simply to psychological continuity. Instead, the connection to the body and the direct experience of pain play a crucial role. In this way Williams criticizes

what he sees as an overestimation of psychological factors in identity theories. He does not deny the importance of memory and character, but argues that they are not sufficient to determine personal identity. The body is not simply a receptacle for the mind, but an essential element of our very experience as individuals.

Another important aspect of Williams's thought is his critique of reductionism, particularly in the form it takes in Parfit. While Parfit argues that personal identity can be reduced to psychological relationships and that "identity is not what matters", Williams (1970; 162) defends the idea that identity has a special importance for the way we experience our lives. He emphasizes that concern for our future cannot be understood without a strong notion of ourselves as a continuous individual. In this context, Williams notes that reductionist theories risk becoming detached from the reality of human experience.

Although these theories may be coherent, they fail to fully capture the ways in which we live out our identity in practice. He therefore emphasizes that philosophy should take these intuitions and experiences seriously, rather than dismissing them in favour of theoretical abstractions. Finally, a central element in Williams's theory is the connection between personal identity and the perspective of the self. He argues that identity is not simply a matter of objective relations between mental states, but is closely related to the way we experience ourselves internally. This perspective makes it difficult to reduce identity to a purely scientific or psychological term.

Although Williams does not offer a complete alternative theory in the traditional sense, he aims to show the limits of existing theories and to defend the complexity of the concept of personal identity. His approach is more critical and methodological, emphasizing the need for a more careful analysis of our intuitions.

2.3 Narrative and the Self as a Construct

Paul Ricoeur and Daniel Dennett give new forms and dimensions to the issue of personal identity in the contemporary period, sharing a common concern; how can the self be understood without being reduced to an unchanging substance? In this regard, both philosophers develop approaches that conceive of identity as a dynamic process, closely linked to interpretation, narratives and functional structures of the mind. In his important work "*Oneself as another*"; published in 1990, Ricoeur proposes an important distinction between two forms of identity; *idem* (identity as sameness) and *ipse* (identity as self).

Idem identity refers to the continuity of stable traits such as character or habits, while identity as *ipse* is related to the subject's ability to keep promises, to act

and to take responsibility over time. This distinction allows Ricoeur (1990; 147) to avoid reductionism; identity is neither a fixed substance nor a distributed stream of experiences, but a unit that is constructed over time.

The central concept in Ricoeur's theory is that of "narrative identity". According to him, individuals understand themselves by constructing stories about their lives, where experiences, actions and intentions are organized into a coherent narrative. This narrative is not simply a passive description, but an active process of interpretation, where the individual gives meaning to himself and the world. In this way, personal identity becomes a hermeneutic project, open to revision and change. Ricoeur (1990; 149) also undertakes a critical dialogue with the empiricist tradition, especially with D. Hume. While Hume reduced the self to a collection of perceptions, Ricoeur argues that this approach fails to explain the unity of human life. For Ricoeur, narrative is what creates this unity, connecting scattered experiences into a comprehensible story. In this sense, identity is not a simple fact, but an interpretive construction.

On the other hand, Daniel Dennett, in works such as "Consciousness Explained" (1991) and the essay "*The Self a Centre of Narrative Gravity*" (1992), develops a theory that, although similar in some respects to Ricoeur's, is based on a more naturalistic and scientific framework. Dennett argues that the self is not a real entity in the traditional sense, but a "narrative centre of gravity" - an abstract construct that arises from the way our information and experiences are organized.

According to Dennett (1991; 418) the mind functions as a system that produces continuous narratives to interpret the world and the self. These narratives create the illusion of a stable "self", even though in reality no such centre as a substance exists. In this respect, Dennett's theory is close to Hume's scepticism, but he develops this idea in a contemporary context, linking it to cognitive science and artificial intelligence.

However, unlike Ricoeur, Dennett (1992; 104-105) is more radical in denying an essence of the self. For him, personal identity is a useful construct, but not an ontological reality. He compares the self to a central point in a force field - a notion that helps explain, but which has no independent physical existence. This approach reinforces a form of reductionism, where identity is expressed entirely in terms of physical and functional processes. Despite their differences, both philosophers share the idea that personal identity is closely linked to narrative. For Ricoeur, this narrative has an ethical and hermeneutical dimension; it is related to responsibility, promises and the meaning of life. While for Dennett, narrative is more of a functional mechanism that serves to organize experience.

3. Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the historical and conceptual development of personal identity, from modern philosophy to contemporary approaches, and to evaluate how these approaches can interpret the transformations of identity in the digital context. The paper has a qualitative character. It is mainly based on the comparative descriptive method, with a focus on the analysis of the authors' views, to highlight their contribution, as well as to enable conclusions to be drawn through comparisons. This will allow us to understand how the concept of personal identity has evolved from the early modern period with John Locke and David Hume, to Thomas Reid and Derek Parfit, to the contemporary period with Williams Ricoeur and Daniel Dennett.

4. Discussion and findings

The development of digital technology has fundamentally transformed the way individuals conceive and construct their identity. In a world mediated by social networks, artificial intelligence and virtual communication, the classic problems of the philosophy of personal identity take on a new dimension.

The theories of Locke, Hume and Parfit provide an important basis for understanding these transformations, but they also require revision in the light of digital realities. In Locke we saw that personal identity is based on the continuity of consciousness and memory. In the digital age, this idea faces a significant challenge; Memory is not only a function of the mind, but also an external phenomenon, preserved in digital forms such as online archives and social networks.

This creates a form of “distributed memory”, where personal identity extends beyond the boundaries of the body and mind. In this sense, it can be argued that an individual’s digital profile becomes part of their personal continuum.

From another perspective, Hume’s theory provides a useful framework for understanding the fragmentation of identity in digital spaces. Hume (2000; 252-253) argues that the self is not a stable substance, but a collection of constantly changing perceptions.

In social networks, identity is often composed of different fragments – posts, images, interactions, that do not form a stable unit, but a series of distributed experiences. Platforms such as Instagram and Facebook reinforce this fragmentation, allowing individuals to present different versions of themselves in different contexts. Derek Parfit (1984; 204-209) further develops this line of thought by arguing that personal identity is not what matters. For him, what matters is psychological continuity.

In the digital age, this idea becomes particularly relevant, as psychological connections are often mediated by technology. Algorithms influence our memory (e.g. /memories or “memories” in social networks) creating a kind of mediated continuity. This suggests that personal identity is increasingly a distributed process between the individual and technological systems.

Another important dimension is narrative. Paul Ricoeur (190; 140-148) argues that personal identity is constructed through the narratives that individuals create about their lives. In the digital age, this process becomes more visible and ongoing; individuals construct public narratives through online postings and interactions. However, these narratives are often curated and selected, raising questions about the authenticity of identity.

Similarly, Daniel Dennett (1992; 103-115) describes the self as a “narrative center of gravity” a construct that arises from the narratives that organize our experience. In the digital context, this idea takes on a concrete dimension; our identity can be seen as a profile constructed from interwoven data and narratives. However, this identity is susceptible to manipulation by algorithms and platform structures.

One of the greatest challenges to identity in the digital age is the multiplication of the self. Individuals often have different identities in different contexts; professional, social, anonymous, which do not completely coincide with each other. This challenges the traditional idea of a unified self and brings identity closer to a more fluid concept. In this sense, Hume's theory and Parfit's reductionism seem to describe contemporary reality better than classical substantial theories.

However, these developments also bring ethical and existential consequences. If identity becomes distributed and mediated by technology, then concerns arise about autonomy and control; who owns our digital identity? Moreover, the fragmentation of identity can affect the sense of unity and stability of the self, creating tensions between internal experience and public appearance.

Thus, we can conclude that: personal identity in the digital age is a complex phenomenon that requires an integrated philosophical approach. Combining Locke's ideas on memory, Hume's on fragmentation, Parfit's on psychological continuity and Rice and Dennett's on narrative, we can understand that the self in the digital world is a dynamic process, distributed and constructed through the interaction between the individual and technology.

5. Findings and recommendations

Based on the comparative and evolutionary analysis of theories on the concept of personal identity, it results that:

- No single theory is sufficient to fully explain personal identity.

- Reductionist approaches emphasize psychological continuity
- Theories of substance and narrative highlight other essential dimensions.
- In the digital age, identity appears fragmented, multiple and mediated by technology, reinforcing the idea that it is a dynamic process and not an unchanging entity.
- The need to develop interdisciplinary approaches that combine philosophy, technology and social sciences in the study of identity.
- Reconsidering traditional concepts of self in light of digital developments and artificial intelligence.
- Promoting a critical understanding of identity in education, to address the challenges of fragmentation and authenticity in virtual spaces.
- Deepening research on the ethical implications of digital identities and the stimulation of personality.

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Emigrant family life and intergenerational changes: Albanian emigrants in Turkey

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Abstract: The family of emigrants, as the most important social institution, is the primary transmitter of a society's social capital to younger generations. Families play a crucial role in understanding the process of social capital. The family can direct social capital, such as its integration with neighbours and other social groups or its isolation from these groups. In the research questionnaire, as a measure of social capital, there is a question about whether the family life of Albanian emigrants resembles that of locals in Turkish society. Contrary to discussions in the theory of the sociology of emigration that the second generations have a lot of differences from their parents during the emigration practices, the data of this study show that the second generation of Albanian emigrants in Turkish society shows few differences with their parents in the way of life, thinking, outlook on life, expectations for the future as well as the importance they give to the customs and traditions of our culture. The purpose of this study is to analyse the group of emigrants who left Albania after 1990 until today in Turkish society, in terms of social integration and social capital and the change of several generations of emigrants in this society. The methodology of this study was conducted using a quantitative research approach, with data collected via questionnaires administered in the field. The champions of this study are 500 Albanian emigrants who have emigrated to Turkey.

Keywords: *Emigrant; family life; intergenerational change; Albanian emigrants; Turkey.*

1. Introduction

Migration is both an individual and a social phenomenon. As such, it affects all primary and secondary social institutions due to its duration and the long-term consequences it produces over time. In sociological theory, this temporal extension is defined as a process. The family, as the primary social institution,

is directly affected by this phenomenon and becomes fully involved in this process. This study analyses the concept of migrant families in the host country, specifically focusing on Albanian families within Turkish society. Intergenerational changes in migrant families are reflected in tensions that emerge during the transmission of cultural elements from the country of origin, as well as in the process of adaptation to the host society. During this process, various forms of social anomie emerge, often accompanied by elements of adjustment (integration). On the one hand, acculturation occurs (either forced or voluntary), involving the preservation or weakening of cultural elements from the country of origin. On the other hand, adaptation and the internalisation of cultural elements from the host society take place. Cultural transmission and integration into the host society are reflected in family life and in intergenerational differences among migrants. Generations change at different rates within any society; however, generational changes among migrants follow a distinct trajectory compared to everyday social life. During the process of socialisation in the host society, a dichotomy emerges between socialisation within the family and socialisation within the host society. Thus, throughout the migration and social integration process, first- and second-generation migrants experience transformations in social capital that may be transmitted or weakened across generations. Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasise that the host society, along with its primary and secondary institutions, through everyday social practices and integration policies, directly influences migrants' adaptation, the preservation or erosion of socio-cultural elements from the country of origin, the maintenance of social capital, and the continuity of ties with the country of origin. This study addresses the family within the context of the sociology of migration, the research methodology, the analysis and discussion of the data, and the conclusions.

2. Literature Review

The family, as the most important social institution, is the primary transmitter of a society's social capital to younger generations. During the process of socialisation, parents transmit socio-cultural elements to their children. The transmission of these elements also occurs through individuals' connections with various social groups. In the context of migration, the family is no longer a static structure but a dynamic space of intergenerational negotiation, where the first generation attempts to preserve cultural and normative capital, while the second generation operates as an agent of social change through integration into the structures of the host society. This creates a structural tension between identity preservation and integration, which shapes the

trajectories of integration and social mobility of migrant families. The social integration of migrants is interdependent on various processes within the host society. Migrants are often connected to institutions that support the continuity of cultural identity, norms, values, traditions, and customs from their country of origin. Among these institutions in the host society are migrant associations. Migrant associations organise activities aimed at maintaining collective interests, cultural and social values, and fostering harmonious social interactions among migrants, as well as between migrants and members of the host society. The characterisation of migrant associations reflects an influential connection with migrants’ shared interests (Bell, 1975). The notion of shared interest refers to the protection of migrants’ socio-cultural identity. These associations play an important role in receiving new migrants, guiding settlement—often suggesting neighbourhoods where migrants of the same origin reside—contributing to policies that prevent assimilation, and discouraging segregation from members of the host society. According to Sardinha (2014), associations enable migrants to choose their sense of belonging, adapt, and integrate into social life. Migrant associations often have a positive impact on social integration and the inclusion of migrants in host societies. They play a crucial role in preserving social capital and mitigating assimilation. Based on the functions mentioned above, migrant associations can be considered key actors in migrants’ social integration, serving as a bridge between the preservation of socio-cultural identity and social capital, while also facilitating the understanding of socio-cultural elements and social capital of the host society. According to Berry (1997), generations differ in their orientation toward the culture of the host country. The first generation, namely parents, tends to preserve the original culture, whereas the second generation, namely children, tends to adapt more rapidly to the host culture. This phenomenon is often analysed within assimilation theory, either as a full or segmented process.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted using a sample of 250 Albanian migrants living in Istanbul, 150 Albanian migrants living in Bursa, and 50 Albanian migrants living in Izmir. The sample selected in these cities was random but specifically targeted Albanian migrants. A total of 446 questionnaires were entered into the SPSS statistical program, of which forty-four were invalid (N = 203 females, 45.5%, and N = 243 males, 54.5%). The research question is based on analysing the social capital of Albanian migrants in relation to family life within Turkish society and intergenerational differences.

4. Data Findings and Analysis

In this study, out of 500 questionnaires administered to Albanian migrants in Turkish society, forty-four were found to be invalid. For this reason, the statistical analysis was conducted based on data from 446 migrants. Of these, 203 (45.5%) were female, and 243 (54.5%) were male. As observed, maintaining gender balance during the administration of questionnaires is essential, as it contributes to the accurate testing of the study’s hypotheses, research questions, and measurement instruments. The age groups representing the most economically active population are distributed in relatively similar proportions. In the 18–29 age group, there are 105 Albanian migrants, representing 23.5% of the total sample. In the 30–40 age group, there are 110 migrants, accounting for 24.7% of the total. In the comparative tables presented later in this chapter, it will be evident that a high proportion of individuals within these age groups possess a higher level of education. The 51–60 age group represents the largest number of migrants, with 114 individuals or 25.6% of the total sample. In contrast, the age group above 60 years has the lowest representation, with only 15 individuals or 3.4% of the total sample. An important factor that must be emphasised as a primary driver of migration is economic motivation. The working-age population is highly represented in this study, further confirming the role of economic factors in shaping migration patterns.

Table 1: Does your family life resemble that of the host population?
 (Frequency / Percentage)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	181	40.6
No	55	12.3
Partially	190	42.6
Migrants living with family	426	95.5
Migrants living without family	20	4.5
Total	446	100.0

Family, as a social institution, cannot be fully understood in isolation from its broader social context; therefore, it must be analysed in relation to the social environment in which it operates. The family constitutes a key social actor within society. Beyond functioning as a connecting bridge between individuals and social relationships, it embodies fundamental social and ontological values. In addition to serving as the basic unit of social structure, it ensures the continuity and functioning of society. Its role extends beyond enabling existence and the transmission of values; it also encompasses the

preservation of social values, the maintenance of social relationships, and the shaping of interactions among individuals (Aydemir, Tercim, & Likaj, 2012). According to Furstenberg (2012), families are central to understanding the dynamics of social capital. This can be illustrated through their connections with communities and other social groups, as well as through their role in the formation and reproduction of social capital, both for themselves and for wider social networks. The family has the capacity to direct social capital, for example, by facilitating integration with neighbours and other social groups or, conversely, by fostering forms of social isolation. Within the questionnaire, as an indicator of social capital, respondents were asked whether the family life of Albanian migrants resembles that of the host population in Turkish society. The findings indicate that 190 Albanian migrants (42.6%) reported that their family life partially resembles that of the host population. Similarly, 181 migrants (40.6%) stated that their family life resembles that of the host population, while only 55 migrants (12.3%) indicated that their family life does not resemble that of the host population.

Table 2. How do you speak the language of the host country? (Frequency / Percentage)

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very well	352	78.9
Well	61	13.7
Partially	26	5.8
Porly	3	0.7
Very poorly	2	0.4
Not at all	2	0.4
TOTAL	446	100.0

The family, as a collective entity, is oriented toward solidarity, collective action, cooperation, and the development of social networks, all of which contribute to its developmental potential and the accumulation of social capital (Aydemir, Tercim, & Likaj, 2012). In order to participate fully in collective and social life, Albanian migrants must demonstrate a strong command of the host country's language. Language proficiency facilitates an understanding of social mentality, perceptions, modes of thinking and behaviour, as well as underlying value systems. From a postmodernist perspective, language is considered a fundamental element for understanding the social structure of a society, as it enables access to its social reality (Goka, Topcuoglu, & Aktay, 1999). The findings indicate that 352 Albanian migrants (78.9%) reported speaking Turkish very well, while 61 migrants (13.7%) reported good

proficiency. Additionally, 26 migrants (5.8%) indicated a moderate level of proficiency. Only 3 migrants (0.7%) reported low proficiency, whereas 2 migrants (0.4%) reported very low proficiency, and another 2 (0.4%) stated that they do not speak Turkish at all.

Table 3. Which language is spoken within the family? (Frequency / Percentage)

	Frekuensi	Percentage (%)
Albanian	239	53.6
Host country language	14	3.1
Both	173	38.8
Migrants living with family	426	95.5
Migrants living without family	20	4.5
Total	446	100.0

Table 4. Which language do your children speak within the family? (Frequency / Percentage)

	Frekuensi	Percentage (%)
Albanian	106	23.8
Host country language	19	4.3
Both	216	48.4
Emigrants who have children	341	76.5
Total	446	100.0

Table 5. Which language do your children find easier to speak? (Frequency / Percentage)

	Frekuensi	Percentage (%)
Albanian	51	11.4
Host country language	46	10.3
Both	244	54.7
Emigrants who have children	341	76.5
Total	446	100.0

The findings indicate that 239 Albanian migrants (53.6%) reported that Albanian is the primary language spoken within their families. Meanwhile, 173 migrants (38.8%) stated that both Albanian and Turkish are used in family communication. Only 14 migrants (3.1%) reported that Turkish is the sole language spoken within their families (see Table 5). Out of the total sample of 446 Albanian migrants, 341 (76.5%) are parents with children. Among them,

216 migrants (48.4%) reported that their children speak both languages within the family context. Additionally, 106 migrants (23.8%) stated that their children primarily speak Albanian at home, while only 19 migrants (4.3%) reported that their children speak Turkish within the family (see Table 6). Regarding language ease, 244 migrants (54.7%) indicated that their children find it easy to speak both languages (Albanian and Turkish). Furthermore, 51 migrants (11.4%) reported that their children find it easier to speak Albanian, whereas 46 migrants (10.3%) stated that their children find it easier to speak Turkish (see Table 7).

Table 6. To what extent have your children adapted to the host society? (Frequency / Percentage)

	Frekuensi	Percentage (%)
High	286	64.1
Moderate	43	9.6
Low	12	2.7
Parent status (Migrants with children)	341	76.5
Total	446	100.0

The adaptation of migrants' children to the host society constitutes a key indicator of social integration and their sense of belonging. The degree of adaptation reflects not only their level of integration but also transformations in lifestyle, patterns of thinking, value systems, and cultural practices. This process is further reflected in the differences observed between the first and second generations of Albanian migrants in Turkish society. As shown in Table 7, 286 Albanian migrants (64.1%) reported that their children are highly adapted to the host society. In comparison, 43 migrants (9.6%) indicated a moderate level of adaptation, while only 12 migrants (2.7%) reported low levels of adaptation among their children.

Table 7. To what extent do migrants differ from their children in the following aspects? (Frequency / Percentage)

	N / %	Very different	Very different	Very different	Total
Perspective on life	F	81	248	12	341/446
	%	18.2	55.6	2.7	76.5/100.0
Lifestyle					
	F	47	264	30	341/446

Expectations for the future	%	10.5	59.2	6.7	76.5/100.0
Importance given to Albanian traditions					
Ways of thinking	F	86	235	20	341/446
	%	19.3	52.7	4.5	76.5/100.0
Perspective on life	F	70	226	45	341/446
	%	15.7	50.7	10.1	76.5/100.0
Lifestyle					
Expectations for the future	F	79	250	12	341/446
	%	17.7	56.1	2.7	76.5/100.0

According to Dikeçligil (2012), the family constitutes the fundamental social institution within society, where individuals learn through interaction with social actors. It enables individuals to become receptive to social influence within the family context and facilitates the development of social networks. Beyond its function as a mediating structure between society and the individual, the family plays a crucial role in fostering healthy social relationships, cultivating the capacity for social participation, and enabling the internalisation of norms, values, and rules throughout the socialisation process.

The family embodies an essential link between society and the individual, as the acquisition of values, along with the development of meaning and ethical frameworks, occurs primarily within the family context. In this sense, the family and social capital are closely interconnected and acquire meaning within the lives of social actors (Aydemir, Tercim, & Likaj, 2012). Migrant families often experience differentiated dynamics due to intergenerational differences in lifestyle, cognitive patterns, life outlook, future expectations, and the importance attributed to cultural traditions. For this reason, key social dimensions were analysed to assess the extent of differences between Albanian migrants and their children within the context of Turkish society. The findings indicate that 248 Albanian migrants (55.6%) reported that their children differ slightly from them in their life outlook. In contrast, 81 migrants (18.2%) reported significant differences, while only 12 migrants (2.7%) indicated no differences in this dimension.

Regarding lifestyle, 264 migrants (59.2%) reported slight differences between themselves and their children, whereas 47 migrants (10.5%) indicated significant differences, and 30 migrants (6.7%) reported no differences. In terms of expectations for the future, 235 migrants (52.7%) reported slight differences compared to their children, while 86 migrants (19.3%) indicated significant differences. Only 20 migrants (4.5%) reported no differences in future expectations. With respect to the importance attributed to Albanian traditions, 226 migrants (50.7%) reported slight differences between themselves and their children, whereas 70 migrants (15.7%) indicated significant differences. Meanwhile, 45 migrants (10.1%) reported no differences in this regard. Finally, concerning cognitive patterns, 250 migrants (56.1%) reported slight differences, while 79 migrants (17.7%) indicated significant differences. Only 12 migrants (2.7%) reported no differences between themselves and their children in this dimension.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The family, as the most important social institution, serves as the primary transmitter of a society's social capital to younger generations (Coleman, 1988). During the socialisation process, parents transmit socio-cultural elements to their children, while this transmission is further reinforced through individuals' connections with various social groups. This section provides a final analysis of the family life of Albanian migrants in Turkish society, the transmission of social capital, and intergenerational differences. A total of 417 Albanian migrants (93.5%) live with their families in Turkish society, indicating a strong family-centred structure among Albanian migrants, either as heads of households or as members of family units. The majority of migrants report that Albanian is the primary language spoken within the family. The use of the native language within the household facilitates the transmission of Albanian modes of thinking and contributes to the preservation of socio-cultural values originating from the country of origin. The adaptation of migrants' children to the host society constitutes a key indicator of social integration and their sense of belonging (Berry, 1997). Beyond integration, this adaptation contributes to transformations in lifestyle, cognitive patterns, values, and cultural practices. At the same time, it shapes intergenerational dynamics within migrant families. The findings of this study indicate that the majority of Albanian migrants (286 migrants, or 64.1%) report that their children are highly adapted to Turkish society. Despite this high level of adaptation, the results reveal that intergenerational differences between parents and their children remain relatively limited. Specifically, only slight differences are observed in lifestyle, cognitive patterns, life outlook,

expectations for the future, and the importance attributed to cultural traditions. Contrary to dominant perspectives in the sociology of migration, which often emphasise substantial differences between first- and second-generation migrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001), this study demonstrates that second-generation Albanian migrants in Turkish society exhibit relatively minor differences compared to their parents across key socio-cultural dimensions. This finding suggests a balanced integration process, in which elements of cultural continuity coexist with adaptation to the host society.

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Young Men’s Perceptions of Pornography and its Role in Informal Sexual Learning

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Abstract: Pornography has become a pervasive source of sexual information for young men, often complementing or substituting informal sexual education from peers, social media, or other non-formal channels, and then turning into risky behaviors. This qualitative study explores how young men perceive pornography as a reference point for sexual knowledge and expectations, and how these perceptions interact with informal sexual education. Using vignette-based anonymous qualitative survey with open-ended responses from 34 male participants aged 18–24, thematic analysis identified several notable patterns. Pornography was perceived as a primary framework for understanding social expectations in sexual relationships, while informal education frequently provided partial or conflicting guidance, creating confusion and uncertainty. Participants described that pornography influenced masturbation practices in alignment with performance expectations and contributed to the formation of risky sexual behaviors. Furthermore, young men reported emotional ambivalence, experiencing tension between sexual stimulation derived from pornography and the skills or comfort required for emotional intimacy. These findings highlight the interplay between media-based sexual information and informal educational influences, offering insights into how pornography functions as a formative reference in shaping sexual knowledge, attitudes, and potentially risky behaviors among young men.

Keywords: *pornography, mental health, young men, sexual education*

1. Introduction

Pornography consumption is increasingly widespread in contemporary society, yet the individual experiences and outcomes associated with its use can vary considerably (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2022). According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), pornography is “books, magazines, films, etc. with no artistic value that describe or show sexual acts or naked people in a

way that is intended to be sexually exciting”. While access to these materials is quite simple, the first attempts to use them start from the social context that stimulates curiosity, or the need to explore oneself in intimacy. In the digital age, the opportunity to carry out these behaviours is quite easy for all smartphone users who have an internet connection. Studies show that the age of initial exposure to smartphones is decreasing, and consequently the possibility of exposure to pornographic materials from young ages, who due to restrictions should not access them (Maas et al., 2024). This is mainly due to various parental techniques, which create freedom for the child to have access to a smartphone and without restrictions of options with age restrictions. The restriction does not come as an age rule, but as an obstacle to the deterioration and damage of the child's cognitive processes. Since sexuality and all sexual activities that a person undertakes throughout life are behaviours and thoughts learned during exploration, in the absence of accurate education that promotes the child's mental well-being, ethical and healthy concepts can undergo deviations (Kim et al., 2023). As a result of this deviation, long-term consequences arise in the mental health and social well-being of the individual, who also risks dangerous, violent and inappropriate behaviour towards the partner or intimate partners in the future. Pornographic materials that are romanticized by social media users, in recent times, are materials that promote toxicity, more specifically toxic masculinity, with behaviours such as emotional stoicism, sexual entitlement, and violence against those around them, mainly with intimate partners. In order to be more superior in their role as men, men follow these tendencies without questioning whether they are appropriate or not; and as a way to learn more about how to assert dominance over sexual partners, they use pornographic materials as a ready example (Borgogna et al., 2021).

The decline of formal sex education in school curricula or institutional training has turned the educational focus to informal networks such as online materials. This concern highlights a broader transformation in sexual socialization, where traditional agents such as family, schools, and religious institutions are increasingly supplemented, or even replaced, by digital media environments. Pornography, which functions as an informal educational tool, offers sexual scenarios that inform users about different sexual variations. Being a publicly usable platform, it carries potential risks, which may include the normalization of aggression, unrealistic expectations of oneself and partners regarding sexual behaviours, the objectification of partners and the reinforcement of phallogocentric ideals (Idoiaga-Mondragon, et al., 2025). Despite the constantly developing literature on pornography consumption and its effects, perception as an educational medium remains a significant gap. Addressing this gap requires an approach that focuses on the voices of early adult men and

the ways in which they integrate pornographic material into their sexual development and identity. This study will explore young men’s perceptions of pornography and its role in informal sexual learning. Specifically, it aims to analyse how pornography contributes to the acquisition of knowledge, how it shapes expectations regarding sexual behaviour and gender roles and how they are intertwined with the development of masculine identity. By investigating these dimensions, the study provides insights into the educational and social implications of digital sexual content and its impact on psychosocial well-being. Throughout the study, the line of how digital media innovation transforms educational experiences and the socialization process is explored. It also contributes to the topic of mental health of young people, who are in the phase of shaping their identity and are at risk of developing behaviours that are not beneficial for the individual themselves but also for society.

Research questions:

1. How is pornography integrated into young men’s processes of sexual socialization and identity formation?
2. How are pornographic representations understood in relation to expectations about sexual performance and masculine competence?
3. How do cultural traditions and peer dynamics regulate the discourse surrounding pornography?

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

A growing body of research (Sebsbie & Tsegaye, 2025; Sravanti et al., 2025) highlight the developmental risks associated with early exposure to sexually explicit media. Scholars argue that premature engagement with sexualized language, imagery and digital interactions may pose significant challenges to youth psychological well-being and relational development. Such exposure is often embedded within broader socio-digital ecosystems characterized by limited parental supervision, peer normalization of sexual content, aggressive marketing strategies and insufficient life skills preparation. Collectively, these factors are suggested to contribute not only to immediate psychological distress but also to potentially deviant sexual developmental trajectories and long-term interpersonal difficulties (Lin et al., 2020).

Empirical findings further indicate that exposure to explicit media during early adolescence is associated with increased likelihood of risky sexual behaviors in later stages of development (Sebsbie et al., 2025). The foregoing review demonstrates that early exposure to sexually explicit media has been widely associated with a range of developmental and behavioral outcomes. While

some research has highlighted the potential learning effects of pornography, whereby youths may use explicit content as an informal source of sexual information and derive knowledge about sexual practices, other studies emphasize its role in normalizing harmful sexual scripts and aggressive behaviors.

Some authors (Litsou et al., 2021; Idoiaga-Mondragon, 2025; McCormack, 2017). argue that pornography functions as a source of information or informal sexual education, especially when conditions for formal education are lacking. Consumers of pornography, mainly young men, use it to learn about sex and intimate relationships, in addition to the motive for arousal. Supporters of this argument emphasize that pornography can fill the gaps left by poor parental communication, suggesting that it is a good way to understand intimate interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, other studies present pornography as an amplifier of the risk for the development of harmful sexual behaviors (Pathmendra, 2023; Fedele et al., 2025). By taking advantage of unrealistic scripts and the normalization of aggression, problematic gender norms are also promoted. One reason why young men consume pornography, according to Greuter (2023), is to learn about sexual intercourse, and this learning is received through influential figures. In order to be liked as the influential figure is, they tend to repeat sexual behavior frequently. However, not always the learned sexual behavior may be healthy and properly applied in intimate relationships. From a methodological perspective, both opposing views have similar problems. Many of the studies are correlational, limiting the interpretation of causal relationships; others use specific samples, limiting generalizability. The literature seems to be still fragmented and lacks a more holistic approach that integrates consumption, perception, interpretation, and the learning process related to the socio-cultural and technological structures of the digital age.

A central issue is how pornography interacts with culturally dominant models of masculinity. Explicit content portrays masculinity as sexually assertive, emotionally detached, dominant and performance-oriented. Such representations may reinforce what scholars describe as hegemonic masculine ideals, privileging control, endurance and sexual conquest (Camacho-Ruiz et al., 2024; Diamond, 2025). However, the critical question remains: does pornography produce these norms or does it merely reflect and amplify pre-existing gender expectations embedded within broader socio-cultural structures?

Closely related is the issue of performative pressure. Pornographic scripts often emphasize exaggerated stamina, physical attributes and dominance, potentially contributing to internalized expectations regarding sexual competence and performance (Komlenac & Hochleitner, 2022). While certain

research suggests that repeated exposure may normalize gender hierarchies and objectification, alternative perspectives argue that consumers actively negotiate meaning based on their socialization, relational experiences and moral frameworks (de Heer, Prior, & Hoegh, 2020). Identity, in this perspective, is not a fixed outcome of exposure but a dynamic and dialogical process shaped by interaction between media representations and lived experience.

The literature tends to privilege an “effects” paradigm, measuring behavioral outcomes or aggression, while devoting comparatively less attention to subjective interpretations, identity work and meaning-making processes. Pornography is frequently positioned as a risk factor to be quantified. Consequently, there remains limited empirical insight into how young men themselves understand, appropriate or distance themselves from pornographic representations in shaping their identities.

Theoretical Framework

Identity formation is central to Erikson's stage of psychosocial development (1968), as opposed to the isolation of the individual from relationships and social circles (Weiland, 1993). In the context where the identity development phase is set, specifically from late adolescence to early adulthood, the individual directs his or her psychic and physical activity towards exploration and engagement in knowing oneself (Kruger et al., 2010; Maree, 2021). Consumption of pornographic materials at this stage of development is frequently carried out to explore sexual identity and to seek pleasure, which then leads to compulsive behavior. However, in adolescence, the risks of developing unrealistic sexual expectations may also be involved, while in early youth, compulsive pornography may be associated with an approach to intimacy oriented towards receiving pleasure rather than sincere and reciprocal relationships. Indicators of sexual risk behavior, including unsafe sex practices and a higher number of sexual partners, have been linked to poor health outcomes. Sexual identity and gender identity are integral components of this broader developmental process. Importantly, identity is conceptualized as dynamic and evolving, rather than fixed or passively by external influences, serving as one of multiple symbolic resources through which young men attempt to understand sexuality, intimacy and gender roles.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) provides the mechanism through which such media exposure may translate into cognitive and behavioral patterns. According to Bandura (1977), individuals learn through observational learning, modeling and perceived normative approval. Pornographic content frequently portrays specific scripts of masculinity, including sexual dominance, emotional detachment and performance

endurance, which may function as modeled behaviors. Through repeated exposure, these representations can contribute to the formation of cognitive schemas regarding what is considered normal, desirable or expected in sexual interactions. The framework does not assume automatic imitation; rather, it acknowledges that internalization depends on factors such as identification with models, perceived realism and pre-existing beliefs.

To account for the psychological pressure associated with masculine performance, the framework further incorporates masculinity norm and gender role strain perspectives. These approaches posit that adherence to rigid masculine norms, such as dominance, control and sexual competence, may produce strain when individuals perceive themselves as unable to meet these standards. Pornographic representations may intensify this strain by amplifying unrealistic expectations regarding physical performance, sexual frequency or relational dynamics (Komlenac & Hochleitner, 2022). In this sense, pornography may not create masculine norms ex nihilo, but rather reinforce and exaggerate culturally embedded ideals, increasing internal pressure to conform. Importantly, rather than treating pornography exclusively as a causal determinant of behavior, the framework situates it within an ongoing interaction between developmental identity processes, observational learning mechanisms and culturally constructed masculine expectations (Rousseau et al., 2021). By combining developmental, social-cognitive and gender norm perspectives, the present study conceptualizes pornography as embedded within broader psychological processes of identity construction and meaning-making.

3. Methodology

Research design

This study employed a qualitative, vignette-based exploratory research design. The primary objective was to examine how young men interpret and construct meaning around pornography as a source of sexual knowledge and how these interpretations intersect with informal sexual education and masculine expectations. Given that the research questions focused on subjective perceptions, interpretive processes and identity-related meaning-making rather than behavioural frequency or causal prediction, a qualitative approach was deemed methodologically appropriate. The study is grounded in a constructivist ontological perspective, which assumes that sexual knowledge and masculinity are socially and psychologically negotiated rather than objectively determined. The vignette-based design was selected to facilitate reflective engagement with sensitive topics. By presenting hypothetical scenarios rather than directly soliciting personal disclosures, the design

reduced defensiveness and allowed participants to evaluate situations from a distanced standpoint.

Participants/sample

The study sample consisted of 34 Albanian male participants aged 18-24 years. This age range was selected due to its developmental relevance, as emerging adulthood represents a critical period for identity consolidation and sexual self-concept formation. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was used, supplemented by snowball dissemination. The questionnaire link was distributed through various online platforms, including WhatsApp, Reddit and email networks within Albania. To ensure full anonymity, no identifying information (such as names, emails, IP addresses or contact details) was collected. Participants were explicitly informed that responses would be accessed and analyzed only after the completion of the data collection phase, ensuring that individual submissions could not be linked to specific respondents. This procedure was applied to strengthen confidentiality and to minimize potential response inhibition related to the sensitive nature of the topic.

Data collection procedures

Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire, consisting of a section where the participants were questioned about their age and their time spent in pornography and the other section consisting of five vignette-based scenarios addressing themes such as: pornography as sexual education, masturbation and sexual self-understanding, masculine performance pressure, emotional intimacy versus sexual confidence, normalization and silence around sexual content. Each vignette was followed by multiple open-ended questions designed to elicit narrative and interpretive responses. The use of an online format was intentional. Given the sensitive nature of sexuality-related topics, anonymous written responses were expected to reduce social desirability bias and increase candor compared to face-to-face interviews.

Data analysis methods

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), following the classical stages of their method. An inductive coding strategy was initially employed to allow themes to emerge from data.

Ethical considerations were respected throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary. Before accessing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the study's academic purpose, the sensitive nature of some questions and their right to withdraw at any time without

consequence. No personal information was collected and the participants confirmed that they were 18 years of age or older.

4. Findings and Discussions

The sample included young men between 18 and 24 years old who reported diverse experiences with pornography consumption, ranging from sporadic exposure to more habitual engagement. While frequency was not the primary focus of inquiry, the differences provide important contextual grounding for the themes identified in the analysis.

4.1. Perception of pornography as a primary educational manual

Thematic analysis revealed a recurring pattern in which pornography was described as an implicit instructional manual or framework. Many participants positioned online sexual content as a primary reference point for understanding sexual practices, bodily responses and relational expectations. In the absence of open discussion within family or educational settings, pornography appeared to fill a perceived informational vacuum, functioning as a default source of sexualization rather than a supplementary influence.

“When I was in middle school, I heard a group of older guys talking about some videos (pornography) and when I joined their conversation, they started joking because I didn’t know what it was. Then I started watching them everyday and suddenly I started understanding what was happening with my body. I couldn’t learn in any other way.” – (Participant 3)

This answer suggests that in young ages, especially in adolescence, a transition from childhood to adulthood, pornography is peer-influenced and seen as a primary source of learning about sexual intimacy. As the Eriksonian theory can explain, in the emerging adulthood the individual wants to explore and create a self-concept to consolidate their identity. At the same time, exposure to pornography appears to be socially mediated. Participants described initial exposure as occurring through peer interactions and observation. One participant reflected, *“I secretly watched them on my brother’s computer, and since he (older than me) was watching those videos, they weren’t bad”* (Participant 8), indicating that pornography consumption may function as a masculine competence, when they are accepted by male authority figures.

4.2. Pornography as a performative masculinity script

Participants describe how pornography puts them under pressure to be masculine only if they strictly follow the rules set by adult film actors. According to them, a man’s sexual life should be characterized by frequent sexual relations, mainly with different partners, as an indicator of male

potential for flirtation and attraction. In addition to the multiple relationships that pornography suggests, sometimes even infidelity in a couple to have risky sexual relationships as a form of masculinity, participants also describe performance indicators. In this context, the size of the genital organ, the duration of sexual intercourse, the frequency of sexual intercourse and the provoking of pleasant reactions in the partner are placed. If these indicators do not reach the perceived perfection, the sexual relationship has not achieved its goal and the individual feels insecure about himself, and as one participant says: *"Whenever I feel insecure after relationships with my partner, I try to watch specific pornography to understand where I went wrong and how I can improve"* (Participant 19).

Most participants see pornography as distancing or damaging to emotional relationships with their partners. Boys, while learning about the physical aspect of a relationship with a girl, put aside the development of a proper and healthy emotional relationship, as a way to fulfill hegemonism and phallogocentrism, two key aspects of "being perceived as a strong male". The use of pornography as a way of self-evaluation of abilities makes frequent relapse to it mandatory. *"I started seeing pornography at the age of 12 and never really stopped since. I think this content should not be allowed anywhere in the world. It can crush a person into pieces of themselves"* (Participant 21). According to the responses of the same participant, but also of many others, pornography results in many risky behaviours, which are deeply embedded in their mental schemas and it is difficult to break away from them, since these schemas have been accommodated for years.

4.3. Risky behaviours and sexual experimentation

The participants, although users of pornographic materials with a variation that leans towards a significant time of use, are aware of the problems of use, more specifically the risky behaviors that come from informal education and the desire to experiment with sexual behaviors. One participant says: *"I was quite aware that protective measures are necessary during sexual intercourse, because I had heard it from the school psychologist. But, after the prom night, I had sex with my girlfriend, without a condom. Although she was my girlfriend, her pregnancy should not have happened so early."* (Participant 22). Not using protective measures during sexual intercourse is one of the main issues that concerns the participants in this study, although according to them, sexual satisfaction is higher in these cases.

Other risky behaviours mentioned in their responses include the creation of sexual fantasies or as they are otherwise called "kinks" which can be dangerous if not practiced safely. Participant 7 says: *"I had heard a lot about BDSM, but I didn't know what it was and I started looking for videos of how*

it was done. After seeing what it was, it seemed a little dangerous, but I couldn't leave it without trying it. It was a little scary and I will never try it again." According to Kolme (2015), in an explanatory article about "BDSM", he quotes: *"BDSM is an acronym that refers to Bondage & Discipline, Dominance & Submission, or Sadism & Masochism between consenting adults."* Apparently, it is something normal during a consented sexual relationship. However, risks exist and it is necessary that before engaging in this type of sexual activity, the risks and ways to overcome these risks should be known. Apparently, participant 7 has sought information in pornographic materials that exercise this activity under supervision but without providing explanations, creating gaps in the knowledge of users. Other risky behaviours resulting from the use of pornography, according to the participants' responses, are sexual relations that are carried out with unknown partners, sexual abuse as a form of power display, eating disorders or body dysmorphia, as well as unhealthy actions to increase sexual performance (dangerous exercises for the genitals, uncontrolled use of supplements).

4.4.Cultural shame of discussing intimate aspects

Based on the nationality of the participants in this study, we also note the interference of cultures in the lack of open communication on the topics of health and sexual education. "In my family, even when a simple kissing scene appears on television, or discussions on sexual issues are opened on shows, whoever is in the room (father, mother, grandmother) immediately changes the channel. I have friends who live in Europe, and they have told me that in addition to school, the family also has frequent conversations on these issues, as casual discussions, normally without going beyond family norms." (Participant 11). Apparently, the participants perceive Albanian culture as an intervening factor in the development of discussions on sexual issues, and as a result it is necessary to obtain information from other, unreliable sources. Participant 16 says: "In fact, at school we had a module on sexual education, but the teacher would take us boys out to the school sports area and discuss it only with girls. I didn't know why, but now I understand it to some extent." Clearly, we are dealing with the phenomenon of labelling, where in this case boys are seen by educational providers as capable of obtaining information themselves. To fulfill their own prophecy, boys obtain information themselves from unreliable sources and in the end a dangerous combination occurs which is again induced by Albanian culture. Despite modernization, Albanian culture still has traces of patriarchy and male hegemony. Since men have to learn the entire spectrum of personal and interpersonal sexual issues themselves, during their psychosocial development they internalize only the norms that fit the patriarchal figures they were modelled after. In the absence of control and

opposition to wrong behaviour, they take it for granted that their behaviour is correct and then the behaviours result in high statistics of abuse or sexual crimes. Although this is widespread throughout the world, in the Albanian context where family tradition and education are preserved, it is a somewhat contradictory phenomenon.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study explored how young men perceive and negotiate pornography within the broader context of masculinity formation and sexual socialization. The findings indicate that pornography functions not merely as entertainment, but as a performative script that shapes expectations regarding sexual performance, bodily standards and related dynamics. Participants described internalized pressures to conform to idealized masculine norms, alongside engagement in risk-taking behaviors and experimentation that appear normalized within pornographic representations. At the same time, pornography consumption was embedded within a cultural environment characterized by humor, silence, moral and traditional regulations. By situating pornography within frameworks of social learnings and masculinity norm strain, this study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the interplay between mediated sexual scripts, peer socialization and identity development during adulthood. Rather than framing pornography solely as harmful, the findings illustrate its role as a socially negotiated reference system for masculine competences and belonging.

The study carries several implications. First, it underscores the importance of comprehensive sexual education that addresses media literacy and critically examines unrealistic sexual standard. Second, it suggests the need for culturally sensitive interventions that create a safe space for open dialogue around sexuality, particularly in contexts where religious and traditional norms discourage discussion. Also, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample was limited to specific age group and cultural context which restricts generalizability. Additionally, the qualitative design does not allow for causal inference regarding the relationship between pornography exposure and behavioral outcomes. Future research could expand the demographic scope, incorporate longitudinal designs to examine developmental trajectories and explore comparative cultural contexts to better understand how masculinity norms interact with media consumptions pattern.

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Developing Socio-Emotional Competencies as a protective factor against online risks among adolescents

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Abstract: The pervasive presence of the internet in adolescents' lives has significantly shaped their emotional well-being, social interactions, and identity development, presenting both educational opportunities and serious challenges. Within secondary education settings, online bullying, hate speech, and digital exploitation have emerged as critical issues that directly affect students' socio-emotional development and the overall school climate. This abstract examines the impact of internet use on adolescents' emotional well-being through the lens of socio-emotional competencies, emphasizing the role of education in prevention and intervention.

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage for the formation of self-awareness, social awareness, emotional regulation, and responsible decision-making. However, exposure to online bullying and hate speech undermines these competencies by normalizing aggression, reducing empathy, and increasing emotional distress. In high school classrooms, the widespread use of harmful digital language often translates into disrupted peer relationships, increased anxiety, social exclusion, and diminished academic engagement. Students who lack well-developed socio-emotional skills are more vulnerable to both victimization and participation in harmful online behaviors.

Moreover, emotional insecurity and social isolation created by negative online experiences can heighten adolescents' susceptibility to online grooming and human trafficking, as perpetrators frequently exploit digital platforms to manipulate emotionally vulnerable youth. Strengthening socio-emotional competencies, such as empathy, self-regulation, ethical awareness, and critical thinking, serves as a protective factor against these risks.

From an educational perspective, integrating socio-emotional learning (SEL) and digital citizenship into the secondary school curriculum is essential. Teachers play a key role in fostering respectful communication, promoting emotional resilience, and guiding students toward responsible and ethical online behavior. Addressing online bullying and hate speech through socio-

emotional education is therefore vital for safeguarding adolescents’ well-being and creating inclusive, safe learning environments.

Keywords: *Socio-emotional learning (SEL); Adolescents; Emotional well-being; Internet use; Cyberbullying; Hate speech*

1. Introduction

The digital transformation of society has profoundly altered the developmental ecology of adolescence. Social networking platforms, instant messaging applications, video-sharing sites, and online gaming communities have become central spaces for identity exploration and peer interaction. According to UNICEF, adolescents represent one of the most digitally connected age groups worldwide, with daily internet use becoming an integral component of their educational and social lives.

However, the expansion of digital access has been accompanied by an increase in online risks. Cyberbullying, exposure to hate speech, digital harassment, online grooming, and manipulation through social media algorithms have created complex psychosocial challenges. The World Health Organization has identified online victimization as a contributing factor to adolescent anxiety, depressive symptoms, and academic disengagement.

While technological solutions and monitoring strategies remain important, they are insufficient when not accompanied by internal protective capacities. Increasingly, research highlights socio-emotional competencies as a foundational mechanism through which adolescents can navigate digital environments safely and responsibly.

Socio-emotional learning (SEL) provides a structured educational framework for developing emotional intelligence, empathy, interpersonal skills, and ethical reasoning. The model proposed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) conceptualizes socio-emotional development through five interrelated competencies that influence behavior both offline and online.

This study seeks to examine whether strengthening socio-emotional competencies can function as a protective factor against online risks among adolescents in secondary education.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional correlational research design to examine the relationship between socio-emotional competencies and

adolescents’ exposure to and involvement in online risks. The research design aimed to identify predictive relationships between socio-emotional variables and different forms of online vulnerability, including cyberbullying, hate speech exposure, and susceptibility to online manipulation.

A correlational approach was selected to determine whether higher levels of socio-emotional competencies function as protective factors against engagement in or victimization from harmful online behaviors.

Participants

The sample consisted of **214 students** enrolled in a public high school in an urban area in Albania. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 years ($M = 16.7$, $SD = 1.02$). The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 52% female ($n = 111$) and 48% male ($n = 102$) students.

Participants were selected using a convenience sampling method due to accessibility within the school setting. All students were enrolled in grades 10 through 12. Parental consent and institutional approval were obtained prior to data collection.

Instruments

Socio-Emotional Competencies Scale

Socio-emotional competencies were measured using a structured questionnaire based on the framework developed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The instrument assessed five core dimensions:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Social awareness
4. Relationship skills
5. Responsible decision-making

The scale consisted of 30 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicated stronger socio-emotional competencies.

Example items included:

- “I can recognize how my emotions influence my online behavior.”
- “I think carefully before posting or sharing content online.”
- “I try to understand how others feel when reading my comments.”

3. Literature Review

A growing body of international research highlights the complex relationship between internet use and adolescents’ emotional well-being. While moderate and purposeful internet use can support academic performance and social

connectivity, excessive or unregulated use has been associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and social isolation.

Studies indicate that cyberbullying affects a significant proportion of adolescents globally. Victims of online harassment often report feelings of humiliation, helplessness, and persistent psychological distress. Unlike traditional bullying, digital harassment can occur continuously and reach a wide audience, intensifying its emotional consequences.

Hate speech represents another emerging concern within school-aged populations. Exposure to discriminatory language and hostile online discourse reduces empathy, reinforces stereotypes, and contributes to the normalization of aggression. Adolescents who frequently encounter hate speech online demonstrate higher levels of emotional desensitization and lower levels of prosocial behavior.

Additionally, emotionally vulnerable adolescents are at greater risk of digital exploitation. Online grooming strategies frequently target youth who experience loneliness, low self-esteem, or social exclusion. Perpetrators manipulate emotional needs for validation and belonging, highlighting the connection between emotional insecurity and digital risk exposure.

Research further demonstrates that socio-emotional learning programs implemented in secondary schools significantly reduce aggressive behavior, improve peer relationships, and enhance emotional resilience. Schools that integrate SEL with digital citizenship education report lower levels of cyberbullying and improved school climate.

Overall, the literature confirms that socio-emotional competencies function as protective factors in digital contexts. However, there remains a need for comprehensive educational strategies that explicitly address the intersection between emotional development and online behavior.

4. Findings / Results

Internet Use Patterns

Results indicated that:

- 68% of students spend more than 4 hours per day online.
- Social media platforms were the most frequently used digital spaces.
- 74% reported daily interaction on messaging applications.

Exposure to Online Risks

- 41% of students reported having experienced cyberbullying at least once.
- 57% reported frequent exposure to hate speech online.
- 18% reported having received messages from unknown individuals that made them feel uncomfortable.

Students who reported higher exposure to online bullying and hate speech also reported:

- Increased levels of anxiety
- Lower emotional self-regulation
- Greater feelings of social exclusion

Socio-Emotional Competencies

The mean scores for socio-emotional competencies ranged between 3.6 and 4.2 on a five-point scale.

- Social awareness and relationship skills scored higher among students involved in collaborative school activities.
- Students with higher self-regulation scores reported fewer conflicts in online interactions.

A moderate negative correlation was identified between exposure to cyberbullying and emotional self-management, suggesting that repeated negative online experiences weaken emotional regulation capacities.

5. Discussion

The findings confirm that excessive internet use and frequent exposure to online bullying and hate speech significantly affect adolescents’ emotional well-being. The high percentage of students reporting exposure to harmful digital behavior reflects the normalization of aggressive communication in online environments.

Importantly, students with stronger socio-emotional competencies demonstrated greater resilience and lower vulnerability to digital conflict. This supports the theoretical assumption that socio-emotional skills function as protective factors in digital spaces.

The correlation between cyberbullying exposure and lower emotional self-regulation highlights the cyclical nature of online harm: emotionally vulnerable students are more likely to be affected by digital aggression, which in turn further weakens their emotional stability.

These findings reinforce the necessity of integrating structured socio-emotional learning programs within secondary education systems.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study demonstrates that internet use significantly influences adolescents’ emotional well-being, particularly when exposure to cyberbullying and hate speech is frequent. While digital platforms offer educational and social benefits, they also present emotional risks that cannot be ignored within school contexts.

Socio-emotional competencies, especially empathy, self-regulation, and responsible decision-making, serve as protective mechanisms against online harm and digital exploitation.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate socio-emotional learning systematically into secondary school curricula.
2. Combine SEL with digital citizenship education.
3. Train teachers to address online bullying and hate speech proactively.
4. Implement school-based prevention programs focused on empathy and respectful communication.
5. Establish safe reporting mechanisms for digital harassment.

Strengthening socio-emotional education is not only a preventive measure but a foundational investment in adolescents’ psychological resilience and ethical digital engagement.

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Enhancing Social Emotional Learning through Metaphors, Poems, and Film: A University Study, Case of International Balkan University

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Abstract: Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is essential for promoting mental health, emotional awareness, and well-being in higher education. This study explores the effectiveness of integrating metaphors, poetry, and film into SEL activities, focusing on their impact on emotional regulation, stress management, and resilience. Conducted at International Balkan University, the research involved ~90 students across English Language Learning (ELT), Psychology, and Psychological and Counseling Guidance (PCG) departments, with a comparison group of 80 students receiving traditional instruction. Activities included Rumi’s “Guest House” poem, the *Bus Metaphor*, and selected scenes from the film *Good Will Hunting*, particularly the therapeutic dialogues between Sean and Will. Results revealed that ~90% of participants rated these activities as highly effective in fostering emotional awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and well-being. Students highlighted the film’s iconic “It’s not your fault” dialogue as a powerful moment of emotional release and

reflection. Findings suggest that creative approaches to SEL—through metaphors, poetry, and film—can strengthen resilience, enhance mental health, and provide practical strategies for coping with stress in university settings.

Keywords: *Social Emotional Learning, Wellbeing, Resilience, Emotional Regulation, Metaphors, Poetry, Film, Higher Education*

1. Introduction

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has become a cornerstone of higher education, fostering students’ ability to recognize, understand, and regulate emotions while promoting mental health, well-being, and resilience. In an era of increasing academic pressures and social challenges, SEL provides students with strategies to manage stress, enhance self-awareness, and build supportive relationships (Duffy et al., 2019; Jones & Kahn, 2018). This study explores how creative approaches—specifically metaphors, poetry, and film—can deepen the impact of SEL activities in university settings.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in higher education has been widely recognized as a framework that strengthens students’ mental health, emotional awareness, and resilience. Research highlights that SEL competencies—such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and responsible decision-making—are essential for coping with stress and promoting well-being in academic and personal contexts (Duffy et al., 2019; Jones et al., 2018).

Creative methods, including metaphors, poetry, and film, have been shown to deepen emotional engagement and facilitate reflection. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors shape how individuals understand and regulate emotions, while Pennebaker (1997) demonstrates the therapeutic value of expressive writing and poetry in emotional processing. Rumi’s “Guest House” poem, for example, has been used in educational and counseling contexts to encourage acceptance of emotions as temporary experiences, fostering resilience and well-being.

Film has also emerged as a powerful pedagogical and therapeutic tool. *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997) illustrates the transformative potential of empathy and supportive dialogue in mental health. The iconic exchange between Sean and Will—“*It’s not your fault*”—has been widely cited as a moment of emotional release, self-compassion, and healing, resonating with audiences across disciplines. Such cinematic experiences provide students with relatable models of emotional regulation and stress management, reinforcing SEL competencies in higher education.

Together, these studies suggest that integrating metaphors, poetry, and film into SEL activities can enhance emotional awareness, promote well-being, and build resilience. This interdisciplinary approach bridges education, psychology, and the arts, offering innovative strategies for supporting student mental health in a digital society.

Research Problem and Objectives

Traditional instructional approaches to SEL often remain didactic and limited in emotional engagement, leaving a gap in methods that facilitate deeper reflection and internalization of competencies. Creative interventions—such as metaphors, poetry, and film—offer potential to bridge this gap by providing relatable, experiential tools for emotional processing.

The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of these creative SEL activities compared to conventional methods. Specific objectives are to: (a) assess impacts on emotional regulation, stress management, and resilience; (b) examine student perceptions across academic departments; and (c) identify contributions to overall well-being in university settings.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How effective are metaphors, poetry, and film in enhancing Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and promoting mental health, well-being, and resilience among university students compared to traditional teaching methods?
2. How do students from different departments (ELT, Psychology, PCG) perceive the impact of these creative SEL activities on emotional regulation, stress management, and personal growth?
3. What differences in emotional awareness, self-regulation, and well-being emerge between students who participated in these activities and those who received traditional instruction?
4. How do metaphors, poetry, and the film *Good Will Hunting* influence students' understanding of emotional intelligence, empathy, and the therapeutic value of supportive relationships?
5. In what ways do students perceive these activities as contributing to their overall well-being, resilience, and ability to cope with academic and personal challenges?

In an era of digital transformation, where students encounter heightened stress, isolation, and mental health challenges from online learning and social media, innovative pedagogical tools like metaphors, poetry, and film foster essential emotional competencies. These accessible, interdisciplinary methods promote

transformative education, equipping future educators and professionals with resilience-building strategies suited to digital and societal changes.

2. Literature Review

SEL in higher education enhances emotional awareness, regulation, and well-being (Duffy et al., 2019; Jones & Kahn, 2018). SEL competencies such as self-awareness, empathy, and responsible decision-making are critical for resilience and mental health (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

Creative methods, including metaphors and poetry, have been recognized as powerful tools for emotional processing. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors shape how individuals perceive and regulate emotions, while Pennebaker (1997) highlights the therapeutic value of expressive writing and poetry. Rumi’s “*Guest House*” poem encourages students to welcome emotions as temporary guests, fostering acceptance and resilience. Recent studies on metaphor analysis in education (Zhang, 2023) show that metaphors facilitate deeper reflection and engagement, aligning with the findings of this study.

Film has also emerged as a valuable pedagogical and therapeutic medium. *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997) illustrates the transformative power of empathy and supportive dialogue in mental health. The repeated phrase “*It’s not your fault*” exemplifies emotional release and self-compassion, resonating strongly with students and reinforcing SEL competencies.

Recent systematic reviews confirm the importance of resilience interventions in higher education (Abulfaraj et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025), while Li (2025) highlights wellbeing as a central outcome of positive higher education frameworks. These studies provide contemporary support for integrating creative SEL methods to strengthen student well-being.

3. Methodology

- **Participants:** ~90 students from ELT, Psychology, and PCG departments in the activity group; 80 students in a comparison group receiving traditional instruction.
- **Activities:**
 1. Rumi’s “*Guest House*” poem (acceptance of emotions).
 2. The *Bus Metaphor* (visualizing release of irrational thoughts).
 3. Film scenes from *Good Will Hunting* (therapeutic dialogues, empathy, resilience).
- **Data Collection:** Student feedback and comparative analysis.

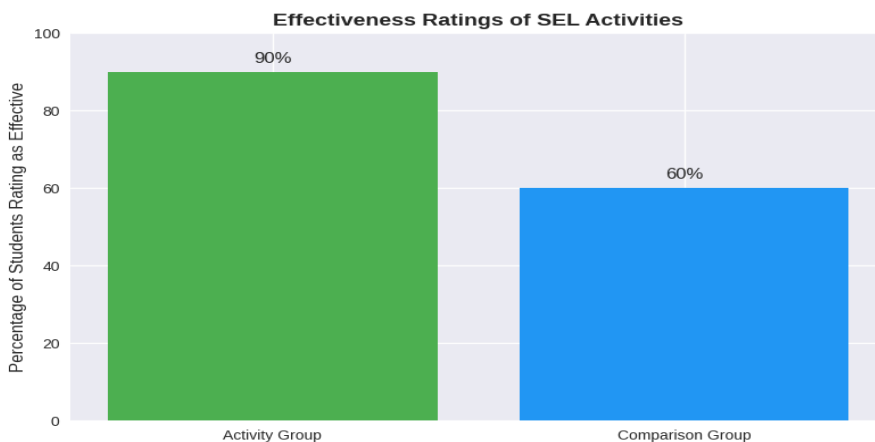
- **Focus:** Effectiveness of creative SEL activities in fostering well-being, resilience, and coping strategies.

4. Results

Quantitative Findings

As shown in **Figure 1**, approximately 90% of students in the activity group rated SEL activities as highly effective, compared to ~60% in the comparison group.

Figure 1: *Effectiveness ratings of SEL activities compared to traditional methods.*



The activity group engaged with metaphors, poetry, and film, while the comparison group received traditional instruction.

Qualitative Findings

Students also provided rich qualitative feedback, highlighting how metaphors and poetry helped them process emotions, develop self-regulation strategies, and improve coping mechanisms.

Table 1: *Student reflections on SEL activities.*

Theme	Student Reflection Example
Emotional Awareness	“Helped clarify and reflect on thoughts... letting them go in the bus station helped.”
Self-Regulation	“Should never block unpleasant emotions... if held, they’ll come later and cause difficulties.”
Wellbeing	“Helped see blockades in my life... allow myself to feel and share when things get tough.”
Resilience	“If I can do this with everything... I’ll free myself.”

Reflections illustrate how metaphors and poetry fostered emotional awareness, self-regulation, and coping strategies.

The findings revealed that integrating metaphors, poetry, and film into Social Emotional Learning (SEL) activities had a significant positive impact on students' mental health, emotional awareness, and well-being. Approximately 90% of participants rated these activities as highly effective compared to traditional instruction.

Students reported that the Bus Metaphor helped them visualize the release of irrational or unpleasant thoughts, reducing stress and promoting resilience. Rumi's "Guest House" poem encouraged acceptance of emotions as temporary experiences, fostering reflection and emotional regulation. The film *Good Will Hunting* was particularly impactful: students highlighted the therapeutic dialogues between Sean and Will, especially the repeated phrase "It's not your fault, as a powerful moment of emotional release, empathy, and self-compassion.

Departmental differences emerged in how students engaged with the activities.

1. ELT students focused on language and expression,
2. Psychology and PCG students emphasized therapeutic applications and counseling insights.

Across all groups, however, the activities consistently promoted SEL competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, empathy, and responsible decision-making.

Overall, the results demonstrate that creative SEL approaches not only enhance emotional regulation and stress management but also strengthen resilience and well-being, providing students with practical strategies for coping with academic and personal challenges.

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that creative SEL activities significantly foster students' well-being, resilience, and emotional regulation. As shown in **Figure 1**, the activity group reported much higher effectiveness compared to traditional instruction. Qualitative reflections in **Table 1** further illustrate how students internalized metaphors and poetry to process emotions, reduce blockages, and strengthen coping strategies.

The film *Good Will Hunting* provided a vivid model of therapeutic dialogue, with Sean's repeated phrase "It's not your fault" resonating as a moment of emotional release and self-compassion. These results align with existing research on metaphor analysis in education (Zhang, 2023), which demonstrates that metaphors facilitate deeper reflection and emotional

understanding. They also support Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995), showing that empathy, self-awareness, and active listening are central to resilience and well-being.

The results confirm that metaphors, poetry, and film significantly foster students’ well-being, resilience, and emotional regulation. Approximately 90% of students in the activity group rated Rumi’s “Guest House” poem or the Bus Metaphor as their favorite and most effective activities, compared to lower engagement in the traditional group.

Students reported that the **Bus Metaphor** helped them “*let go of thoughts at the bus station,*” reducing stress and freeing themselves from emotional blockages.

Rumi’s poem encouraged acceptance of emotions, with reflections such as:

- “*Should never block unpleasant emotions... if held, they’ll come later and cause difficulties.*”
- “*Helped see blockades in my life... allow myself to feel and share when things get tough.*”

The film **Good Will Hunting** provided a vivid model of therapeutic dialogue. Students described Sean’s empathetic stance and the iconic “***It’s not your fault***” moment as transformative, helping them reflect on self-compassion and the importance of supportive relationships in wellbeing. Themes emerging from student feedback included emotional awareness, self-regulation, reflective insight, and coping strategies.

These results align with existing research on metaphor analysis in education (Zhang, 2023; Rizzato, 2024; Badal, 2024), which demonstrates that metaphors facilitate deeper reflection and emotional understanding. They also support Emotional Intelligence Theory (Goleman, 1995), showing that empathy, self-awareness, and active listening are central to resilience and well-being.

Recent systematic reviews (Abulfaraj et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025; Li, 2025) confirm that resilience interventions and wellbeing frameworks are increasingly recognized as essential in higher education. This study contributes to that growing body of evidence by demonstrating the effectiveness of creative SEL methods.

SEL Competencies

The creative activities—Rumi’s “Guest House” poem, the Bus Metaphor, and the film Good Will Hunting—helped students strengthen the five core SEL competencies, each directly linked to mental health, wellbeing, and resilience:

1. **Self-Awareness:** Metaphors and poetry encouraged students to recognize and name their emotions, fostering reflection and

acceptance. This awareness was key to building resilience and reducing stress.

2. **Self-Management:** The Bus Metaphor provided a practical strategy for regulating emotions by visualizing the release of irrational thoughts. Students reported feeling calmer and more capable of managing stress.
3. **Social Awareness:** The therapeutic dialogues in *Good Will Hunting*, especially Sean’s empathetic stance toward Will, modeled compassion and understanding. Students connected this to their own relationships, enhancing empathy and well-being.
4. **Relationship Skills:** SEL activities promoted collaboration and communication across departments. The film’s emphasis on trust and supportive relationships highlighted the importance of connection for mental health.
5. **Responsible Decision-Making:** Reflecting on metaphors and film scenes encouraged students to consider the consequences of blocking emotions versus accepting them. This strengthened their ability to make healthier, more resilient choices.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that integrating metaphors, poetry, and film into Social Emotional Learning (SEL) activities can significantly foster students’ well-being, resilience, and emotional regulation in higher education. By engaging with Rumi’s “Guest House” poem, the Bus Metaphor, and the film *Good Will Hunting*, students developed strategies for processing and accepting emotions, reducing emotional blockages, and coping with stress in challenging situations. The therapeutic dialogues in the film—particularly Sean’s repeated phrase “It’s not your fault”—resonated deeply with participants, offering a powerful model of empathy, emotional release, and supportive relationships.

Student feedback confirmed the effectiveness of these creative approaches: ~90% of participants rated the poem or metaphor as their favorite and most impactful activities, reporting greater emotional awareness, reflective insight, and engagement compared to traditional methods. These findings align with existing research on metaphor analysis in education (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Zhang, 2023), which highlights the role of metaphors and poetry in facilitating deeper reflection and emotional understanding.

Overall, this study underscores the transformative value of integrating creative tools—metaphors, poetry, and film—into Social Emotional Learning (SEL) to promote mental health, resilience, and emotional regulation in higher

education. Student feedback confirmed the effectiveness of these approaches, with ~90% rating them as highly impactful, highlighting their role in fostering emotional awareness, self-regulation, and coping strategies. While limited to a specific context and sample size, the results suggest that such creative methods can be adapted across disciplines and cultures to strengthen wellbeing and provide practical strategies for managing stress in academic and personal life.

These findings align with prior research on metaphors and emotional intelligence and resonate with contemporary reviews on resilience interventions, underscoring the relevance of SEL in today’s digital society. Future research should expand this approach to diverse populations and contexts, further exploring its potential to enhance student well-being and resilience in higher education.

Limitations of the Study

The study is constrained by its single-institution sample, reliance on self-reported data, and quasi-experimental design, limiting generalizability and causal claims. Future research should incorporate longitudinal tracking, standardized SEL measures, and diverse institutional/cultural contexts to strengthen evidence.

This approach contributes to innovative education in a digital society by fostering emotionally resilient learners

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Verbal aggression in educational settings: an empirical examination of bullying-related statements

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Abstract: Verbal aggression constitutes a significant yet often not sufficiently examined form of bullying within educational settings. Research on bullying has predominantly focused, on the one hand, on overt physical behaviors or student peer interactions, and, on the other hand, although to a lesser extent, on the linguistic forms through which aggression is enacted in educational contexts. This study empirically examines bullying-related statements in educational settings, with the aim of identifying their defining characteristics, patterns of use, and linguistic features. Data were collected through a qualitative survey administered to university students (1st, 2nd and 3rd years students, Faculty of Letters, “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galati, Romania), who were mainly asked to report statements that made them feel bullied either by peers or by teaching staff within educational settings. The reported statements were analyzed using a verbal aggression framework (Poling *et al.*, 2019; Hamilton, 2012; Gauducheau and Marcoccia, 2023), focusing on the types of speech acts performed and the linguistic devices through which verbal aggression was accomplished. The analysis reveals that bullying-related statements are enacted through a range of speech acts, namely assertives, directives, declaratives (Searle, 1969), functioning rather implicitly than through overtly abusive language. In addition, recurring linguistic devices such as evaluative labeling, sarcasm, mitigation strategies, and appeals to institutional authority were found to play a central role in the construction of verbal aggression. Moreover, the findings highlight the importance of power asymmetries in shaping the perceived aggressiveness of statements.

Keywords: *verbal aggression, bullying, speech act, linguistic strategy, educational context*

1. Introduction

Bullying in educational contexts has received sustained scholarly attention, particularly in relation to student well-being and institutional responsibility;

however, research has tended to prioritize overt physical behaviors and peer-to-peer interactions, with comparatively less emphasis on verbal aggression and its linguistic realisation. Within contemporary higher education, where communicative norms are shaped by institutional hierarchies, increased formalization, and digitally mediated interaction, verbal aggression often manifests implicitly, bringing about challenges for identification and analysis. Addressing this gap, the present study examines bullying-related statements in academic settings with the aim of identifying their defining characteristics, patterns of use, and linguistic features. Data were collected through a qualitative survey administered to first-, second- and third-year undergraduate students enrolled at the Faculty of Letters, “Dunărea de Jos” University of Galați, Romania. Participants were asked to report statements produced by peers or teaching staff that they perceived as verbally aggressive and bullying related, within educational contexts, both during face-to-face interactions as well as during device-mediated communication. The term *educational context* is taken here with its very broad meaning encompassing both the *intra muros* context (courses, breaks) and the *extra muros* activities related to the educational process (assignments, projects) as well as extra curriculum activities (trips with peers, various clubs, etc.). The data were analyzed within a pragmatic framework pertaining to speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) as well as in terms of key linguistic features.

The findings indicate that verbal bullying in academic contexts is enacted through a range of speech acts, including assertives, directives, and declaratives, which function implicitly rather than through explicit verbal abuse. Recurrent linguistic strategies – such as evaluative labeling, sarcasm, mitigation, and appeals to institutional authority – play a central role in constructing verbal aggression. Overall, the study highlights the importance of power asymmetries and institutional communicative practices in shaping the perception and impact of verbal aggression in educational settings.

The study is relevant for the conference theme, *Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society*, because it directly addresses how bullying and hate-related discourse is shaped within contemporary educational environments undergoing rapid transformation due to digitalization, institutional innovation, and changing communicative practices. By focusing on verbal aggression as a form of bullying that is frequently accomplished through implicit and indirect language, the study echoes current concerns about emotional well-being in a digital society, where academic interactions are increasingly mediated, formalized, and embedded in power-laden institutional contexts. Moreover, the study perfectly matches the sub-theme (*Mental Health, Youth and Social Well-Being: Internet and emotional well-being, bullying, hate speech, human trafficking*) as it foregrounds the impact

of verbal bullying and hate-related discourse on students’ emotional well-being and examines the linguistic forms through which such practices are enacted in educational settings. By centering on participants’ perceptions of verbally aggressive statements produced by both peers and teaching staff, the research captures how everyday academic communication can function as a source of psychological harm, even in the absence of overtly abusive language.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study employs a two-layered theoretical framework. At the broader level, it is situated within research on bullying and verbal aggression, providing the general conceptual grounding. At a more specific level, the framework draws on pragmatic and linguistic theories to analyze statements classified as instances of verbal bullying, specifically incorporating impoliteness theory and speech act theory. In addition, the analysis focuses on recurring linguistic strategies through which verbal aggression is enacted.

2.1. *Bullying and Verbal Aggression: General Conceptual Framework*

Bullying, as a widely spread social phenomenon which affects 246 million students of all ages every year (Maga, 2023, p.12), can be defined as “any unwanted aggressive behavior(s) by another youth or group of youths who are not siblings or current dating partners that involves an observed or perceived power imbalance and is repeated multiple times or is highly likely to be repeated.” (Gladden *et al.*, 2014, p7) Moreover, Maga (2023, p.12) adds another important feature of bullying, namely that it often hits students insidiously, triggering isolation and dramatic consequences for their health and education.

Specialized literature puts forward, on the one hand, *two modes* of bullying: *direct bullying* (it occurs in the presence of the victim and may encompass aggressive gestures such as pushing the target or hostile oral or written communication with the victim) and *indirect bullying* (the victim is the reference or the topic of written or oral messages, rumors, or news), and, on the other hand, *four types* of bullying: *physical* (it involves contact with the victim such as hitting or pushing); *verbal* (it includes hostile communication but also meaningful hand gestures); *relational* (it aims at damaging the victim’s relationships with others through spreading negative rumours or posting shaming images); *damage of property* (it encompasses destruction of personal objects or deleting personal information). (Gladden *et al.*, 2014, p7-8)

If we are to apply these taxonomies to our study, it is obvious that it falls both within the direct verbal category, as students were required to write down statements by means of which they were targeted by peers and staff, and also within the indirect verbal bullying since they were also asked to provide statements in which a fellow colleague was targeted and they were the witness to the interaction or have acquired the information through rumors or hearsay. Furthermore, we adopt in this study the following definition of verbal aggression envisaged as "any sentence or phrase standing alone and judged to be a reprimand, harsh command, tattle, tease, insult, rejection, hostile assertion of ownership or priority, callous factual statement, accusation, criticism, obscenity, or other expletives..." (McCabe and Lipscomb, 1988, p.393 quoted by Poling *et al.*, 2019). The minute enumeration of the disrespectful and abusive forms that remarks can take highlights the broad spectrum of harms enacted to the individual well-being, damaging "the self-concept of its victims" (Hamilton, 2012, p6).

According to Moïse, 2012, quoted by Gauducheau and Marcoccia (2023, p.88), verbal aggression may display three forms: a) *brutal verbal violence* corresponding to a situation of argument and dispute; b) *polemical verbal violence* referring to hostile argumentation; c) *indirect or disguised verbal violence* occurring when "exchanges are consensual or cooperative but in a feigned or ambiguous manner"⁴, such as ironical statements. The same authors point out that verbal aggression may become manifest through various discursive manifestations such as: threatening speech acts (expressing disagreement, denigration, insults, etc.), use of vulgar words or phrases, use of particular terms of address or even simple words such as *OK* or *voilà* (fr) (*Ibidem*).

In the light of the above, we have encouraged students to provide not only statements with overt aggressiveness, but also statements when they felt bullied even if the phrases used seemed to be lacking hostility.

2.2. Specific Analytical Framework: speech acts theory

"Aggressive language is typically placed at the far end of a continuum that ranges from polite to rude" (Hamilton, 2012, p 6). It is a form of impoliteness which "involves seeking to damage and/or damaging a person's identity or identities" (Culpener, 2011, p1). The main pragmatic tool used to assess the bullying-related statements provided by students was the speech act theory as conceived by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). We do not exploit politeness or face-work theories as we dwell only on hostile repetitive language and not

⁴ « lorsque les échanges sont consensuels ou coopératifs mais de manière feinte ou ambiguë. » (our translation)

on its polite mitigation approaches. However, *a priori*, based on Durkheim's (1915) face-centered positive and negative rites, quoted by Holtgraves (2005, p.75), we may include verbal bullying among the acts threatening, on the one hand, the speaker's positive face (namely “the desire for closeness with others”) and, on the other hand, the recipient's both positive and negative faces (restriction of their freedom and the “desire to have autonomy of action”).

According to Austin's three-level model of speech acts (1962), utterances do not merely describe reality, but perform actions in social contexts. Although these acts are analytically described as separable, they occur simultaneously, while pertaining to different dimensions of meaning and action: a) locutionary act (creating a valid linguistic expression); b) illocutionary act (doing something while saying, a social action performed while producing a linguistic expression); c) perlocutionary act (causing effects on the hearer through the same linguistic expression). When asking the students to provide verbal bullying statements and to label them as a reprimand, a harsh order, a tease, an insult, a rejection, etc., we focus in this study on the first two dimensions of speech acts⁵, namely the locutionary meaning and their illocutionary force. Furthermore, we rely on Searle's classification (1969) of speech acts into five types: *assertives*, which involve the speaker's engagement to the truth of a statement (*You never get anything right.*); *directives*, which attempt to get the recipient to act (*Get lost!*); *commissives*, which commit the speaker to future action (*You'll regret this!*); *expressives*, which convey psychological states (*I can't stand you!*); and *declaratives*, which aim at changing institutional reality (*You don't belong with us!*). Our research hypothesis at this point is that verbal bullying exploits mainly assertives to demean the interlocutor, directives to restrain autonomy, and declaratives to put forward new rules and norms.

3. Methodology

In order to carry out the applied part of our exploratory research, we have made use of two important methods, namely the questionnaire (to gather data) and the qualitative discourse analysis (to identify the speech acts performed and recurrent linguistic strategies).

Firstly, data were collected through the survey method, using a questionnaire, which included open-ended items. The questionnaire conceived and given to students in Galati, Romania, was structured as follows: Part 1 – *Give examples*

⁵ We voluntarily excluded from our study the perlocutionary dimension, since the effect on the recipients is more difficult to establish and its adequate analysis would have also required psychological instruments.

of statements that, during your school years, made you feel bad⁶ and could be considered verbal bullying. The statements were divided into four categories: a) statements addressed to you by a colleague (oral or written); b) statements addressed to you by a teacher (oral or written); c) statements made to a colleague by another colleague (either you witnessed the discussion or learned about these statements indirectly); d) statements made to a colleague by a teacher (either you witnessed the discussion or learned about these statements indirectly). Part 2 – *Label the statements you wrote as one of the following manifestations (the same label may be used for more than one statement): a reprimand, a harsh order, a tease, an insult, a rejection, a hostile assertion, an accusation, a criticism, an obscenity, none of the mentioned labels can be applied.* There was no number of statements indicated, they were told to write as many as they can remember.

This questionnaire, which was independent of any teaching activity, was attended by only those students who gave their oral consent and no student was forced to participate against their will or under any other circumstances. Additionally, it was their choice whether they wanted to sign the questionnaire or submit it anonymously.

The questionnaire was given to students at the beginning of 2026 and 32 students responded, although not all of them filled in all the subpoints from part 1. We collected the statements and their labelling and translated⁷ them into English. Afterwards, we classified them in terms of speech acts performed and as far as the linguistic devices are concerned.

4. Findings and Discussions

Although we were not interested in a quantitative analysis, we couldn't help noticing that the numbers of statements performed by teachers towards students was relatively bigger than the ones made by colleagues⁸. This is not a proof that teacher bullying is more frequent than fellow bullying, it may suggest that, after a certain period of time, teacher bullying had a more serious impact on their well-being because teachers are associated with a superior status and their bullying is perceived as more painful and long lasting.

⁶ We purposely used this adjective as it is general (we did not want to orient students' mind towards a particular type of bullying-related statements) and it overarches different emotions such as: sadness, embarrassment, anger, frustration, low-self worth, all of them being potentially triggered by verbal bullying.

⁷ We are aware that the intensity of certain words and the illocutionary force of certain phrases can be affected through translation.

⁸ According to students' recollection.

4.1. Verbal bullying performed by fellow colleagues / peers

a) In terms of illocutionary function, *assertive speech acts* (direct or indirect ones) were the most numerous ones. We bring forth a four-layered classification of these statements in terms of illocutionary force:

i) weak illocutionary force – we range here, according to their pragmatic function, the teasing, the irony, the light mockery that can also be taken as a joke (if they are not recurrent): *What hair does he have, you say he's a stork!; Are you on your period?; What are those galoshes on your feet?; Don't you have money for other clothes?; How small and skinny you are!; The wind blows on you away in the street!* (for someone very skinny); *Wow, you girls are so beautiful, except for you X, you're a bit skinny.; Little girl Heidi (for someone raised by her grandparents); You're too shy!; You have many sisters, you can't do things like me, I'm an only child.; Eh, kids like you can't even aspire to high school, let alone college, we have money.; You certainly can't do this* (various physical exercises), *because you are too short, weak, you have no strength!; He doesn't have designer clothes.; You barely reach the doorknob.* We are dealing here with verbal micro-aggressive bullying which may easily escalate towards more serious forms.

ii) moderate illocutionary force – we range in this category assertive acts such as direct clearly offensive insults, but without an explicit attack on the individual's fundamental identity: *Are you deaf?; You're a nerd!; You have a cork head!*⁹ (with the meaning you are a bit slow); *She's beautiful, but she's a bit stupid.; You're always wrong.; Why are you pulling up your pants, you're horrible!; You grew up on a farm.; His parents are peasants, what do you want from him!; He/She doesn't wash at all.; He/she smells bad.; Antisocial!; Depressive!; Are you black with anger or is that who you are?; If we turn off the light, no one will see you!.* The examples display a verbal psychological bullying which affects the victim's self-esteem and induces shame, without, however, using extreme vulgarities or slurs.

iii) strong illocutionary force – this category encompasses attacks on intelligence, normality, or social value, with clear intent to humiliate: *You idiot!; You're stupid, you're not too bright!; You stupid beanpole!; I think he's got a brain problem.; He doesn't understand, he has no business here.; Are you crazy?; Your mother dropped you on the head at birth!; You're no good at anything!; You're fat; You're so fat, you're probably going to roll down the stairs! You're a whale! You're filthy.; You look like a moldy plank!; What's with that hair on your head, you look like a homeless girl!; Whether I'm sitting*

⁹ We have privileged in some examples the literal translation in order for the reader to be aware of the image created in Romanian although the phrase does not sound idiomatic in English.

next to you or next to the trash can, it makes no difference!; Your face is as black as asphalt!. We are dealing again with verbal psychological bullying characterized by a persistent negative labelling which may lead to the victim's isolation and alienation.

iv) very strong / extreme illocutionary force – the statements aim at dehumanization, identity stigmatization through the use of medical/ethnic/religious terms as insults: *You're disabled!; Are you retarded?; Can't you see that he's autistic?; Do you have ADHD?; Stupid homosexual!; Repentant, are you allowed? Nigga!* The examples point to identity and discriminatory verbal bullying in which identity features become a powerful insult, increasing the risk of psychological trauma and thus can border on harassment.

b) *Directive speech acts* function as order, threat, exclusion, or coercion: *Get out of here, you can't stay with us!; Get out of here, you idiot!; I'll beat you!; You have to hand in your homework!; Ignore them!; You need to look better!; You're like an animal, lose weight!; Just be quiet, your opinion doesn't matter.; Better not say anything.* These examples display a relational verbal bullying aiming at the victim's exclusion, to the diminishing or even the loss of group membership and to his/her systematic marginalization.

c) *Declarative speech acts* – when statements impose new rules according to which the school microuniverse functions: *He/she doesn't belong here.; We're not friends, I'm not interested.; You don't belong here.; We don't play with girls.* (as a stated rule); *He/she's not in our gang.* We identify at this point both psychological and relational bullying focusing on discrimination and on forcing the victim to conform.

Altogether, the examples analysed highlight that verbal bullying becomes manifest through both explicit language (direct and clear attacks whose negative intention is immediately understood by the victim) and through indirect, biased language (the target may not easily perceive the degree of aggressiveness of the statement, but the psychological effect of bullying is beyond any doubt).

The recurrent linguistic strategies identified include:

1. *Negative evaluative labeling* directly targeting an individual who is thus reduced to a trait and a stereotype. This negative labeling is directed towards demeaning:

- an individual's intelligence through the use of semantically charged adjectives pointing to a stable feature rather than a temporary state (*idiot, stupid, retarded, crazy, nerd*) or through intensification by repetition (*You're stupid, you're not too bright*);
- an individual's appearance/body through the use of adjectives and verbs highlighting physical characteristics or actions considered not to fit the norms

(*fat, filthy, not wash himself, smell bad*), through animalistic or objectifying comparisons (*a stork, a beanpole, a moldy plank, a whale*);

- an individual's identity through the use of pejorative terms (*disabled, retarded, nigga*), sexually orientation terms used as insults (*stupid homosexual*) or medical terms turned into slurs (*autistic, ADHD*) which associate identity with deficiency and reinforce exclusion norms.

2. *Sarcasm* becomes manifest through the use of rhetorical questions, functioning as mock inquiries and revealing contempt and ridicule: *Are you on your period? Are you deaf? What are those galoshes on your feet? Why do you come to school if you still don't understand? Don't you have money for other clothes?*

3. *Mitigation strategies* are meant to mask aggression under a softening statement, but in fact we deal with pseudo-softening statements which make the insult socially safer for the speaker while maintaining its harmful intent. At this point, we identify the use of litotes (*You're not too bright*), of hedging (*I think he's got a brain problem; a bit stupid*), of adversative conjunctions (*She's beautiful, but she's a bit stupid*).

4. *Appeals to institutional or normative authority* that put forward group norms based on which rejection is legitimized; they set boundaries presented as stemming from rules and norms rather than personal choices: *We don't play with girls. He doesn't belong here. He's not in our gang*, etc.

5. *Gender and background essentialism strategies* through the transformation, on the one hand, of physiological traits and functions, and, on the other hand, of origin, into stigmatic degradation: *Are you on your period? We don't play with girls. You grew up on a farm. Your parents are peasants*.

Across these examples provided by students, bullying discourse seems to draw on permanent traits rather than on particular behaviours. Imaginary deficiencies together with presupposed stupidity, abnormality, and incompetence are brought forth as unquestionable facts, and thus rebuttal and rejection are unlikely to be accomplished. Metaphors and animalization/objectification are exploited to dehumanize the recipient through the exaggeration of a particular feature and non-human analogies. Moreover, rhetorical questions indirectly reinforce humiliation as a form of mockery. Fellow colleagues build social boundaries, creating thus an opposition between the insiders (the ones who share the same rules and fit into the norms) and the outsiders (the target of the bullying who are envisaged by the bullies as not sharing the same frame or origin/social status). Medical terms become insults which treat differences as pathological deficiencies. Last but not least, across the dataset, overtly aggressive statements which are hard to counterattack are combined with pseudo-softening statements containing

litotes or hedging which aim at concealing to a certain degree their derogatory force.

4.2. Verbal bullying performed by the teaching staff

a) The statements labelled as verbal bullying stemming from the teaching staff keep the same the hierarchy of the speech acts previously identified: the most numerous ones are the *assertives* which describe and evaluate, directly or indirectly, a situation or a characteristic.

i) assertives with weak illocutionary force that pragmatically function as teasing, light assessment, contextual irony: *Your skirt is too short, look how frivolous you look. Frivolous!; Your shirt isn't ironed, how do you think you're going to make it in life?.* This bullying targets appearance and personal presentation.

ii) assertives with moderate illocutionary force that function as rebuke, irony or reproach: *Do you want me to hang up?; I had other expectations from you.; Do you want me to commit suicide?.* We are dealing with verbal emotional behavior that contains threatening and manipulative elements.

iii) assertives with strong illocutionary force that function as insults and display contempt:

- bringing forth the lack of skills, knowledge, intelligence *At least you're beautiful, because you didn't write anything on the mock test.; That's all your brain can handle.; You can't even put that much into that mind of yours. ; Not even that much, you don't know how to write in French and you want to attend the Faculty of Letters.; If you had come to class, you would have known.; You have no linguistic intelligence!; You're so uneducated!; You have no brain!; Oh boy, but you're so thick-headed!; You're as dumb as the night! (very dumb, as a rock); Stupidity can be cured, insensitivity never.; You are not as educated as I thought.*

- containing a deprecatory comparison: *You are the worst class I have ever had.; I have been teaching for X years, but I have never seen a class worse than yours.; I also taught at a school for the disabled and they were more normal than you.;*

- containing a negative prospective impact: *You will not achieve anything in life (if you continue like this)!; I don't know what you'll do next without a high school diploma!.*

This verbal psychological bullying becomes manifest through the use of threatening or humiliating elements.

iv) assertives with very strong illocutionary force that act as direct verbal aggression, serious insult, abuse: *You shameless and impudent people.; You're stupid.; You're good for nothing!; Monkeys!; Slaves!; Fools!; Hooligans!; Handicapped!; You have Satan in you!.* These examples point to a

psychological verbal bullying as the statements contain numerous name-calling, insults, and demeaning language.

b) *Directives* by means of which the speaker puts a series of constraints: *Put down the phone or I'll make a collar out of it! Please take your package and get out!; If you don't learn, go to the field or the sheepfold.; Don't touch it, you don't know how!; Give up football, you have to study, otherwise leave high school!; Sit in the last row because I don't bother with you.; You're not capable, you don't understand, so put your hand down, leave others answer!; Shut up, because no one asked you anything.; Be like X!* They convey open threats, rejection, and hostility aiming at demeaning the interlocutor.

c) *Commissives* are very rare, allowing the speaker to put forward a promise made to himself, indirectly pointing to the other: *I will never tolerate stupidity and shamelessness*. Such a statement creates psychological harm by indirectly labeling someone negatively.

The statements stemming from teachers (according to students) use mainly explicit language: insults and labels are directly stated, leaving no ambiguity about the speaker's intention; negative judgment, criticism or threats are clearly conveyed; even in the interrogative sentences, the criticism and threats are clear and direct.

The recurrent linguistic strategies identified include:

1. *Negative evaluative labeling* meant to attack:

- more the student's identity and less his/her particular behavior: *You're stupid.; You're good for nothing.; Fools!; Hooligans!; Handicapped!*. They are ad hominem attacks that impact very much the student because of the explicitly degrading lexemes;

- cognitive competence: *You can't even put that much into that mind of yours.; You don't know how to write in French and you want to attend the Faculty of Letters*. Competences are greatly minimized (*that much*) and intellectual inadequacy is presented as a largely enrooted and permanent feature;

- personal morality and personality traits: *shameless, impudent, frivolous*. This moral labeling is accomplished through pejorative evaluative adjectives which describe the target as morally or socially inappropriate.

2. *Animalisation and dehumanization strategies*: *Monkeys! Slaves! You have Satan in you!* These statements place students outside human community and cut out all traces of dignity, legitimizing harsh treatment.

3. *Generalisation strategies* are rendered by the use of plural collective forms of address (*You shameless and impudent people.*), of absolutist language (*I'm tired of everyone complaining about you!*), of inferiority triggering comparisons (*You are the worst class I have ever had.; I taught at a school for the disabled and they were more normal than you.*) This public collective framing intensifies shame by putting forward a shared stigmatized identity.

4. *Sarcasm* is used to trigger ridicule and to intensify humiliation: *That’s all your brain can handle.; At least you’re beautiful, because you didn’t write anything at the mock test.; It’s good that you have gold in your hands, but you don’t know the problem.; Of course you haven’t heard of X before, in your countryside, you know nothing.*

5. *Hyperbole* is used to introduce an exaggerated punishment: *Put down the phone or I’ll make a collar out of it. We’re taking you to the school of the insane!* These threats rely on fear to claim authority.

6. *Emotional manipulation strategies* which place the teacher in the center of the statement: *Do you want me to commit suicide? I had other expectations from you.* By placing the emotional burden on students, the statements function as an emotional blackmail meant to induce guilt and distress.

In the light of the linguistic features identified, we may state that the statements very rarely address academic performance, but student’s identities, intelligence, morality, and social value. They exploit negative comparisons and labelling, sarcasm, hyperbole and direct threats. The statements stemming from teachers create images of inferiority and lack of competence that go beyond momentary humiliation, and powerfully impact students’ mind and personality for a long time. They tend to frame a classroom atmosphere dominated by ridicule and exclusion (as they weaken students’ self-awareness, their academic confidence and their sense of belonging) rather than support and assistance. Correction meant to attain intellectual and personality growth turns into personal degradation and psychological harm.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study consisted of a qualitative analysis of bullying-related statements (reported by students). Several exploratory conclusions can be drawn:

- The results confirm our study hypothesis – verbal bullying in educational settings is frequently accomplished by means of assertive speech acts (undermining identity, intelligence, morality or social worth), followed by directives acts (limiting autonomy and imposing constraints) and, to a lesser extent, by declaratives (bringing forth norms meant to build up a border line between the accepted ones and the “outcasts”;

- Bullying often takes indirect and biased forms, especially among peers. It is rendered through negative evaluative labeling, sarcasm and rhetorical questions, pseudo-mitigation strategies which point out that bullying in this context, even if it is easily perceived, becomes harder to contest and to reprimand;

- The examples analysed were characterized by an impressive presence of medical terms used as insults, defamations through animalization and

dehumanization, which are directed towards students’ core identity and may trigger long-term stigma;

- Although the study is not quantitative per se, students could more easily remember statements uttered by teachers. This proves that teacher bullying, as it stems from institutional authority who normally should have no relation to verbal aggression, has a more powerful perlocutionary effect – a stronger psychological impact.

- Communication in educational contexts does not always encourage growth among students, but it also weakens self-esteem, destroys the sense of belonging and ruins confidence in the school system efficiency.

We should highlight that the above mentioned findings refer only to our collected data which, because of the number of participants (32 students), limits the insights that we could submit to analysis. Therefore, we do not pretend exhaustiveness in our remarks. Moreover, the analysis accounts for the perceived aggression of the statements (not objectively verified information) recollected by students and memory can obviously distort both words and their intensity. Furthermore, although we insisted that students provide only those statements that had a repetitive nature, we are not certain that all statements meet this criterion of verbal bullying.

Despite these limitations, the study demonstrates that verbal bullying in educational contexts is a linguistically and pragmatically complex phenomenon which exceeds those “simplistic” insults and may lead to psychological harm. Future research may focus on the analysis of the measurable psychological impact of these statements on students and their well-being.

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Psychosocial Services in Community Centers for young with Autism in Albania: Effectiveness, Support Gaps, and Inclusion Perspectives

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Abstract: Community centers and day-care facilities play an increasingly vital role in supporting young with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families in Albania, particularly where specialized services remain limited. This study explores the contribution of psychosocial services provided in Albanian community centers to the wellbeing and inclusion of young with autism, examining their perceived effectiveness, support gaps, and inclusion perspectives. Adopting a descriptive and analytical research design, the study integrates insights from a mixed-methods approach, including interviews with multidisciplinary staff, stakeholder perspective analysis, and an extensive review of international literature. Findings indicate that while communication training and behavioral support are perceived as effective—aligning with evidence from Turner-Brown et al. (2008) and McClannahan et al. (2002)—implementation is significantly hindered by systemic factors. The study identifies critical gaps, such as a shortage of qualified multidisciplinary staff, limited financial resources, and regional disparities between urban and rural areas. A primary finding is the "weak coordination" between community centers, schools, and health services, which fragments care and prevents the transition of functional skills into inclusive environments. These findings are analyzed through an inclusion-oriented framework, emphasizing how sustainable public investment is required to mitigate the high societal costs of autism, estimated by Ganz (2007) at \$3.2 million per capita over a lifetime.

The paper concludes with practical recommendations for strengthening professional standards and establishing formal inter-institutional protocols to move beyond therapy-only models toward long-term social integration for young with autism in Albania.

Keywords: *autism spectrum disorder, community centers, psychosocial services, inclusion, Albania, service effectiveness, support gaps, coordination.*

1. Introduction

Contextual Background: In the evolving landscape of Albanian social services, community centers have emerged as fundamental pillars for the delivery of localized, accessible support for vulnerable populations. Within this framework, these centers function as a vital bridge between primary healthcare and formal education, specifically tailored to address the complex needs of young with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). By providing community-based structures, they offer a decentralized alternative to traditional institutional care, focusing on early intervention, functional skill development, and behavioral support. These facilities are increasingly recognized as essential platforms for fostering social inclusion, as they move beyond clinical settings to provide integrated care within the child's own community environment.

Problem Statement: Despite the critical role these centers play, the Albanian social service sector faces significant challenges, most notably a lack of systematic evidence regarding the quality and effectiveness of psychosocial implementation. Currently, there is a scarcity of data-driven evaluations to measure long-term developmental outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding how these interventions translate into actual social participation. Furthermore, specialized care remains unevenly distributed across the country, with a heavy concentration of services in urban hubs like Tirana, while rural and peripheral regions suffer from a severe lack of resources. This regional disparity, combined with a lack of standardized professional protocols, creates an environment where the quality of support is often dictated by location rather than by the specific needs of the child.

Research Objective: The primary objective of this study is to explore the specific contributions of psychosocial services provided in Albanian community centers toward the overall wellbeing and social inclusion of young with ASD. By integrating perspectives from service providers and key stakeholders, the paper aims to provide an analytical overview of how individualized support and communication training impact functional autonomy. Moreover, this research seeks to identify the systemic barriers—

such as the weak coordination between health, education, and community-based sectors—that currently hinder service accessibility. The research also provides evidence-based recommendations to strengthen professional standards and foster sustainable inclusion pathways within the Albanian context.

2. Literature Review

International best practices for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) emphasize comprehensive treatment models that address the diverse needs of individuals across their lifespan (Odom et al., 2010). Research indicates that effective interventions often utilize behavior analysis to target functional skills and social reciprocity, which are critical for adolescents and adults (McClannahan, MacDuff, & Krantz, 2002; McDonald & Hemmes, 2003). Furthermore, global models have increasingly integrated technology, such as interactive multimedia and computer-based programs, to teach complex emotion recognition and social cognition (Bölte et al., 2002; Golan & Baron-Cohen, 2006). In contrast, the current Albanian framework for psychosocial support often struggles with limited resources and a lack of multidisciplinary staff, creating a gap between these evidence-based international practices and local implementation. While international research highlights the success of social skills training and supported employment in improving cognitive performance and quality of life, the Albanian context still faces challenges in providing such specialized and evenly distributed care (García-Villamizar & Hughes, 2007; Herbrecht et al., 2009).

There is a significant theoretical move in ASD research from a purely medical or therapeutic model toward a social and developmental model that prioritizes autonomy and social integration (Seltzer et al., 2004). Historically, autism was classified primarily by its severe impairments in social interaction and associated psychopathology (Wing & Gould, 1979; Brereton, Tonge, & Einfeld, 2006). However, modern perspectives emphasize the importance of developmental trajectories, recognizing that adolescents and adults with autism can continue to gain functional skills and improve their quality of life through tailored interventions (Seltzer et al., 2004; Levy & Perry, 2011). Leisure programs and community-based activities are now recognized for their role in reducing stress and enhancing the wellbeing of individuals with ASD, moving beyond a focus on "curing" symptoms to fostering participation (García-Villamizar & Dattilo, 2010). This shift underscores the necessity for community centers to provide structured daily activities and family guidance that support long-term inclusion rather than isolated clinical therapy.

The transition of theoretical models is often reflected in the legislative structures governing social care. While international standards, such as those defined by the American Psychiatric Association (2000), provide the clinical basis for diagnosis and intervention, the translation to community-level implementation depends on local legislation. In Albania, social care legislation aims to decentralize services, yet the translation to effective community-level implementation remains inconsistent. Effective legal frameworks must account for the lifetime incremental societal costs of autism and ensure that post-high school service use is accessible to young adults transitioning out of the education system (Ganz, 2007; Shattuck et al., 2011). Weak coordination between community centers, schools, and health services often stems from a lack of integrated legal protocols that mandate inter-institutional collaboration, which is essential for ensuring that families and young receive continuous support (Thomas, Morrissey, & McLaurin, 2007).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** to evaluate the psychosocial services provided in Albanian community centers. The descriptive component is utilized to document the current state of service implementation, individualized support, and the specific types of interventions offered. The analytical component focuses on examining the underlying barriers and the degree of inter-institutional coordination to determine how these factors influence the transition from clinical therapy models toward inclusion-oriented developmental outcomes.

3.2 Data Collection

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the service landscape, data were collected through a **mixed-methods approach**:

- **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with service providers and multidisciplinary staff to gather qualitative insights on the quality of implementation.
- **Stakeholder perspective analysis** involved reviewing existing reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations to identify regional availability and public investment trends.
- **Perception surveys** were utilized to capture the perspectives of families regarding the perceived effectiveness of individualized support and communication training.

3.3 Participants and Sample

The study sample includes **community-based structures and day-care facilities** that provide specialized services for young with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Albania. The participants consist of:

- **Multidisciplinary Staff:** The professional profiles involved in the study include psychologists, social workers, and developmental therapists.
- **Administrative Stakeholders:** Representatives from centers responsible for coordinating with health and education services.
- **Beneficiaries:** Families of young with ASD who utilize these community-based structures for early intervention and social inclusion support.

3.4 Analysis Framework

The analysis follows an **inclusion-oriented framework**, categorizing findings into two primary domains:

- **Perceived Effectiveness:** This domain is categorized by measurable improvements in core and related ASD symptoms, including communication skills, behavioral support, and the development of autonomy and functional skills.
- **Barriers and Gaps:** Challenges are categorized into structural levels (insufficient resources and regional availability), professional levels (limited multidisciplinary staff), and systemic levels (weak coordination between community centers, schools, and health services).

4. Results

4.1 Perceived Effectiveness

The evaluation of psychosocial services in Albanian community centers highlights varying degrees of success across different developmental domains, often reflecting the specific intervention types used:

- **Communication and Social Skills:** Interventions focused on social communication deficits show suggestive evidence of effectiveness, particularly in preschool populations. This is consistent with findings by Turner-Brown et al. (2008), who reported significant improvements in theory of mind skills following social cognition and interaction training.
- **Behavioral Support:** Local behavioral interventions show promising results in reducing disruptive behaviors and improving adaptive skills. These findings align with the meta-analytic evidence provided by McClannahan, MacDuff, and Krantz (2002), which supports the

efficacy of behavior analysis for targeting functional skills in individuals with autism.

- **Autonomy and Daily Living:** Structured daily activities in Albanian centers are perceived to support functional skill development. Odom et al. (2010) similarly emphasize that comprehensive treatment models are critical for addressing functional needs across the lifespan.
- **Quality of Life:** Perceptions from families suggest that center-based support improves the overall wellbeing of young. This mirrors the results of García-Villamizar and Dattilo (2010), who found that leisure programs significantly increase quality of life and reduce stress.

4.2 Identified Support Gaps

Despite the perceived effectiveness, critical gaps in the Albanian service landscape hinder optimal outcomes:

- **Limited Multidisciplinary Staff:** There is a persistent shortage of specialized professionals, such as psychologists and developmental therapists, which restricts the quality of implementation. This reflects the "limited multidisciplinary staff" identified as a primary barrier to service quality in Albania.
- **Insufficient Resources:** Community centers often lack the specialized materials and technology-mediated tools needed for modern interventions. Authors such as Golan and Baron-Cohen (2006) have shown that computer-based training is highly effective for emotion recognition, yet such resources remain scarce in the Albanian framework.
- **Regional Availability:** Services remain unevenly distributed, with a high concentration in urban areas and a severe lack of specialized care in rural regions. This creates an environment where accessibility is determined by location rather than by the specific needs of the child.

4.3 Coordination Issues

A significant finding of this study is the presence of "weak coordination" between key institutional stakeholders:

- **Institutional Fragmentation:** There is a lack of formal referral and communication protocols between community centers, schools, and health services. Thomas et al. (2007) identify that such coordination is essential for families to navigate the complex service landscape effectively.
- **Educational Disconnect:** The disconnect between community-based services and schools often prevents the successful translation of functional skills into inclusive classroom settings.

- **Health Synergy Gaps:** The transition from clinical diagnosis to community-based psychosocial support is often delayed due to the weak integration between health services and community facilities. Shattuck et al. (2011) have noted that these gaps in service use are particularly concerning as young adults transition out of mandated education systems.

4. Discussion

The regional disparity in service availability in Albania creates a significant inequality in accessibility for young with ASD. Specialized care is heavily concentrated in urban hubs like Tirana, while rural and peripheral regions suffer from a severe lack of resources. This reflects the "uneven distribution" of specialized care identified in the Albanian context, where geographical location dictates the quality of support more than the child's specific needs. When comparing this to international contexts, Ganz (2007) and Shattuck et al. (2011) highlight that the lack of accessible services during transition periods results in a high societal cost and lost productivity. While authors like Trepagnier et al. (2011) and Golan and Baron-Cohen (2006) demonstrate that technology-mediated interventions can bridge gaps by providing remote social cognition training, the current Albanian framework lacks the infrastructure to implement such specialized digital solutions in rural areas. Consequently, young in peripheral Albanian regions face a higher risk of being excluded from the "early intervention" pathways that are crucial for long-term development. Evaluating Albanian services through an inclusion-oriented lens reveals a tension between short-term therapy and long-term developmental outcomes. Current services in Albanian community centers are often perceived as providing therapy-only models rather than pathways to social integration. This stands in contrast to the findings of Seltzer et al. (2004) and Levy and Perry (2011), who argue that the trajectory of development in adolescents and adults with autism depends on moving toward a social/developmental model focused on autonomy. In Albania, the "weak coordination" between centers, schools, and health services suggests that the functional skills targeted in community settings are not being reinforced in inclusive educational environments. Unlike the outcomes reported by García-Villamisar and Dattilo (2010), where leisure programs directly improved the quality of life and reduced stress, Albanian interventions often remain isolated, failing to foster the "social participation and integration" required for a successful transition to adulthood. The identified support gaps in Albania, such as the limited multidisciplinary staff, are directly correlated with the lack of sustainable public investment. Ganz (2007) estimates the lifetime per capita societal cost of autism at \$3.2

million, emphasizing that adult care and lost productivity are the largest contributors to this cost. However, Albanian community centers struggle with "insufficient resources," which limits the quality and intensity of interventions. This resource gap is further evidenced by the "weak empirical evidence" supporting local psychosocial interventions compared to the robust meta-analytic evidence available for global practices like EIBI or SSG. As noted by Gerhardt and Lainer (2011), a lack of specialized services for adolescents and adults creates a "crisis on the horizon." In Albania, this crisis is exacerbated because the lack of funding prevents the development of standardized professional protocols and inter-institutional collaboration, which authors like Thomas et al. (2007) identify as essential for families to navigate the complex ASD service landscape.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study underscore that while community centers in Albania provide essential psychosocial services, there is a significant discrepancy between local implementation and international best practices. While services like communication training and behavioral support are perceived as effective, their impact is restricted by the "weak coordination" between centers, schools, and health services. This lack of synergy prevents young with ASD from successfully transitioning their learned skills into inclusive environments. Furthermore, the concentration of services in urban areas creates a barrier to equity, leaving young in rural regions with limited access to specialized care. When comparing these findings to the broader literature, it is evident that Albania is facing a "crisis on the horizon" similar to that described by Gerhardt and Lainer (2011), where the needs of individuals with autism are not being met as they approach adulthood. Unlike the robust evidence found in meta-analyses for interventions such as Social Skills Groups (SSG) and Early Intensive Behavioral Interventions (EIBI) discussed by Gosling et al. (2022), the Albanian context lacks the multidisciplinary staff and sustainable investment necessary to achieve high-level effectiveness.

6. Recommendations

To improve the reach and impact of psychosocial services in Albania, the following actions are recommended:

- **Strengthen Inter-Institutional Coordination:** Establish formal, legally mandated protocols for communication and referrals between community centers, the school system, and primary health services to ensure continuous support for families and young. Thomas, Morrissey,

and McLaurin (2007) identify that such coordination is essential for families to navigate the complex service landscape effectively.

- **Enhance Professional Standards:** Implement mandatory, standardized training for multidisciplinary staff, focusing on evidence-based practices such as the Frankfurt Social Skills Training or face expertise training identified by Herbrecht et al. (2009) and Faja et al. (2011).
- **Increase Sustainable Public Investment:** Prioritize long-term funding to reduce regional disparities and provide centers with the resources needed for technology-mediated interventions, which can help bridge the gap in service accessibility between urban and rural areas. As noted by Ganz (2007), adult care and lost productivity are the largest contributors to the high societal cost of autism, making early investment a financial necessity.
- **Foster Inclusion-Oriented Outcomes:** Shift the focus of community centers from short-term therapy models toward broader developmental outcomes such as autonomy and social integration, as advocated by Seltzer et al. (2004) and García-Villamizar and Dattilo (2010).
- **Develop a Systematic Evidence Base:** Invest in national research to conduct rigorous, data-driven evaluations of local services, addressing the "lack of systematic evidence" that currently hinders clinical decision-making and public policy.

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Young People's Lived Experiences of Suicide and Self-Harm: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract: Suicide represents a leading cause of death among young people and remains a major public health concern worldwide. While existing research has identified various risk and protective factors associated with youth suicide, less attention has been given to how young people themselves make sense of suicidal distress and self-harm. Using a qualitative case study design and reflexive thematic analysis, this study explores the lived experiences of four young people aged 13–26 from Tetovo, North Macedonia. The analysis draws on clinical case material from counseling practice to examine participants’ meaning-making processes related to suicidal thoughts, self-harm, and suicide attempts. Findings highlight the complex and multidimensional nature of suicidal experiences, shaped by the interaction of individual, familial, social and psychological factors. The study underscores the importance of context-sensitive and multidimensional approaches to youth mental health, emphasizing collaboration between mental health services, families, and community institutions to support young people’s social well-being and suicide prevention efforts.

Keywords: *Youth mental health; Suicide; Self-harm; Qualitative case study; Lived experience.*

1. Introduction

Every year 727 000 people take their own life and there are many more people who make suicide attempts (World Health Organization, 2021). Although extensive research has been conducted on the contributory and protective factors influencing young people's suicidal distress (Grimmond, Kornhaberid, Visentinid, & Cleary, 2019; Hawton et al., 2012), less research has explored how young people themselves experience and make sense of self-harm and suicide (Gilmour, Ring, & Maxwell, 2019). Emerging literature has begun to explore how young people can conceptualise suicide and self-harm as self-

destructive shame responses to social and structural stigma (McDermott & Roen, 2016) and furthermore suggest that such experiences of stigma and shame can produce barriers to seeking help and support (Chandler, 2017; Gilmour et al., 2019).

There is also a critical gap in qualitative research that centers young people’s voices, particularly in how they interpret their distress, navigate help-seeking, and make meaning of their experiences within educational, familial, social, and increasingly digital contexts. Policies and interventions are often based on adult-centric frameworks that may not reflect young people’s perspectives or the complex socio-digital environments they inhabit. Without grounding strategies in young people’s lived realities, prevention and intervention efforts risk being misaligned and less effective.

Aligned with the theme —Mental Health, Youth and Social Well-Being, the study highlights how digital spaces shape young people’s distress, identity formation, and help-seeking. It shows how online environments can function both as sites of vulnerability and as spaces of connection and support. By centering youth voices, the research contributes to developing more responsive, contextually grounded approaches to mental health and social well-being in contemporary digital society.

2. Literature Review

Self-harm is considered to be an increasing concern amongst adolescents (Townsend, 2014), with studies suggesting that self-harm may be associated with an increased likelihood of future suicide attempts (Whitlock et al., 2013). However, a growing body of evidence has suggested that self-harm can also be understood as a tool for emotional regulation, allowing individuals to cope with distress (Paul, Tsypes, Eidlitz, Ernhout, & Whitlock, 2015); self-soothe and regain control over over-whelming emotions (Chandler, 2016b); and care for one's self (Chandler & Simopoulou, 2020). Further to this, it has been reported that people experiencing disassociation can find that self-harm disrupts dissociative feelings, acting as a sensation-seeking practice when feeling numb (Paul et al., 2015) and as a grounding technique to reconnect the mind with the body (Hunt, Morrow, & McGuire, 2020).

Whilst suicidal thoughts and attempts have been given much attention, qualitative explorations of suicidal feelings are lacking, with complex emotions tending to be reduced to quantifiable measures (Burkitt, 2014). Some theoretical positions have been offered: Kovacs & Beck's (1977) ‘internal struggle hypothesis’ for example, describes how suicidal distress can be experienced as a moment-to-moment internal conflict between wanting to live

and wanting to die (Bergmans, Gordon, & Eynan, 2017). Others have suggested that at times of suicidal crisis, individuals may experience a type of tunnel vision, termed a ‘suicidal mode’, in which all other thoughts and feelings are restricted as the individual becomes increasingly focussed on suicide (Brüderl et al., 2018). There is, however, a lack of research exploring the ways in which young people who feel suicidal make sense of their own experiences of suicidal distress (Gilmour et al., 2019).

This gap may in part be due to concerns that talking about suicide could increase or intensify young people's suicidal feelings (Berman & Silverman, 2017), although evidence suggests that this is not the case, at least amongst adult populations (Blades, Stritzke, Page, & Brown, 2018; Polihronis, Cloutier, Kaur, Skinner, & Cappelli, 2020), and indeed that participating in qualitative suicide research can have a cathartic effect (Biddle et al., 2013). Alternatively, the lack of in-depth discussion of suicidal distress may be due to suicide-related stigma, which can position people experiencing suicidal distress as ‘sinful’, ‘dangerous’, ‘attention-seeking’, ‘selfish’ and ‘contagious’ (Oexle et al., 2019), rendering it a topic that can be difficult to talk about.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, aiming to explore participants' subjective experiences as constructed within the therapeutic context. The design was exploratory in nature, seeking to generate in-depth understanding rather than generalisable findings. Data for this research were derived from the researcher's session notes, collected with participants' informed consent. All session notes were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), following Braun and Clarke's six phases of RTA. The process was supported by reflexive journaling to further develop the analytic lens and provide opportunities for reflection (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022).

This study employed purposive sampling, selecting participants based on their direct relevance to the research focus. All four participants were clients at the counselling centre where the researcher is employed. Inclusion criteria required participants to have experienced suicidal ideation and/or suicide attempts, ensuring that the sample was information-rich in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 26 years. All four participants identified as female; no male clients met the inclusion criteria during the data collection period. The demographic characteristics of the sample is summarized in Table 1.

All participants and their parents were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity will be used to protect identities, and all data will be securely stored and used solely for academic research purposes.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 4)

Characteristic	Category	n
Gender	Female	4
	Male	0
Age	13	2
	17	1
	26	1
Suicide attempts methods	Taking pills	1
	Self-harm	1
	Visualising hanging	1
	Attempt to jump	1

3. Results, Findings and Discussion

Findings are organized across three interrelated themes: personal, family, and social factors. Across all themes, participants’ narratives reveal the relational and contextual nature of suicidal distress.

Personal Factors

Feeling alone and experiencing lonely situations during adolescence can be favourable for the development of their personality, but on many occasions this loneliness becomes social isolation, because during this stage feelings of loneliness present a high frequency in affective deficiencies. And poor significant links with the people around them, consequently the adolescent population does not develop the necessary skills to interact socially, and face changing situations, which is

why social isolation is a powerful, but little known risk factor which is associated with suicidal ideation. All four participants expressed feelings of loneliness despite being surrounded by others. One participant described engaging in self-harm as a means of counteracting emotional numbness:

“I often feel that I am different from my friends... I sit alone and think, but I can’t feel anything, and in order to feel anything I have cut myself.”

Low self-esteem, hopelessness, and sadness are other risk factors associated with loneliness (Böttcher & Garay, 2021). Adolescents with low self-esteem often exhibit pervasive pessimism, self-doubt, indecisiveness, diminished self-worth, and an exaggerated fear of failure. Such cognitive and emotional

patterns may intensify vulnerability to suicidal ideation, as suicide can come to be perceived as a definitive solution to temporary yet overwhelming distress (González et al., 2020).

These dynamics were evident in participants' narratives. They articulated deeply internalized negative self-perceptions, self-blame, and feelings of worthlessness. Suicidal ideation was frequently framed as an escape from ongoing emotional pain. One participant explained:

“I don't think I'm worth anything; I see myself as trash, and that's how I perceive myself. Why live? I only tire others around me. I often have thoughts of hanging myself, and I think about how I would have done it, but then I feel sorry for my sisters and mother”.

These accounts illustrate how intrapersonal distress is closely intertwined with relational experiences and perceived burdensomeness.

Family factors

Family environments played a central role in shaping participants' distress. Narratives reflected both emotional absence and overt dysfunction, highlighting the family as a critical relational context in the development or mitigation of suicidal vulnerability.

Participants described *lack of supportive family relationships, emotional distance, limited communication*, and in one case harsh or physically punitive parenting. Even where parents were described as —good people,‖ emotional unavailability contributed to feelings of isolation and inability to seek support. One participant reflected:

“Parents are strict because they think it helps them control their children, but it actually has the opposite effect. My parents have beaten me for trivial reasons, and now they have changed and regretted it, but the damage can't be undone.”

Another shared: *“My father and mother are good people, but emotionally distant and I have never felt close enough to speak freely with them”.*

Such dynamics fostered environments in which emotional needs remained unacknowledged, intensifying vulnerability during periods of crisis.

In some cases, *family systems were dysfunctional* characterized by conflict, substance misuse, financial instability, and chronic stress. These conditions heightened adolescents' feelings of insecurity, helplessness, and entrapment. One participant described the impact of parental alcohol misuse and economic instability:

“My dad is an alcoholic. He works for a while and then spends all his money on drinking. He doesn't care if we have food to eat or if the bills are paid. My mother cannot leave or divorce him due to her fear of how we will survive on our own”.

These findings underscore how structural and relational instability within the family can compound personal distress.

Social factor

Race, socioeconomic status, stigma, and bullying are important social risk factors that contribute to adolescent suicide-related behaviors.

Participants’ experiences were also shaped by broader social and structural pressures, including socioeconomic hardship, toxic work environments and bullying. Economic strain was described as an ongoing stressor affecting both adolescents and their families. One participant described the psychological burden of workplace toxicity:

—The work environment is very toxic, everyone is yelling, and I can't stand it, but I have no choice but to work.

Adolescents spend the majority of their time in school, which serves as a primary setting for their learning and development. While the school environment offers valuable opportunities for peer interaction, it also entails specific group risks such as bullying. Moreover, there is a certain association between bullying and the risk of adolescent suicide. As one participant reflected:

“I’ve always been bullied for the way I look, leading me to trust the wrong people who have only been nice to benefit themselves”.

These accounts illustrate how social marginalization and interpersonal victimization can amplify psychological vulnerability during adolescence.

Across narratives, suicidal distress did not emerge as the result of a single factor, but rather as a complex interplay of personal vulnerability, relational disconnection, family instability, and social adversity. Consistent with existing literature (Böttcher & Garay, 2021; González et al., 2020), low self-esteem, hopelessness, loneliness, and emotional dysregulation emerged as prominent personal risk factors. However, participants’ accounts suggest that these intrapersonal experiences were not isolated psychological traits, but were deeply embedded in relational environments marked by disconnection and invalidation. Importantly, suicidal ideation was often described as a perceived solution to overwhelming distress rather than solely a desire to die. This framing underscores the need to conceptualize suicidal thoughts as expressions of unmet emotional needs and relational ruptures. As in previous studies (Ortiz et al. 2019), family dynamics emerged as central to participants’ experiences. Emotional distance, harsh parenting, conflict, substance misuse, and economic strain contributed to environments in which adolescents felt unheard, unsupported, or unsafe. These findings align with ecological and family systems perspectives, which emphasize the family as a primary context for emotional regulation, identity formation, and help-seeking behaviors. Notably, even in cases where parents were described as —good, emotional

unavailability limited open communication about distress. This suggests that risk does not only emerge from overt dysfunction but also from subtle relational gaps that restrict emotional expression. These findings highlight the importance of family-based and relationally oriented interventions that move beyond individual-level symptom management and address patterns of communication, emotional responsiveness, and systemic stressors.

Beyond the family, broader social contexts—including bullying (Sánchez, 2018), toxic work environments, stigma, and socioeconomic hardship—significantly shaped participants’ distress. School settings were described as spaces of both socialization and victimization, with bullying contributing to damaged self-concept and mistrust. Economic strain and unstable work conditions added chronic stress, reinforcing feelings of powerlessness. These accounts emphasize that suicidal distress cannot be fully understood without acknowledging structural and societal influences.

4. Limitations and Conclusions

First, although this paper reports on a small sample, participants were purposively selected, facilitating an in-depth, narrative analysis to facilitate enhanced understanding of this under-researched topic (Braun & Clarke, 2020; Smith, 2017). Second, as all participants in this study, are female, future research may wish to explore lived experiences of suicidal distress amongst male participants. Finally, the findings are context-specific and cannot be generalized. Key factors such as the role of family, social norms related to mental health, and access to supportive resources (e.g., counseling or treatment services) can vary significantly, influencing the interpretation and applicability of results.

This study extends current understandings of youth suicidal distress, offering insights into the lived experiences of young people's suicidal feelings, exploring opportunities for early clinical intervention and suicide prevention. This study is revealing the complex, multifactorial, and dynamic nature of adolescent suicidality. The findings demonstrated that suicide attempts in adolescents often arise from the cumulative impact of numerous antecedents, ranging from psychological distress and familial dysfunction to social rejection and emotional crises. These pressures can create a state of mental and emotional overload, prompting adolescents to perceive suicide as the only escape. Given these findings, suicide prevention strategies must adopt a holistic and adolescent-centered framework. This includes not only addressing individual vulnerabilities but also strengthening protective factors, improving parent-child relationships, mitigating harmful online influences, and reducing access to potentially lethal means, including unauthorized access to

prescription drugs. Educational interventions for parents, teachers, and adolescents themselves are essential for identifying warning signs and providing timely support. Ultimately, centering adolescent voices through qualitative research contributes unique insights that can inform culturally sensitive, developmentally appropriate, and evidence-based mental health policies and interventions.

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The Role of Positive Identity in Preventing and Reducing Depressive Symptoms among Youth: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: Depression among adolescents and young adults has become a major global public health concern, with increasing prevalence and earlier onset across cultures.

Protective factors that buffer vulnerability to depressive symptoms are therefore of substantial theoretical and practical importance. One such protective factor is positive identity, conceptualized within developmental and positive psychology frameworks as a coherent, valued, and purposeful sense of self. This systematic literature review synthesizes empirical research examining the role of positive identity in preventing and reducing depressive symptoms among youth. Following PRISMA guidelines, peer-reviewed studies published between 2000 and 2025 were retrieved from Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science using keywords related to positive identity, self-concept, positive youth development, and adolescent depression. A total of 72 articles met inclusion criteria.

Findings consistently demonstrate a negative association between positive identity constructs (e.g., self-esteem, identity commitment, purpose in life, and positive youth development assets) and depressive symptoms. Longitudinal evidence suggests that positive identity predicts lower subsequent depression, whereas reverse effects are weaker or nonsignificant. Mechanisms include enhanced emotion regulation, resilience, social connectedness, and intrinsic motivation.

The review highlights conceptual heterogeneity in identity operationalization and calls for standardized measurement and experimental intervention research. Implications for educational and community-based mental health prevention programs are discussed.

Keywords: *Positive identity, adolescent depression, positive youth development, self-concept, resilience, mental health prevention.*

1. Introduction

Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health disorders among adolescents and young adults worldwide (World Health Organization, 2023). Epidemiological evidence indicates that approximately 13–20% of adolescents experience clinically significant depressive symptoms before adulthood (Polanczyk et al., 2015; WHO, 2023). Depression during youth is associated with academic failure, substance misuse, interpersonal difficulties, and increased suicide risk (Thapar et al., 2012).

Given the developmental sensitivity of adolescence, identifying protective psychological resources is critical. One such resource is positive identity, broadly defined as a coherent, confident, and purposeful sense of self that integrates personal values, commitments, and competencies (Erikson, 1968; Lerner et al., 2005). Identity formation is a central developmental task of adolescence (Erikson, 1968), and disruptions in identity processes have been linked to internalizing disorders, including depression (Meeus, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2011).

Within the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, positive identity is conceptualized as a developmental asset that promotes thriving and psychological well-being (Lerner et al., 2005). PYD emphasizes strengths such as competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring—the “5 Cs”—which are hypothesized to protect against psychopathology (Lerner et al., 2015).

Meta-analytic research has shown that aspects of selfhood—such as self-esteem and self-concept clarity—are moderately negatively associated with depressive symptoms (Sowislo & Orth, 2013; van Tuijl et al., 2014). However, research specifically integrating broader identity constructs within prevention frameworks remains fragmented.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Positive Identity

The concept of identity has long been central to developmental psychology. Erikson (1968) conceptualized identity formation as the primary psychosocial task of adolescence, emphasizing the integration of personal values, beliefs, and goals into a coherent sense of self. Failure to achieve identity coherence may result in role confusion and psychological distress. Subsequent empirical models, such as Marcia’s (1966) identity status paradigm, operationalized identity development through processes of exploration and commitment, identifying four identity statuses: achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion. Research consistently shows that identity diffusion and prolonged

moratorium are associated with higher internalizing symptoms, including depression (Meeus, 2011).

More contemporary frameworks conceptualize identity within strengths-based developmental models. The Positive Youth Development (PYD) perspective proposes that youth thrive when internal assets and external supports interact synergistically (Lerner et al., 2005). Within this framework, positive identity reflects confidence, self-worth, and a stable sense of personal values. Rather than focusing on risk reduction alone, PYD emphasizes the cultivation of developmental assets that buffer psychological vulnerability.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) further contributes to understanding identity’s protective role. According to SDT, identity coherence is supported when the psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. When these needs are met, individuals develop an integrated and self-endorsed identity structure, which promotes psychological well-being and reduces depressive symptomatology.

Together, these frameworks suggest that positive identity is not merely the absence of confusion, but an active, integrated, and valued self-concept that may protect against emotional disorders.

2.2 Identity Development and Depression in Adolescence

Adolescence represents a sensitive developmental period marked by biological, cognitive, and social transitions. It is also the peak onset period for depressive disorders (Thapar et al., 2012). Identity development during this stage is closely intertwined with emotional adjustment.

Longitudinal research indicates that identity confusion predicts increases in depressive symptoms over time (Steiger et al., 2014). Youth who struggle to form stable commitments may experience uncertainty, low self-worth, and rumination—cognitive processes strongly linked to depression.

Conversely, identity achievement—characterized by exploration followed by commitment—has been associated with lower depressive symptom levels (Crocetti et al., 2008). Meeus (2011) argued that identity commitment functions as a psychological anchor, stabilizing self-perceptions and reducing vulnerability to emotional instability.

Meta-analytic findings reinforce this association. Sowislo and Orth (2013) demonstrated that low self-esteem significantly predicts later depression, with stronger effects in adolescence than adulthood. Importantly, the predictive pathway from low self-esteem to depression was stronger than the reverse, suggesting directionality.

Similarly, van Tuijl et al. (2014) found that self-concept clarity—defined as the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly defined and stable—was negatively related to depressive symptoms across adolescent samples.

Thus, identity coherence and positive self-evaluation appear to serve as psychological buffers against depressive symptom development.

2.3 Positive Youth Development and Mental Health Outcomes

The PYD framework provides empirical evidence linking positive identity assets with lower internalizing problems. Lerner et al. (2015) emphasized that the “5 Cs”—competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring—predict thriving outcomes and lower risk behaviors.

Chi et al. (2020), in a three-year longitudinal study of Chinese adolescents, found that higher PYD scores predicted decreases in depressive symptoms over time. Notably, depressive symptoms did not significantly predict later PYD levels, suggesting that developmental assets may have a protective rather than reactive function. Cross-cultural studies further support these findings. Research in European and Latin American youth samples indicates that positive identity and confidence dimensions within PYD models significantly predict psychological well-being and lower depressive symptomatology (Pérez-Díaz et al., 2022).

Importantly, PYD emphasizes contextual supports (family, school, community) in shaping identity. This ecological perspective suggests that preventive interventions should focus not only on individual traits but also on relational environments that foster positive self-development.

2.4 Mechanisms Linking Positive Identity to Depression Prevention

Several theoretical and empirical pathways explain how positive identity reduces depressive vulnerability.

2.4.1 Emotion Regulation

Identity coherence enhances emotional stability by reducing internal conflict. Compas et al. (2017) noted that adolescents with stronger self-structure demonstrate more adaptive coping strategies and less maladaptive rumination, both protective against depression.

2.4.2 Cognitive Appraisal and Self-Worth

Depression is strongly associated with negative self-schemas (Beck, 1967). A positive identity may counteract maladaptive cognitive distortions by promoting stable self-worth and realistic self-evaluation (Orth et al., 2008).

2.4.3 Resilience and Stress Buffering

Masten (2014) conceptualized resilience as “ordinary magic,” emphasizing normative developmental processes. Identity commitment may function as a resilience factor by providing meaning and direction during stress exposure.

2.4.4 Purpose in Life

Purpose has been identified as a dimension of identity capital (Damon et al., 2003). Adolescents who perceive their lives as meaningful show lower depressive symptoms and greater life satisfaction (Burrow & Hill, 2011).

3. Results

From the 72 studies initially included in the broader screening, 31 studies specifically conceptualized and measured positive identity either as a distinct construct or as a clearly defined subdimension within structured developmental frameworks. These studies included 18 cross-sectional designs, 10 longitudinal studies, and 3 intervention-based investigations. Samples ranged from early adolescence (ages 11–14) to emerging adulthood (ages 18–25), with cultural representation across North America, Europe, East Asia, and Latin America.

Positive identity was operationalized in three primary ways across studies:

1. As a distinct subscale within Positive Youth Development (PYD) models (e.g., confidence, positive identity assets),
2. Through identity commitment and integration measures, and
3. Through purpose-driven or value-integrated identity constructs.

3.1 Positive Identity within Positive Youth Development Frameworks

Several studies conceptualized positive identity as a developmental asset embedded within the PYD framework. In this model, positive identity reflects confidence, stable values, and a sense of self-worth integrated into broader relational systems (Lerner et al., 2005).

Chi et al. (2020), in a three-year cross-lagged panel study involving 1,300 Chinese adolescents, found that higher levels of positive youth development — particularly the confidence and character components closely linked to positive identity — significantly predicted lower depressive symptoms over time. Importantly, the cross-lagged analysis demonstrated that depressive symptoms did not significantly predict subsequent declines in positive identity dimensions, suggesting a directional protective effect.

Similarly, Pérez-Díaz et al. (2022), examining Chilean adolescents, found that positive identity predicted psychological well-being both directly and indirectly through mediators such as confidence and character. Although depressive symptoms were not the primary outcome variable, the negative association between positive identity and internalizing symptom indicators was significant.

Lerner et al. (2015) reported that adolescents scoring high on identity-related PYD dimensions exhibited lower levels of emotional distress and internalizing problems. Their longitudinal data indicated that identity confidence contributed uniquely to psychological adjustment beyond other contextual variables.

Across these PYD-based studies, positive identity consistently functioned as a protective developmental asset, reducing vulnerability to depressive symptomatology.

3.2 Identity Commitment and Coherence as Indicators of Positive Identity

Beyond PYD frameworks, several studies examined positive identity through identity commitment and coherence models.

Crocetti et al. (2008) validated a three-dimensional identity process model (commitment, in-depth exploration, reconsideration of commitment). Adolescents classified as having high commitment and low reconsideration — indicative of identity achievement — reported significantly lower depressive symptoms compared to those in diffusion status.

Meeus (2011), in a review of longitudinal identity research, concluded that identity commitment is consistently associated with psychological adjustment, whereas identity diffusion predicts increases in internalizing problems. He emphasized that stable commitments provide emotional anchoring during adolescence.

Steiger et al. (2014) found that adolescents with higher identity diffusion showed greater increases in depressive symptoms over time. Importantly, identity commitment was associated with reductions in depressive trajectories across developmental stages.

Schwartz et al. (2011) examined identity disturbance and found that adolescents reporting higher identity confusion exhibited significantly elevated depressive symptom severity, even after controlling for demographic factors. Collectively, these findings suggest that identity coherence and commitment — central features of positive identity — function as protective mechanisms, whereas identity diffusion increases depression risk.

3.3 Purpose and Value-Integrated Identity

Purpose-driven identity was another recurring dimension of positive identity across studies. Damon et al. (2003) conceptualized purpose as a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something meaningful to the self and beyond the self. Adolescents reporting strong life purpose demonstrated greater psychological adjustment.

Burrow and Hill (2011) found that purpose in life was negatively associated with depressive symptoms in adolescents and emerging adults. Participants

with higher purpose levels reported greater emotional stability and lower internalizing symptom scores.

Purpose appears to operate as an organizing identity structure, reducing existential uncertainty and promoting psychological resilience.

3.4 Longitudinal Evidence of Directionality

Longitudinal studies provided stronger evidence regarding causal direction.

Orth et al. (2008), while primarily focused on self-esteem, demonstrated that positive self-evaluative identity predicted subsequent reductions in depressive symptoms. Importantly, depression did not consistently predict identity deterioration, supporting a vulnerability rather than scar model.

Chi et al. (2020) provided cross-lagged evidence that identity-related PYD dimensions prospectively predicted lower depression, reinforcing identity's preventive function. Steiger et al. (2014) confirmed that identity diffusion predicted depressive increases across adolescence into adulthood.

Taken together, longitudinal findings consistently support the hypothesis that positive identity precedes and reduces depressive symptoms rather than merely co-occurring with them.

3.5 Cross-Cultural Consistency

Studies conducted in China (Chi et al., 2020), Chile (Pérez-Díaz et al., 2022), the United States (Lerner et al., 2015), and European contexts (Crocetti et al., 2008; Meeus, 2011) revealed similar protective patterns.

Despite cultural variation in identity expression, the stabilizing and protective role of positive identity appears consistent across socio-cultural contexts.

4. Discussion

The present review aimed to synthesize empirical evidence regarding the role of positive identity in preventing and reducing depressive symptoms among youth. Across cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, positive identity consistently emerged as a significant protective factor against depressive symptomatology. The findings indicate that adolescents and emerging adults who demonstrate coherent identity commitments, stable self-definition, and purpose-oriented self-structures report lower levels of depressive symptoms and exhibit reduced vulnerability over time.

4.1 Positive Identity as a Protective Developmental Asset

The findings align with Erikson's (1968) theoretical proposition that identity formation constitutes the central psychosocial task of adolescence. Successful identity resolution provides coherence, direction, and psychological stability.

In contrast, identity confusion or diffusion increases emotional instability and vulnerability to internalizing disorders (Meeus, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2011). Longitudinal evidence reviewed (e.g., Chi et al., 2020; Steiger et al., 2014) suggests that positive identity precedes reductions in depressive symptoms rather than merely co-occurring with them. This supports the vulnerability model (Orth et al., 2008; Sowislo & Orth, 2013), in which deficits in identity-related constructs increase susceptibility to depression.

Identity commitment appears particularly protective. Adolescents who have explored alternatives and established stable commitments demonstrate lower rumination, greater emotional regulation capacity, and stronger resilience (Crocetti et al., 2008). Identity coherence may reduce existential uncertainty, a known contributor to depressive cognitions.

4.2 Mechanisms Linking Positive Identity to Reduced Depression

Several mechanisms explain how positive identity reduces depressive vulnerability:

1. *Cognitive Stability*: Depression is characterized by negative self-schemas and hopeless cognitive patterns (Beck, 1967). A coherent positive identity provides stable self-evaluations that counteract maladaptive cognitive distortions. Youth with integrated self-concepts may interpret stressors as situational rather than as reflections of global self-deficiency.

2. *Emotional Regulation*: Adolescents with stronger identity commitments show more adaptive coping strategies and lower levels of maladaptive rumination (Compas et al., 2017). Emotional regulation capacities mediate the relationship between identity clarity and depressive symptoms.

3. *Purpose and Meaning*

Purpose-oriented identity structures promote psychological resilience by providing meaning and long-term orientation (Damon et al., 2003; Burrow & Hill, 2011). Purpose reduces feelings of emptiness and hopelessness—core features of depressive symptomatology.

4. *Satisfaction of Basic Psychological Needs*: Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) posits that autonomy, competence, and relatedness foster integrated identity development. When these needs are satisfied, individuals are less prone to internalizing symptoms.

Collectively, these mechanisms suggest that positive identity functions not only as a correlate but as a developmental resource embedded within cognitive, emotional, and motivational systems.

4.3 Educational and Preventive Implications

Given the protective role of positive identity, educational systems represent a critical context for preventive intervention. School-based programs that foster

self-reflection, value clarification, goal-setting, and relational belonging may indirectly reduce depressive risk. Positive Youth Development frameworks (Lerner et al., 2005) emphasize strengths-based programming rather than risk-only approaches. Social-emotional learning (SEL) interventions that promote self-awareness and identity exploration have shown modest reductions in internalizing symptoms (Compas et al., 2017).

- Preventive strategies should include:
- Structured identity exploration activities
- Mentorship programs supporting value integration
- Career and purpose-oriented counseling
- Classroom climates promoting autonomy and belonging

Such interventions may strengthen identity coherence and consequently buffer depressive vulnerability.

4.4 Cross-Cultural Considerations

Evidence from China (Chi et al., 2020), Chile (Pérez-Díaz et al., 2022), Europe (Crocetti et al., 2008), and North America (Lerner et al., 2015) suggests cross-cultural robustness of the identity–depression relationship. However, cultural differences in identity formation processes warrant further investigation, particularly in collectivist versus individualist contexts.

Future research should examine whether communal identity dimensions (e.g., relational identity) function similarly as protective factors.

4.5 Limitations of the Current Literature

Despite consistent findings, several limitations persist:

- Conceptual heterogeneity in defining positive identity.
- Overreliance on self-report measures.
- Limited randomized controlled trials.
- Underrepresentation of low-income and marginalized populations.
- Addressing these limitations requires longitudinal multi-method designs and experimental interventions specifically targeting identity development.

5. Conclusion

This review demonstrates that positive identity constitutes a robust protective factor against depressive symptoms among youth. Across diverse cultural contexts and methodological designs, adolescents who exhibit coherent identity commitments, purpose-driven self-structures, and integrated value systems show lower depressive symptom levels and reduced vulnerability

over time. Longitudinal findings indicate that positive identity predicts subsequent decreases in depressive symptoms, supporting its role as a preventive developmental asset rather than merely a correlational marker.

Strengthening positive identity through educational, familial, and community-based interventions may represent a promising strategy for reducing the global burden of youth depression. Future research should prioritize experimental designs to test identity-focused preventive programs and clarify underlying mediational mechanisms. Positive identity is not merely a developmental milestone—it is a psychological resource that safeguards mental health during one of the most vulnerable stages of human development.

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Emotional regulation as an emotional intelligence skill supporting student well-being in language learning

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of digitally supported language learning has transformed patterns of student engagement across face-to-face and online environments. This study investigates the relationship between students' psychological well-being and their participation in English skills courses conducted in a blended format. Using a quantitative correlational design, the research examined associations between well-being and engagement in both classroom activities and interaction on the Google Classroom platform. Participants were 42 undergraduate students enrolled in Skills 1 and Skills 3 courses at a university. Well-being was measured using the well-being factor of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), operationalized through three dimensions: mood, self-esteem, and happiness. Participation was assessed through systematic observation of in-class interaction and analysis of online activity indicators, including assignment submission, task completion, and engagement with course materials.

Pearson correlation analyses revealed strong positive relationships among participation indicators, suggesting consistent engagement across different course activities. Well-being showed significant positive correlations with presentation performance and written task engagement, whereas its association with general classroom participation was not statistically significant. These findings provide partial support for the hypothesis that higher well-being is associated with increased engagement, particularly in structured and performance-based tasks.

The results highlight the role of psychological well-being as a contributing factor to participation in blended language learning environments. Students

with higher levels of optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction may be more inclined to engage in tasks requiring preparation and sustained effort. Implications for language teaching include integrating well-being-sensitive pedagogical practices to support student engagement across both traditional and digital learning contexts.

1. Introduction

Student well-being has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental component of educational quality and effectiveness, particularly within complex and digitally mediated learning environments (Mercer, 2021; Xu & Yang, 2023). In second and foreign language education, well-being plays a crucial role in shaping learners' motivation, persistence, and engagement, as language learning involves not only cognitive processing but also substantial emotional investment. Learners frequently encounter challenges such as communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, identity negotiation, and intercultural adaptation, all of which may influence their willingness to participate actively in classroom activities (Oxford, 2016; Jenkins, 2015).

Contemporary research emphasizes that emotional states directly affect learning behavior. Students experiencing positive psychological conditions tend to demonstrate higher engagement, resilience, and academic performance, whereas those with low well-being may withdraw from interaction, avoid participation, and struggle to sustain attention. Positive psychology perspectives conceptualize well-being not merely as an educational outcome but as a prerequisite for effective learning and meaningful participation (Braunstein et al., 2017; Greenier et al., 2021; Proietti Ergün & Dewaele, 2021; Bajaj & Pande, 2016; Akbari & Khormaiee, 2015). Traditionally, foreign language classrooms were viewed primarily as cognitive spaces focused on linguistic competence. However, this perspective is increasingly considered insufficient for addressing the holistic needs of learners in multicultural and emotionally dynamic contexts. Participation through speaking, collaboration, questioning, and responding is strongly influenced by learners' emotional readiness and self-perception, as emotional processes play a central role in language learning and classroom interaction (Benesch, 2012). Students who feel confident and emotionally secure are more likely to engage actively, whereas those experiencing low self-esteem or negative mood states may limit their involvement despite adequate language proficiency.

Digital Transformation and Participation Across Learning Environments

The rapid digital transformation of education has further reshaped patterns of student engagement. Learning management systems and online platforms such

as Google Classroom now play a central role in organizing instruction, communication, and assessment. These technologies extend participation beyond physical classroom interaction to include online behaviors such as accessing materials, submitting assignments, completing tasks, and interacting with digital content.

While digital tools offer flexibility and accessibility, they also impose increased demands for self-regulation, time management, and autonomous learning. Reduced face-to-face interaction and delayed feedback may contribute to feelings of isolation or disengagement, particularly among students with lower psychological well-being (Kohnke & Moorhouse, 2025). Consequently, participation in contemporary language education occurs across two interconnected contexts: in-class interaction and online engagement. For Generation Z learners, who are highly accustomed to digital communication yet susceptible to cognitive overload and motivational fluctuations, maintaining consistent engagement across these contexts can be challenging. Psychological factors such as optimism, self-confidence, and life satisfaction may therefore play a decisive role in determining participation in both environments.

Well-Being as a Psychological Predictor of Engagement

Well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing individuals' emotional states, self-perceptions, and overall life satisfaction. Research indicates that higher levels of well-being are associated with greater motivation, persistence, and academic engagement, whereas low well-being may lead to avoidance behaviors and reduced effort. Within trait Emotional Intelligence (trait EI) theory, well-being represents a central dimension reflecting individuals' subjective emotional functioning, grounded in foundational models of emotional intelligence that emphasize emotional awareness, regulation, and social functioning (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995).

The Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue) operationalizes well-being through measurable components including positive mood, self-esteem, and happiness (Petrides, 2009). These factors influence how individuals perceive challenges, interact with others, and regulate their learning behavior. In language learning contexts, students with higher self-esteem are more likely to take communicative risks, those with positive mood states tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm and persistence, and individuals reporting higher happiness often exhibit stronger overall engagement. In digital environments, where participation requires independent initiative and sustained motivation, these psychological characteristics may be particularly influential.

Research Gap

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of student well-being, relatively few studies have examined its direct relationship with observable participation across both face-to-face and online learning environments. Existing research often focuses on academic achievement, satisfaction, or emotional experiences without linking specific well-being dimensions to measurable behavioral indicators such as classroom interaction and digital activity. Moreover, studies of technology-mediated learning frequently emphasize technological effectiveness while overlooking the psychological conditions that enable sustained engagement. This gap is particularly significant in language education, where interaction and practice are essential for skill development.

Purpose of the Study

The present study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between students' well-being and their engagement in English skills courses across two complementary contexts: classroom participation and interaction on the Google Classroom platform. Using a quantitative correlational design, well-being was measured through the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), focusing on three dimensions: mood (optimism and emotional state), self-esteem (confidence and self-perception), and happiness (overall life satisfaction).

Participation was operationalized through observable classroom behaviors and measurable online engagement indicators, including assignment submission, task completion, and interaction with course materials. By analyzing correlations between well-being scores and participation variables, the study aimed to determine whether psychological well-being functions as a predictor of engagement across traditional and digitally mediated learning environments. It was hypothesized that students with higher levels of well-being would demonstrate greater active participation in classroom activities and higher engagement on Google Classroom, whereas lower well-being levels would be associated with reduced interaction in both contexts.

Significance of the Study

Understanding the relationship between well-being and participation has important implications for contemporary education. As learning increasingly spans physical and digital environments, educators must consider not only cognitive factors but also the psychological conditions that enable students to engage effectively. Enhancing student well-being may contribute to improved participation, stronger learning outcomes, and more sustainable educational

experiences. By providing empirical evidence on the association between well-being and engagement, this study contributes to the development of supportive, inclusive, and effective language learning environments that address the needs of modern learners.

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between students' psychological well-being and their level of participation in English skills courses across face-to-face and digital learning environments. A quantitative approach was selected because the research aimed to measure variables objectively and determine the strength and direction of statistical relationships between well-being scores and participation indicators. Correlational designs are appropriate for investigating associations among naturally occurring variables without manipulation or intervention.

The design supports the study's objective of determining whether students' well-being is associated with their engagement in classroom interaction and online participation on the Google Classroom platform. The use of standardized measures and numerical data ensures methodological coherence and enables systematic statistical analysis.

Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of 42 undergraduate students enrolled in Skills 1 and Skills 3 English courses at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication, South East European University. These courses focus on developing core language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and involve both classroom interaction and structured online activities delivered through Google Classroom.

A convenience sampling strategy was employed, as participants were selected based on their enrollment in the courses taught during the study period. The sample represents university students engaged in blended language learning environments in which participation occurs across both physical and digital contexts.

Instruments and Procedures

Well-being Measurement

Students' well-being was assessed using the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), a widely used self-report instrument measuring trait emotional intelligence (Petrides, 2009). The study focused on the well-being factor, operationalized through three dimensions:

- Mood-optimism and overall emotional state
- Self-esteem- self-perception and confidence in one's abilities

- Happiness- general life satisfaction

Participants completed the questionnaire during regular class time. Responses were scored according to TEIQue guidelines to obtain individual well-being scores.

Participation Measurement

Student participation was assessed across two contexts: in-class interaction and online engagement.

In-class Participation

Classroom participation was documented through systematic observation of students' involvement in English skills activities, including contributions to discussions, responses to instructor questions, participation in group work, and voluntary interaction with peers and instructors. Observations were conducted throughout the course to capture consistent behavioral patterns.

Google Classroom Interaction

Online engagement was measured using activity indicators recorded on the Google Classroom platform, including assignment submission, task completion rates, access to course materials, and interaction with posted content. These indicators provided objective measures of students' digital participation.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected during the winter semester of 2025. First, students completed the TEIQue questionnaire to assess well-being. Subsequently, participation data were compiled from classroom observations and Google Classroom analytics. Each participant's well-being score was matched with their participation data to enable correlational analysis.

Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical techniques to examine relationships between well-being and participation variables. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize well-being scores and participation levels. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine associations between:

- Overall well-being and in-class participation
- Overall well-being and Google Classroom interaction
- Individual well-being components (Mood, Self-esteem, Happiness) and participation indicators

These analyses enabled testing of the study hypotheses regarding the relationship between well-being and student engagement across learning environments.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose of

the study prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by assigning codes to participants and reporting data in aggregated form. No personally identifiable information was disclosed. The study complied with institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

3. Results

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among four variables: overall classroom participation, presentation performance, written task engagement, and well-being scores measured using the TEIQue.

Correlations Among Participation Variables

Significant positive correlations were found among the different indicators of student engagement. Classroom participation was strongly correlated with presentation performance ($r = .565$, $p < .001$) and written task engagement ($r = .652$, $p < .001$). Presentation performance was also strongly associated with written engagement ($r = .613$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that students who were active in one type of course activity tended to be active across other academic tasks, suggesting a consistent pattern of engagement.

Relationship Between Well-being and Participation

The relationships between well-being and participation variables were positive but weaker in magnitude.

Well-being showed a significant positive correlation with presentation performance ($r = .216$, $p = .001$), indicating that students with higher well-being tended to demonstrate greater engagement during oral presentations. A smaller but statistically significant correlation was also observed between well-being and written task engagement ($r = .151$, $p = .027$), suggesting that higher well-being was associated with slightly greater involvement in written assignments.

In contrast, the correlation between well-being and overall classroom participation was not statistically significant ($r = .112$, $p = .102$). Although the relationship was positive, it did not reach conventional significance levels, indicating that well-being alone may not be strongly associated with general in-class interaction.

4. Summary of Findings in Relation to Study Hypotheses

Overall, the results provide partial support for the hypothesis that higher levels of well-being are associated with increased engagement in English skills

courses. Well-being demonstrated significant positive relationships with specific forms of participation—particularly presentations and written tasks—whereas its association with general classroom participation was not statistically significant.

These findings suggest that psychological well-being may be more strongly related to structured or performance-based activities than to spontaneous classroom interaction. Students reporting higher levels of optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction appeared more willing to engage in tasks that require preparation, public performance, and sustained effort, such as presentations and written assignments. In contrast, informal participation during lessons may be influenced by additional contextual or individual factors beyond well-being alone.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study examined the relationship between students’ psychological well-being and their level of participation in English skills courses across both face-to-face classroom activities and digitally mediated learning through the Google Classroom platform. Using a quantitative correlational design and the well-being component of the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue), the research focused on three dimensions of well-being—mood, self-esteem, and happiness—and their association with observable indicators of student engagement.

The findings indicate that well-being is positively related to certain forms of participation, particularly performance-based and task-oriented activities. Students with higher well-being scores demonstrated significantly greater engagement in presentations and written assignments, suggesting that positive emotional functioning may facilitate willingness to prepare, perform, and complete academic tasks. However, the relationship between well-being and general classroom participation was not statistically significant, indicating that spontaneous interaction during lessons may depend on additional factors such as personality traits, language proficiency, classroom climate, or instructional practices.

These results contribute to the growing body of research emphasizing the importance of psychological factors in language education, particularly within blended learning contexts where participation occurs across both physical and digital environments. The findings suggest that student well-being may play a more pronounced role in structured academic tasks than in informal interaction, underscoring the need for pedagogical approaches that support students’ emotional functioning alongside academic development. Enhancing learners’ optimism, confidence, and life satisfaction may therefore promote

deeper engagement with course requirements and improve overall learning experiences.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of integrating well-being-sensitive strategies into language instruction, especially in courses involving presentations and sustained written work. Supportive feedback, inclusive classroom environments, and manageable workloads may help students translate positive psychological states into active participation across learning modalities, including online platforms such as Google Classroom.

Despite its contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample of students from specific English skills courses limits the generalizability of the findings to other populations, educational levels, or cultural contexts. Second, the use of convenience sampling may introduce selection bias. Third, well-being was assessed through self-report measures, which may be influenced by social desirability or temporary emotional states. Additionally, the correlational design does not permit causal conclusions; it remains unclear whether higher well-being leads to greater participation or whether active engagement contributes to improved well-being.

Future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs to examine changes over time, and additional variables such as language proficiency, motivation, personality, and instructional factors. Investigating specific components of well-being separately and evaluating interventions aimed at enhancing student well-being may provide deeper insights into how psychological factors influence engagement in both traditional and digital language learning environments.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of student well-being as a meaningful factor in academic engagement, particularly in structured tasks within blended language courses. By demonstrating measurable associations between well-being and participation across classroom and digital settings, it contributes to ongoing efforts to design learning environments that support not only cognitive development but also the emotional conditions necessary for sustained and effective learning.

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Relationship between family support, depression, anxiety, and eating disorder in adolescence

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Abstract: Introduction: Adolescence is a period of rapid psychological, emotional, and social development, during which individuals may be vulnerable to eating disorder symptoms. Family support plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents’ mental health and coping strategies.

Objective: This study aimed to examine the relationship between eating disorder symptoms, anxiety, depression, and perceived family support among adolescents.

Material and Methods: A total of 240 adolescents aged 15–18 years, enrolled in the first and third years of two secondary schools in Prishtina, completed standardized instruments including the Eating Attitude Test, Perception of Parents Scale, Kutcher Adolescent Depressive Scale, and State–Trait Anxiety Inventory.

Results: Higher perceived family support was associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and eating disorder symptoms. Also, there was a difference in terms of involvement, autonomy support and parental warmth between the low-risk group and the critical group of respondents on the EAT – 26 scale. Anxiety, depression, and family support were significant predictors of eating disorder behaviors, highlighting the protective role of supportive family relationships.

Conclusion: Enhancing family support and addressing emotional health are key strategies to prevent and manage eating disorders in adolescence. Interventions targeting both adolescents and their families may promote healthy nutrition attitudes, emotional well-being, and resilience.

Keywords: *adolescence, eating disorders, family support, anxiety, depression, mental health.*

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a period of life marked by rapid growth and maturation. This life phase is a significant, decisive period in the life of every individual. Fluctuations and changes occur during this period, therefore the adolescent changes roles and conquer new responsibilities from a child the person becomes an adult. During adolescence, separation occurs, identity is formed, and sexuality and work responsibility are acquired. It is a transitional phase from childhood to adulthood, characterized by emotional, psychological, and social changes. During this time, adolescents develop their identity, autonomy, and sense of responsibility.

A key aspect of this period is the formation of body image, which reflects an individual's mental representation of their physical appearance. Body image is influenced by both internal (biological and psychological) and external (cultural and social) factors. Negative body image can lead to low self-esteem, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and disordered eating behaviors, including anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa (Sander, Moessner & Bauer, 2021; Keski-Rahkonen & Mustelin, 2016).

Anorexia nervosa typically emerges during early or mid-adolescence, more frequently in girls. Its development is multifactorial, involving intrapersonal factors (e.g., low autonomy, insecurity, fear of maturation), interpersonal factors (e.g., overprotective or conflicted parental attitudes), and socio-cultural pressures (Dzielska, Kelly & Ojala, 2023; Wenar, 2014). Symptoms include restrictive eating, excessive exercise, use of appetite-suppressing methods, and distorted body perception, often accompanied by anxiety, depression, and feelings of guilt (Christian et al., 2020; Qian et al., 2022). Bulimia nervosa is characterized by episodes of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors, such as purging, fasting, or excessive physical activity. Developmental difficulties, stress, disrupted family relationships, and early childhood conflicts contribute to its emergence. Psychological and socio-cultural factors, particularly stress, play a major role as precipitating factors in the development of bulimia nervosa (Polivy & Gape, 2021).

Despite extensive research on adolescent mental health and eating disorders, gaps remain in understanding the interplay between parental behaviors, anxiety, depression, and disordered eating in contemporary contexts, particularly considering the influence of digitalization, social media, and evolving societal norms. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to examine these relationships, addressing underexplored mechanisms linking parental

behavior, adolescent psychological functioning, and eating disorder symptoms.

This study addresses the challenges of adolescent mental health and social well-being in the context of a rapidly evolving digital and social environment. By examining these factors, the research contributes to current discussions on youth mental health, informs the development of innovative interventions, and supports the design of future-oriented educational and clinical strategies.

2. Theoretical Framework

Existing literature shows that parental behaviors strongly influence adolescent mental health and engagement in risky behaviors. Supportive and autonomy-promoting parenting is linked to higher self-esteem and reduced maladaptive behaviors, whereas overprotective or controlling parenting increases vulnerability to anxiety, depression, and disordered eating (McCarthy, 2021). Adolescents' mental health is also influenced by peer relationships, socio-cultural pressures, and digital media exposure, which can exacerbate body dissatisfaction and problematic eating behaviors. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the biopsychosocial model (Engel, 1977), which integrates individual, relational, and socio-cultural factors to explain health outcomes. In this model, individual factors include anxiety and depression, relational factors include parental behaviors, and socio-cultural factors encompass peer influence and digital/social media pressures. The model allows for the examination of direct and indirect pathways: parental behavior may directly affect eating disorder symptoms or indirectly influence them through anxiety and depression, while socio-cultural factors may moderate these relationships. Applying this theoretical framework informs the research design, guiding variable selection, measurement instruments, and analytical strategy. It ensures coherence between theory and research objectives by linking psychosocial determinants to observable adolescent outcomes. By integrating the biopsychosocial model, the study addresses gaps in the literature regarding the combined influence of parenting, psychological functioning, and societal factors on adolescent eating behaviors, providing a structured approach for analyzing complex interactions in mental health and well-being.

3. Methods

Study design and participants

This study employed a theoretical-empirical, analytical approach to examine the relationship between eating disorder symptoms, anxiety, depression, and

perceived parental behavior. A convenience sample of 240 adolescents (120 males, 120 females), aged 15–18 years and attending first and third grades in two high schools in Prishtina, Kosovo, participated voluntarily during the summer semester of the 2024/25 academic year. Adolescents with severe somatic disorders or on special diets were excluded.

Instruments

We used the following measurement instruments for the purposes of this study:

- **Eating Attitude Test – EAT 26**

The Eating Attitude Test – EAT 26 is a 26-item assessment scale designed to identify symptoms of eating disorders in respondents (Grolnick, Ryan and Deci, 1999). The scale itself consists of three subscales: Bulimia and Food Preoccupation (6 items) which is indicative of food thoughts and bulimic behavior, Dieting (13 items) which refers to the pathological avoidance of high-calorie foods, and Oral Control (7 items) which refers to self-control during food intake. A score above 20 is considered critical. The scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.76.

- **Perception of Parents Scale – POPS**

The Perception of Parents Scale – POPS consists of 21 items regarding involvement, autonomy support and warmth on the part of the mother, as well as 21 items regarding involvement, autonomy support and warmth on the part of the father (Cooper et al., 2987). Involvement refers to parental availability and interest in the child’s life; support refers to stimulating freedom of choice, the development of autonomy and independence; while warmth refers to parental display of love for the child. Cronbach’s alpha of the subscales relating to the mother ranged from 0.84 to 0.89, while for the father it ranged from 0.79 to 0.81.

- **Kutcher Adolescent Depressive Scale (KADS)**

The Kutcher Adolescent Depressive Scale (KADS) is a self-assessment scale for depression in adolescents (Spielberger, Gorsuch and Lushene. 1970). It consists of 11 items, with responses scored on a 4-point scale: from 0 – never to 4 – always. The range of possible scores is from 1 to 33 points, with higher scores indicating higher levels of depression. The Cronbach’s alpha for the entire scale is 0.94.

- **The State – Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)**

The State – Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) is a scale for measuring anxiety (Potterton et al., 2020). It consists of 40 statements, with responses scored on a 3-point scale: from 1 – never to 3 – always. It has two subscales: Trait anxiety – STAI-T and State anxiety – STAI-S. A higher score indicates a higher level of anxiety. Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.82.

- **Body Mass Index (BMI)**

We obtain the body mass index when we divide body weight expressed in kilograms by the square of body height expressed in meters.

Data collection process

The study was conducted during the summer semester (April – June 2025). The study was conducted on school premises, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation. Participants received verbal and written instructions about the study objectives and procedures. Data were analyzed using SPSS v.20. Descriptive statistics summarized participant characteristics. Pearson correlations, one-way ANOVA, and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine associations and identify predictors of eating disorder symptoms. Significance was set at $p < .01$ and $p < .05$.

4. Results

The study included 240 adolescents (120 males, 120 females) aged 15–18 years. Most participants (57.5%) had a normal body mass index (BMI), while 10.8% were underweight, 17.5% slightly overweight, and 14.2% were obese. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for eating disorder symptoms, parental perception variables, anxiety, depression, and BMI. The mean EAT-26 bulimia and food preoccupation score was 16.8 (SD = 3.6), while the mean diet and oral control subscale scores were 5.5 (SD = 2.7) and 7.2 (SD = 2.7), respectively. Participants reported moderate levels of perceived parental involvement, autonomy support, and warmth for both mothers and fathers. Trait anxiety levels were relatively high ($M = 74.4$, $SD = 8.7$), where as state anxiety was moderate ($M = 38.2$, $SD = 6.1$). The mean depression score was 35.3 (SD = 5.2). The average BMI was within the normal range ($M = 21.1$, $SD = 2.1$). These findings suggest variability in adolescents’ psychological well-being, eating attitudes, and perceived parental support.

Table1. Descriptive statistics for eating disorder symptoms, parental perception, anxiety, depression and BMI

Construct	Scale	N	Mean $\pm$ SD	Range of results
Eating disorder symptoms	EAT-26	240	16.8 $\pm$ 3.6	0 – 43
Bulimia and food preoccupation	BFP	240	5.5 $\pm$ 2.7	4 – 13
Diet	Diet	240	7.2 $\pm$ 2.7	4 – 17
Oral control	ORC	240	3.9 $\pm$ 1.5	2 – 8
Parental perceptions	POPS	240	34.5 $\pm$ 7.5	4 – 37

Mother involvement		240	40.9 ± 8.3	7 – 55	
Mother autonomy support		240	33.9 ± 7.2	6 – 36	
Mother warmth		240	29.9 ± 6.9	4 – 35	
Father involvement	STAI	240	37.6 ± 8.1	6 – 49	
Father autonomy support	STAI – T	240	27.4 ± 6.1	4	–
Father warmth	STAI – S	240	74.4 ± 8.7	32	
Anxiety	KADS	240	38.2 ± 6.1	34 – 110	
Trait Anxiety		240	35.3 ± 5.2	14	–
State Anxiety		240	18.9 ± 8.5	58	
Depression		240	21.1 ± 2.1	12	–
BMI				55	
				7	–
				29	
				15 – 26	

Source: the surveys, author’s own study on the basis of the research on eating disorder, parental perception, anxiety, body satisfaction, depression and BMI, carried out in a secondary school in Prishtina

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant associations between eating disorder symptoms, anxiety, and depression (Table 2). Higher EAT-26 total scores were moderately positively correlated with trait anxiety ($r = .46$, $p < .01$), state anxiety ($r = .42$, $p < .01$), and depression ($r = .39$, $p < .01$). Bulimia and food preoccupation, diet, and oral control subscales showed similar positive associations with anxiety and depression. BMI was weakly associated with EAT-26 scores and negatively correlated with anxiety, indicating that psychological factors were more strongly related to eating disorder symptoms than body mass index.

Table2. Pearson’s correlation concerning eating disorder symptoms, BMI, anxiety and depression

Pearson’s correlation	BMI	STAI – T	STAI – S	KADS
BMI		-.22*	.18**	.04
EAT -26	.26**	.46**	.42**	.39**
Bulimia	.36**	.41**	.38**	.34*
Diet	-.11	.37**	.35**	.31**
Oral control	-.15*	.29**	.29**	.21
	88			

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

Of the total sample, 133 participants (55.42%) were classified as low-risk ($EAT-26 \leq 9$), 64 participants (26.67%) as medium-risk ($EAT-26 10-18$), and 43 participants (17.92%) as high-risk ($EAT-26 \geq 19$).

One-way ANOVA analyses were conducted to examine differences in perceived maternal involvement, autonomy support, and warmth across EAT-26 risk groups (Table 3). There was no significant difference in maternal involvement, $F(2, 238) = 2.91, p = .792$. Significant differences were found for maternal autonomy support, $F(2, 238) = 1.44, p = .003$, and maternal warmth, $F(2, 238) = 0.44, p < .001$. Participants in the high-risk group reported lower maternal autonomy support ($M = 38.1, SD = 9.6$) and warmth ($M = 27.6, SD = 7.2$) compared to low- and medium-risk groups.

Table 3. The difference between the groups of participants on the EAT 26 questionnaire according to mother involvement, autonomy support and warmth

	N	M	SD	F	df	p
Mother involvement						
Low risk group	133	33.1	5.2	2.91	2	.792
Medium risk group	64	29.3	6.1			
Critical group	43	25.1	6.2			
Mother autonomy support						
Low risk group	133	44.5	7.9	1.44	2	.003
Medium risk group	64	45.3	8.4			
Critical group	43	38.1	9.6			
Mother warmth						
Low risk group	133	36.2	6.5	0.44	2	.001
Medium risk group	64	34.1	6.1			
Critical group	43	27.6	7.2			

Source: the surveys, author’s own study on the basis of the research on eating disorder and parental perception, carried out in a secondary school in Prishtina

One-way ANOVA analyses were conducted to examine differences in perceived paternal involvement, autonomy support, and warmth across EAT-26 risk groups (Table 4). No significant differences were found for paternal involvement, $F(2, 238) = 1.43, p = .74$, or paternal warmth, $F(2, 238) = 1.55, p = .84$. However, significant differences were found for paternal autonomy support, $F(2, 238) = 2.82, p = .002$. Participants in the medium- and high-risk groups reported lower perceived paternal autonomy support ($M = 35.2\text{--}39.5, SD = 8.1\text{--}9.3$) compared to the low-risk group.

Table4. The difference between the groups of participants on the EAT 26 questionnaire according to father involvement, autonomy support and warmth

	N	M	SD	F	df	p
Father involvement						
Low risk group	133	32.2	6.4	1.43	2	.74
Medium risk group	64	30.7	6.7			
Critical group	43	26.9	7.3			
Father autonomy support						
Low risk group	133	37.1	7.9	2.82	2	.002
Medium risk group	64	39.5	8.1			
Critical group	43	35.2	9.3			
Father warmth						
Low risk group	133	33.4	7.2	1.55	2	.84
Medium risk group	64	30.7	5.8			
Critical group	43	33.1	7.1			

Source: the surveys, author’s own study on the basis of the research on eating disorder and parental perception, carried out in a secondary school in Prishtina. A multiple regression analysis examined whether anxiety, depression, and perceived parental behaviors predicted eating habits (Table 5). The overall model was significant, $F = 2.17$, $p = .002$, explaining 13.4% of variance in EAT-26 scores ($R^2 = .134$). Significant positive predictors of disturbed eating habits were anxiety ($\beta = .235$, $p < .01$), maternal autonomy support ($\beta = .389$, $p < .01$), maternal warmth ($\beta = .216$, $p < .01$), and paternal autonomy support ($\beta = .317$, $p = .02$). Depression was a negative predictor ($\beta = -.242$, $p = .03$). Other parental variables were not significant predictors.

Table 5. Regression analysis for the criterion variable ‘eating habits’ according to the EAT-26 questionnaire

Predictors	<i>r</i>	β	<i>p</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Anxiety	.347**	.235	.00**	.366	.134	2.17	.002*
Depression	.071*	-.242	.03*				
Mother involvement	-.212**	-.258	.19				
Mother autonomy support	.143	.389	.00**				
Mother warmth	-.256**	.216	.00**				
Father involvement	.018	-.278	.62				
Father autonomy support	.129*	.317	.02*				
Father warmth	.212	.217	.87				

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

5. Discussion

In this study, we attempted to analyze the relationship between psychological problems present in adolescence, such as anxiety, depression, perceived parental behavior, and eating disorders, which include anorexia and bulimia nervosa. Although the origins of anorexia and bulimia are not yet fully

understood, research suggests that they result from a complex interplay of factors that can destabilize the emotional state of adolescents.

Based on the results of the EAT-26 questionnaire, we divided the respondents into three groups based on the severity of eating disorder symptoms. According to the obtained results, 64 adolescents achieved a score between 10 and 19 on the EAT-26 questionnaire, which means they are included in the medium-risk group for developing an eating disorder, while if the criticality limit is taken as a score above 19, then 43 respondents belong to the critical group for developing bulimic behavior. However, the majority of the respondents have healthy eating habits, i.e. they constitute the low-risk group for developing an eating disorder in the period of adolescence, in which various emotional and cognitive changes occur, followed by individualization, the need for autonomy, building personal identity, one's own values and attitudes (Garcia et al., 2020).

Studies confirm that adolescents with anorexia or bulimia are pathologically preoccupied and dissatisfied with their bodies, which affects the development of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, withdrawal or isolation. Our obtained results confirm that anxiety, depression and body satisfaction are important predictors of the occurrence of eating disorders. The data coincide with the findings of certain studies that assume that anxiety and depression precede the occurrence of anorexia and bulimia (Keyes et al., 2029). Depressive mood contributes to changes in the personal, academic and social aspects of the young anorexic or bulimic person.

The family context also plays an important role in the development of eating disorders. Adolescents' relationships with their parents, particularly with their mothers, influence their psychosocial and biological development. Therefore, family dynamics can be considered risk or protective factors for the development of mental health problems, including eating disorders. Our results indicate that adolescents in the low-risk and high-risk groups differed significantly in their perceptions of parental involvement, autonomy support, and warmth. Specifically, the low-risk group reported higher scores on all three parental subscales compared to the high-risk group. Emotional warmth and acceptance from both parents contribute to adolescents' sense of being loved, which facilitates identity formation and the development of autonomy.

6. Conclusion

Eating disorders that occur during adolescence take various forms, ranging from mild dissatisfaction with one's own body through various types of behavior where with the young person tries to achieve the ideal weight, to the appearance of symptoms of eating disorders - anorexia and bulimia.

Sociocultural, psychological, biological and genetic factors are part of the genesis of the occurrence of anorexic and bulimic disorders. Difficulties with self-esteem, dissatisfaction with one's own body image, cognitive distortion followed by dysfunctional thoughts contribute to the person being worried, anxious, depressed, and therefore overeating, vomiting or dieting. The quality and type of relationship with parents plays an important role in the psychological development of the young person and their psychological functioning. Parents reward their children for the desired forms of behavior, giving them love and attention. For every parent, parenting is a pleasure and children grow up without traumatic experiences, with confidence, readiness for active participation and overcoming stressful and frustrating situations. On the other hand, parents who do not consider the needs and rights of the young person, build a cold emotional relationship with the adolescent, contribute to the adolescent experiencing himself or herself as a worthless, empty and powerless person, they are a risk factor for the development of an eating disorder, therefore it is necessary to implement adequate preventive programs through which the person in the adolescence period will develop a healthy attitude towards food and care for their health.

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Digital aggression and youth emotional well-being: exploring the relationship between cyberbullying, hate speech, and vulnerability to manipulative online interactions

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of digital communication environments has profoundly reshaped the social and psychological contexts in which young people construct identity, develop relationships, and seek social belonging. While online platforms facilitate interaction and participation, they also expose youth to multiple forms of digital aggression, including cyberbullying, hate speech, and manipulative online contacts. Despite growing scholarly attention to these phenomena, they are frequently examined as discrete risks rather than as interconnected experiences that may collectively influence youth vulnerability. This study aims to investigate the psychosocial pathway through which exposure to online hostility may affect emotional well-being and increase susceptibility to manipulative online interactions. The research adopts a cross-sectional survey design targeting young people aged 15–24 across several municipalities in Albania. Data are collected through an anonymous structured questionnaire measuring patterns of internet use, exposure to cyberbullying and hate speech, indicators of emotional well-being, and experiences with potentially manipulative online contacts. It is hypothesized that repeated exposure to online aggression may contribute to emotional distress and perceived social exclusion, which in turn may increase openness to unfamiliar online contacts and influence vulnerability to manipulation. The study contributes to the literature by conceptualizing digital aggression, emotional well-being, and online exploitation risks as part of a psychosocial continuum rather than isolated phenomena. The findings are expected to inform preventive strategies by emphasizing the importance of integrating digital literacy education with psychosocial resilience, youth

support systems, and coordinated institutional responses aimed at strengthening online safety and mental health among young people.

Keywords: *digital aggression, cyberbullying, emotional well-being, online grooming, youth vulnerability.*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies and online communication platforms has significantly transformed how young people interact, construct identities, and participate in social and educational environments. Young people aged 15–24 represent the most digitally connected demographic globally, with internet access and social media engagement forming a central part of their everyday lives (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2023). While digital platforms provide opportunities for communication, learning, and civic participation, they also expose youth to new forms of online risk. Among the most prominent concerns identified in recent research are cyberbullying, online hate speech, and manipulative online interactions within digital communication environments. Cyberbullying, defined as intentional and repeated aggressive behaviour carried out through digital technologies, has been associated with negative psychological outcomes including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal (Kowalski et al., 2019; Hamm et al., 2015). Similarly, the spread of online hate speech targeting individuals or groups based on identity characteristics contributes to hostile online environments and may reduce feelings of safety and social trust among young users (European Commission, 2020). In addition, digital communication platforms may facilitate manipulative interactions such as online grooming, in which individuals build trust with vulnerable users in order to manipulate or exploit them (Whittle et al., 2013).

Although these issues have received growing scholarly attention, they are often examined separately within different academic and policy frameworks. However, young people’s experiences in digital environments rarely occur in isolation. Exposure to cyberbullying, hate speech, and manipulative online approaches may coexist and produce cumulative psychosocial effects that influence emotional well-being and perceptions of safety in online spaces. Despite this potential overlap, relatively limited research has examined how digital aggression, emotional vulnerability, and openness to unfamiliar online contacts interact within a broader framework of youth digital risk.

In response to this gap, the present study explores the relationship between exposure to digital aggression, emotional well-being, and vulnerability to manipulative online interactions among young people aged 15–24 in Albania.

The study examines patterns of internet use, experiences with cyberbullying and online hate speech, indicators of emotional well-being, and encounters with potentially manipulative online contacts. The research aligns with the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society”, contributing to discussions on youth mental health, digital citizenship, and online safety. By conceptualizing cyberbullying, hate speech, and manipulative online interactions as interconnected elements within a broader continuum of digital risk, the study aims to support the development of educational and preventive strategies that strengthen digital literacy, emotional resilience, and safer online environments for young people.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The increasing integration of digital technologies into everyday life has generated significant scholarly interest in the social, psychological, and educational implications of online interaction among young people. Digital environments have become central spaces where youth construct identities, maintain relationships, and access information. While digital connectivity offers opportunities for communication, learning, and participation, it also introduces risks related to harmful online behaviours. Among the most frequently discussed concerns are cyberbullying, online hate speech, and manipulative online interactions. Cyberbullying is one of the most widely studied forms of digital aggression and is commonly defined as intentional and repeated harm inflicted through electronic communication technologies such as social media platforms or messaging applications (Kowalski et al., 2019). Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying occurs in environments characterized by persistence, large audiences, and limited opportunities for victims to escape harmful interactions. Empirical research consistently shows that cyberbullying is associated with negative psychological outcomes including anxiety, depression, reduced self-esteem, and social withdrawal (Hamm et al., 2015). However, many studies focus primarily on individual victimization without sufficiently examining how cyberbullying interacts with other forms of online hostility.

In parallel, scholars have increasingly examined the spread of online hate speech within digital environments. Hate speech refers to expressions that promote hostility or discrimination against individuals or groups based on identity characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, religion, or political beliefs (European Commission, 2020). The rapid circulation of such content through digital platforms contributes to the normalization of hostile discourse and increased social polarization. Exposure to hate speech may generate feelings of exclusion, fear, and social mistrust among young users (Wachs et al., 2021).

Despite growing attention to this issue, research often examines hate speech primarily from legal or sociological perspectives, with limited focus on its interaction with other forms of online aggression.

Another emerging area of concern involves manipulative online interactions, including grooming behaviours. Online grooming refers to strategies through which individuals gradually build trust with targets, often by providing emotional support or validation, before attempting manipulation or exploitation (Whittle et al., 2013). Studies suggest that individuals experiencing loneliness, social isolation, or emotional distress may be more receptive to attention from unfamiliar online contacts (Davidson & Gottschalk, 2011). However, relatively little research has examined how prior exposure to digital aggression may contribute to emotional conditions that increase vulnerability to such manipulation. Recent scholarship increasingly emphasizes that digital risks should be understood as interconnected rather than isolated phenomena. Livingstone and Smith (2014) argue that online harms frequently overlap and may produce cumulative psychological and social effects. Repeated exposure to cyberbullying or hate speech, for example, may contribute to emotional distress and reduced feelings of belonging, which may increase openness to unfamiliar online contacts offering validation or support. Despite this perspective, empirical research examining the relationships between digital aggression, emotional well-being, and vulnerability to manipulation remains limited.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on ecological systems theory and digital risk frameworks that conceptualize youth experiences within interconnected social environments. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) emphasizes that individual development is shaped by interactions across multiple environmental systems, including family, school, peer networks, and broader social contexts. In contemporary societies, digital environments function as an additional ecological layer influencing youth behaviour, emotional development, and social interaction. Complementing this perspective, Suler’s (2004) concept of the online disinhibition effect explains how anonymity, invisibility, and reduced social accountability in digital communication can encourage individuals to engage in behaviours—such as aggression or hostility—that may not occur in face-to-face interactions. These characteristics help explain the persistence of cyberbullying and hate speech within online spaces and the potential for manipulative actors to exploit emotional vulnerabilities.

Building on these perspectives, the present study adopts an integrated conceptual framework in which cyberbullying, hate speech, and manipulative online interactions are viewed as interconnected components of a broader continuum of digital risk. Exposure to online aggression may affect emotional

well-being by increasing feelings of distress or social exclusion, which may in turn influence patterns of digital interaction and openness to unfamiliar contacts. By examining these relationships within a unified framework, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of youth vulnerability and resilience in contemporary digital environments.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the relationships between patterns of internet use, exposure to digital aggression (cyberbullying and hate speech), emotional well-being, and vulnerability to manipulative online interactions among young people. A quantitative design allows the collection of standardized data from a relatively large sample and facilitates statistical analysis of relationships between key variables. Through structured survey data, the study seeks to identify patterns of digital behaviour, assess the prevalence of online risks, and explore associations between digital aggression and emotional vulnerability among youth.

Research Design: The research employs a cross-sectional descriptive and correlational survey design. The descriptive component documents patterns of internet use, prevalence of cyberbullying exposure, experiences with hate speech, and indicators of emotional well-being among participants. The correlational component explores potential relationships between these variables, particularly whether exposure to online hostility is associated with emotional distress or increased encounters with unfamiliar online contacts. As the data were collected at a single point in time, the design allows the identification of relationships between variables but does not aim to establish causal effects.

Participants and Sampling: The study targets young people aged 15–24, a demographic group that is highly engaged with digital technologies and social media platforms. Participants were recruited from several municipalities in Albania, including both urban and semi-urban contexts, to capture diverse digital experiences among youth. A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was used due to the exploratory nature of the research and the accessibility of participants through educational institutions, youth organizations, and online networks. The final dataset includes 213 valid responses. Participation was voluntary and respondents completed the survey anonymously through an online platform.

Instruments and Data Collection: Data was collected using a structured online questionnaire designed specifically for this study and distributed via Google Forms. The questionnaire was structured into several thematic sections:

- Demographic characteristics (age, gender, education status, municipality)
- Patterns of internet use and preferred digital platforms
- Digital safety awareness and online risk management
- Emotional well-being indicators (e.g., anxiety, loneliness, self-confidence, emotional regulation)
- Exposure to cyberbullying
- Exposure to online hate speech
- Indicators of manipulative online interactions
- Support and protective factors, such as access to trusted adults and peer support networks

Most survey items used Likert-type or frequency scales to enable quantitative measurement of experiences and perceptions. The estimated completion time for the questionnaire was 7–10 minutes.

Data Analysis: The collected data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize demographic characteristics, internet use patterns, and the prevalence of online experiences. To examine relationships between variables, correlation analysis was conducted to explore associations between exposure to digital aggression, emotional well-being indicators, and encounters with manipulative online contacts. Where relevant, cross-tabulations were also used to examine differences across demographic groups.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical principles were respected throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. No personally identifiable information was collected, ensuring confidentiality and data protection. Given the sensitivity of topics such as cyberbullying and online manipulation, participants were informed that they could skip any question or withdraw from the survey at any time without consequences. The study follows standard ethical guidelines for social science research and ensures that the collected data are used solely for academic purposes.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

A total of 213 valid responses were included in the analysis. The sample consisted primarily of young women (77.5%), followed by young men (20.7%), while 1.9% preferred not to state their gender. In terms of age

distribution, 69 respondents were aged 15–17, 84 were aged 18–20, and 60 were aged 21–24. Most participants were enrolled in university education (n = 128) or upper secondary school (n = 66), with only a small number from lower secondary education and one respondent from vocational education. This composition indicates that the dataset mainly reflects the experiences of digitally active students and young adults. The findings reveal high levels of internet use among respondents. Over 77.5% reported spending three or more hours online daily outside school or work, and 46.5% reported being online after 23:00 on at least three nights during the previous week. The most frequently used platforms were Instagram (n = 160), WhatsApp (n = 158), TikTok (n = 148), and YouTube (n = 112), while the most common online activities included chatting (n = 180) and watching videos (n = 149). These results confirm that digital communication is deeply embedded in the daily routines of young people and that social media platforms serve as central environments for interaction and information exchange. Respondents generally reported moderate to high awareness of digital safety practices. Many indicated that they regularly check privacy settings (76.1%), know where to seek help if something unsafe occurs online (66.2%), and feel capable of managing risky situations online. However, only 54.5% reported feeling safe on the internet overall, suggesting a gap between digital competence and perceived online safety. Indicators of emotional well-being show a mixed psychosocial profile. While 56.3% reported feeling confident often or always and 51.2% reported being able to calm themselves when distressed, a noticeable proportion also reported emotional difficulties. Specifically, 16.4% experienced frequent anxiety, 14.6% reported frequent sadness, and 5.6% reported feelings of loneliness or exclusion. These results indicate that youth emotional well-being reflects a coexistence of resilience and vulnerability, supporting the assumption that responses to digital environments vary depending on individual emotional resources and coping capacities.

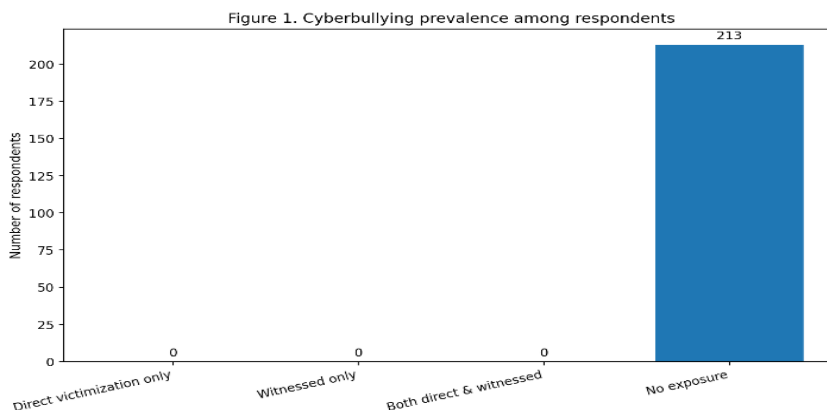
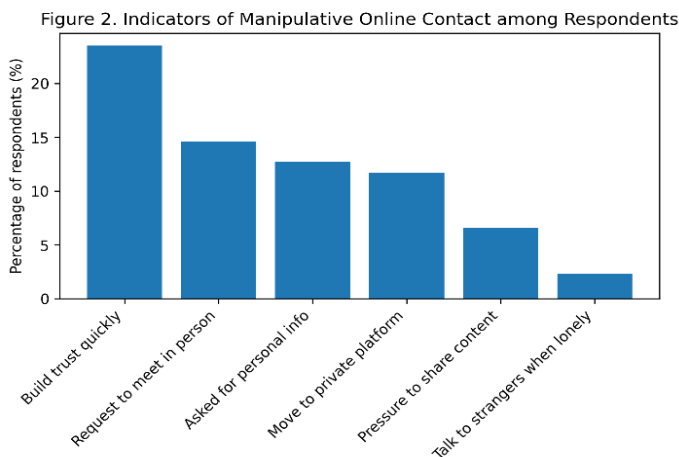


Figure 1 presents the distribution of cyberbullying exposure among the respondents, distinguishing between individuals who experienced direct victimization, those who only witnessed cyberbullying directed at others, those who reported both experiences, and those who reported no exposure. The findings indicate that cyberbullying is a visible component of the digital environments in which young people interact, with a notable proportion of respondents reporting some form of exposure within the previous six months. The data show that a significant share of respondents encountered cyberbullying indirectly by witnessing it, even when they were not personally targeted. This suggests that online harassment is not limited to isolated victimization events but is embedded in the broader communication dynamics of digital platforms. The presence of a substantial group of respondents who reported both witnessing and experiencing cyberbullying further indicates that digital aggression often occurs within shared social networks where victims, perpetrators, and bystanders are interconnected.

At the same time, the chart indicates that a portion of respondents reported no exposure to cyberbullying, highlighting that online experiences remain heterogeneous among young people. This variability may reflect differences in online behaviour patterns, digital literacy, peer networks, or platform use. The prominence of witnessed cyberbullying compared to direct victimization is particularly important for understanding the social dynamics of digital aggression. Previous research has shown that exposure to cyberbullying as a bystander can have psychological consequences similar to those experienced by direct victims, including increased anxiety, emotional distress, and reduced perceptions of online safety. Moreover, repeated observation of aggressive online interactions may contribute to the normalization of hostile communication within digital spaces.

These findings reinforce the argument that cyberbullying should be understood not only as an individual experience but also as a collective social phenomenon occurring within digitally mediated peer networks. From an educational and policy perspective, this highlights the importance of prevention strategies that address the role of bystanders, promote responsible digital citizenship, and encourage peer-supported reporting mechanisms. Schools and youth organizations therefore play a crucial role in fostering digital environments where harmful online behavior is recognized, challenged, and effectively addressed.

Overall, Figure 1 demonstrates that cyberbullying remains a relevant and visible aspect of youth digital experiences, supporting the broader research objective of examining how digital aggression contributes to the psychosocial risks faced by young people in contemporary online environments.



As illustrated in Figure 2, the most frequently reported indicator of manipulative online contact was attempts by unknown users to build trust very quickly (23.5%), followed by requests to meet in person (14.6%) and requests for personal

information (12.7%). Requests to move communication to a private platform were reported by 11.7% of respondents, while pressure to share personal content was reported by 6.6%. Only a small minority (2.3%) indicated that they would be more likely to communicate with strangers online when feeling lonely. These results suggest that while the predisposition to engage with unknown contacts remains relatively low, exposure to manipulative approaches is nevertheless present within the digital environments experienced by young people.

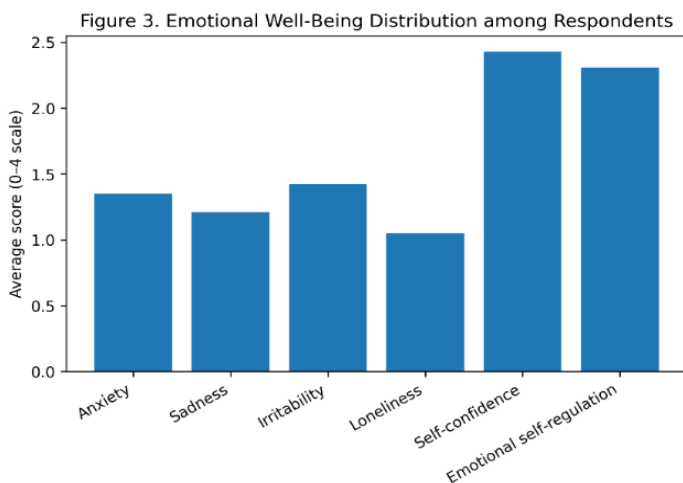


Figure 3 presents the distribution of emotional well-being indicators reported by respondents during the previous two weeks, measured on a 0–4 frequency scale (0 = Never, 4 = Always).

The indicators include anxiety, sadness, irritability, loneliness, self-

confidence, and emotional self-regulation. The analysis shows a balanced emotional profile characterized by the coexistence of both protective and risk-related emotional states. The highest mean scores were observed for self-confidence ($M = 2.43$) and emotional self-regulation ($M = 2.31$), suggesting that many respondents frequently feel confident and are able to regulate their

emotions when distressed. These results indicate the presence of psychological coping resources and emotional resilience among a substantial portion of the participants.

In contrast, negative emotional indicators showed moderate levels. The highest average score among these was irritability ($M = 1.42$), followed by anxiety ($M = 1.35$) and sadness ($M = 1.21$), while loneliness recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 1.05$). This pattern suggests that respondents are more likely to experience emotional tension and stress rather than persistent feelings of social isolation.

Overall, the results reveal a coexistence of emotional resilience and vulnerability among participants. While many young people report confidence and emotional regulation, a notable proportion also experience anxiety, irritability, or sadness. When considered alongside findings related to cyberbullying exposure and manipulative online interactions, these indicators highlight the psychosocial conditions under which digital risks may emerge. At the same time, the presence of strong emotional coping capacities suggests that resilience may help mitigate the psychological impact of negative online experiences.

Figure 4. Correlations Between Digital Aggression, Emotional Distress, and Manipulative Contact

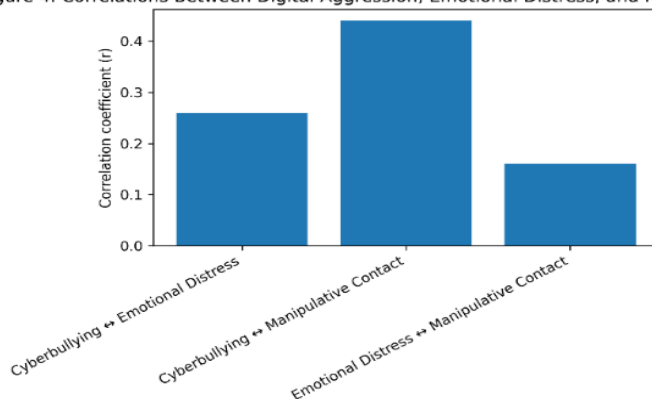


Figure 4 presents the correlation coefficients between key variables analyzed in the study. The results indicate a moderate positive association between cyberbullying exposure and emotional distress ($r = .26$), suggesting that higher levels of online victimization tend to co-occur with increased experiences of anxiety, sadness, irritability, and loneliness. A stronger correlation is observed between cyberbullying exposure and manipulative contact indicators ($r = .44$), indicating that respondents exposed to digital aggression are also more likely to report encounters with potentially manipulative online approaches. The relationship between emotional distress and manipulative contact ($r = .16$) is weaker but remains positive, supporting the theoretical assumption that

emotional vulnerability may contribute to increased susceptibility to risky online interactions. Although the cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference, these correlations provide empirical support for the study’s conceptual model in which digital aggression, emotional distress, and online vulnerability operate as interconnected elements within a broader psychosocial risk continuum.

Overall, the findings indicate that young people’s experiences in digital environments are shaped by interconnected forms of online risk rather than isolated incidents. The data show that cyberbullying, exposure to hate speech, emotional distress, and manipulative online contact indicators frequently coexist within the same digital spaces. The observed correlations between cyberbullying exposure, emotional distress, and manipulative interactions support the study’s conceptual framework, suggesting that digital aggression and emotional vulnerability may form part of a broader psychosocial risk continuum. From a practical perspective, the results highlight the need for integrated educational and preventive approaches that go beyond basic digital literacy. Schools, universities, and youth services should combine digital citizenship education, emotional resilience development, and peer-based prevention strategies to address online harm more effectively. At the same time, the study acknowledges limitations related to self-reported data, convenience sampling, and the cross-sectional design, which restrict the ability to establish causal relationships. Despite these limitations, the findings provide important exploratory evidence for understanding the complex interaction between youth emotional well-being and digital risk exposure, offering a foundation for future research and policy development aimed at promoting safer and more supportive digital environments for young people.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study examined the relationship between digital aggression, emotional well-being, and vulnerability to manipulative online interactions among young people aged 15–24 in Albania. The findings demonstrate that digital environments represent complex social ecosystems where different forms of online risk frequently coexist. Exposure to cyberbullying and online hostility was reported by a considerable proportion of respondents, both as direct experiences and as witnessed behaviour within digital peer networks. These findings support previous research indicating that cyberbullying and hostile online communication environments are associated with negative emotional outcomes and reduced perceptions of online safety (Hamm et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2019). The analysis of emotional well-being indicators revealed a balanced psychosocial profile in which emotional resilience

coexists with moderate levels of distress. While many respondents reported relatively high levels of self-confidence and emotional self-regulation, a notable proportion also reported experiences of anxiety, irritability, and sadness. This dual pattern highlights the dynamic nature of youth emotional well-being in digital contexts and suggests that protective emotional resources may function as buffers against negative online experiences.

The correlation analysis further supports the conceptual framework proposed in this study. Exposure to cyberbullying was moderately associated with indicators of emotional distress and more strongly related to encounters with manipulative online contacts. Although the relationship between emotional distress and manipulative contact indicators was weaker, it remained positive, suggesting that emotional vulnerability may contribute to increased susceptibility to risky online interactions. These findings align with integrated digital risk frameworks that conceptualize online harms as interconnected rather than isolated phenomena (Livingstone & Smith, 2014).

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of developing integrated prevention strategies that combine digital literacy education with psychosocial resilience-building and youth support mechanisms. Educational institutions, youth organizations, and policy actors should promote responsible digital citizenship, emotional well-being, and awareness of manipulative online behaviors. Strengthening peer-based reporting systems and institutional responses to online harm may further contribute to creating safer and more supportive digital environments for young people.

Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a non-probability convenience sampling strategy limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the study sample. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, as participants' perceptions of online experiences and emotional states may vary. Third, the cross-sectional design captures relationships between variables at a single point in time and does not allow conclusions regarding causal relationships between digital aggression, emotional distress, and vulnerability to manipulation. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal research designs, larger and more representative samples, and mixed-method approaches combining quantitative and qualitative data. Such research would provide deeper insight into the long-term psychosocial impacts of digital aggression and support the development of evidence-based educational and policy interventions aimed at strengthening youth well-being and safety in digital societies.

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A literature review on growing up digital: The impact of technology on social skills and emotional intelligence in children.

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Abstract: Digital technology is now an integral part of most young children's daily life experience. It has changed the way many children interact with their environment. Children today have access to mobile phones, tablets and other devices which allow them to engage with online gaming, social networking etc. Therefore, this literature review seeks to explore the effects of the use of digital technology on the development of children's social skills and emotional intelligence. In order to provide a comprehensive review, this article will present the findings of interdisciplinary research, including psychological, educational and media studies. The review will consider the potential positive effects of using digital technology, but also the potential negative consequences.

The literature reviews suggest that there is a complex and frequently contradictory relationship between the use of digital technology and the development of social skills and emotional intelligence. Excessive and/or unguided use of screens has been associated with decreased face-to-face contact, less empathy, and greater difficulty with emotional regulation and increased social withdrawal. However, there are examples of digital interactions (particularly collaborative and interactive) that could enhance communication skills, emotional expression and social awareness. It appears that the development of these outcomes is greatly moderated by variables such as the nature of the content, amount of time spent engaged with technology, parental guidance, and the broader social and cultural context of the child.

The author suggests that digital technology is neither intrinsically harmful nor useful; it is the way that it is used in relation to children's lives that determines the impact. As such, implications for parents, educators, and policy makers are considered. These implications include the need for the informed, balanced and age-appropriate use of technology by children. The study identifies some limitations in the existing body of research, and advocates for further longitudinal and culturally inclusive research.

Keywords: *Digital Technology, Social Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Self-Regulation, Child Development*

1. Introduction

As our digitalized world changes the way we live, it is changing the way children grow up. During the last decade, the widespread availability of smartphones, tablets and internet based platforms has changed how children interact with digital technologies (Rideout, 2017). Children today start using digital devices at a younger age than ever before. They now use digital devices to communicate, learn and connect socially. As digitalized technology has become an integral part of children's lives, researchers and society have shown an increased interest in understanding the ways in which digital technologies shape children's developmental pathways in terms of social skills and emotional intelligence.

Children who develop adequate social skills, including communication, cooperation, and relationship building will be able to successfully integrate into their social environment (Denham et al., 2003). Emotional Intelligence is another factor that has been proven to contribute to success in both academic achievements and mental health as well as to function well interpersonally. For many years, traditional models of social and emotional intelligence development have included direct face to face interactions with family, peers and educators. The increase in the amount of technology mediating these interactions raises critical concerns regarding the quality and quantity of children's social and emotional experiences (Turkle, 2011).

Research examining the relationship between children's digital technology usage and developmental outcomes has grown significantly in recent years. Unfortunately, results have varied widely. Many studies have found that excessive screen time is associated with adverse outcomes, such as reduced empathy, difficulty focusing, and social withdrawal (Uhls et al., 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). On the other hand, some studies have identified potential positive effects of digital technology on developing children's communication skills, creative thinking, and providing access to larger social networks (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011; Granic et al., 2014). The discrepancies in findings demonstrate that the effect of technology cannot be uniformly applied across all types of engagements. Rather, the effects of technology are influenced by a multitude of factors, including the type of digital engagement, the length of time spent engaged, and the presence or absence of parental mediation (Domoff et al., 2019).

Given the complexity of the topic and the varying levels of consistency among previous studies, the purpose of this study is to critically evaluate the available

research concerning the impact of digital technology on children's social skills and emotional intelligence. Through an examination of previous research, this review aims to provide a balanced and detailed explanation of the effects of growing up in a digital society on children's developmental paths and to identify areas of research and practices related to education and parenting that require additional investigation.

2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the role of digital technology in shaping children's social skills and emotional intelligence is dependent upon developing a strong theoretical base about how children grow, develop, and socially connect in their environment. Therefore, the current study used three theoretically based frameworks – Social Learning Theory, Emotional Intelligence Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory – to develop an integrated model to understand the digital environment's effect on children's development.

2.1 Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory was developed by Bandura (1977) and states that children acquire behaviors, attitudes and social norms through the act of observing, imitating and modeling. Although children can only learn behaviors through first-hand experience, they can also learn from what others have learned through their own experiences and the consequences of their actions. Traditionally, children learn through their interactions with family members, teachers and peers. However, today's digital world offers many examples of "virtual" models to learn from; including social media influencers, online peers and television and movie characters.

Video sharing sites, social media and other forms of digital platforms create new avenues for children to observe and learn from others' behavior. Depending on the content consumed, children may model either prosocial (cooperation/helping) or antisocial (aggression/exclusion) behaviors. Consequently, researchers have begun asking questions regarding the types of digital models children are being exposed to, and if those models will positively or negatively affect their development of social skills. Due to the fact that there is no instant real-time feedback for children when engaging in digital activities, children may have difficulty determining whether they are modeling the correct social behaviors.

2.2 Emotional Intelligence Theory

Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory was originally developed by Mayer and Salovey (1997) and then further elaborated by Goleman (1995). EI Theory

stresses the importance of being able to recognize, understand, manage and utilize emotions. An individual's EI consists of several different areas including self awareness, self regulation, empathy and social skills. All of these areas of EI are critical to successfully functioning in relationships and maintaining good mental health (Mayer et al., 2004).

An individual's development of emotional intelligence is directly tied to their social experiences; specifically their interactions with other people. Therefore, the potential effects of digital environments on an individual's emotional intelligence development could be either positive or negative. On one hand, decreased face to face communication and therefore fewer opportunities to practice empathy and interpret other's emotional cues (such as facial expressions and tone of voice) (Uhls et al., 2014) may result in a decrease in an individual's emotional intelligence. On the other hand, some digital environments may allow individuals to express their feelings, and potentially find social connections, for individuals who may have trouble finding social connections in everyday life (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

Therefore, the degree to which digital environments affect an individual's emotional intelligence development will depend on the type of digital environment the individual is participating in and the degree to which that environment allows for social emotional development.

2.3 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) represents a comprehensive framework for examining the relationship between a child's environment and their development. The environment is made up of four levels: microsystem (the family and school), mesosystem (interaction among settings), exosystem (indirect influences such as where a parent works), and macrosystem (societal norms and values).

In modern society, digital technology has become a part of each level of a child's environment. Technology is involved in a child's daily interactions with digital devices at the microsystem level, digital communication between schools and homes at the mesosystem level, and broad cultural trends toward digitalization at the macrosystem level. Therefore, technology is not something outside of a child's environment, but rather is a part of the environment itself (Johnson & Pupilampu, 2008).

This view indicates that the effects of digital technologies are not consistent across all populations, but rather vary due to differences in contextual variables (i.e. parenting practices, schooling, and socio-cultural status). For example, when parents are actively mediating their child's digital use and guiding that use, the outcomes may be positive (Domoff et al., 2019). Conversely, when parents do not supervise their children's digital use, there

may be increased risk of negative outcomes related to excessive or inappropriate use.

3. Impact of Digital Technology

3.1 Impact of Digital Technology on social skills

The digital world that children live in today affects the way we practice social skills. Traditionally, social skills, including communication, cooperation, conflict resolution and building relationships, were practiced in person. They were learned by interacting with others in families, schools and among peers (Denham et al., 2003). Today's digital technologies and devices have changed the number of times children interact with each other. Therefore, there continues to be discussion about whether the digital world has an effect on the social skills children develop.

One of the major concerns in the literature is that the amount of time children spend using screens could reduce the opportunities for them to interact with people face-to-face. Many studies show that the more children use digital media, the less they will communicate with people face-to-face. Communication in person is important to develop social skills such as being able to listen actively, communicating effectively non-verbally and having the ability to understand and feel empathy for others (Uhls et al., 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2018). For example, Uhls et al. (2014) reported that children who did not have access to screens for several days showed a much greater improvement in their ability to read non-verbal emotional cues than children who continued to use digital media. This study supports the idea that in order for children to have the opportunity to learn and develop a good understanding of social situations they need to interact directly with humans.

Additionally, children who are excessively isolated and/or withdraw from social situations due to spending most of their time alone in front of screens may be at risk of poor social competence. Passive consumption, or simply viewing television or watching videos, while sitting alone in front of a screen for long periods of time has been shown to increase feelings of loneliness and isolation (Keles et al., 2020). Online interactions do not replace the immediate nature of face-to-face communication and therefore may limit children's ability to develop the skills required to resolve conflicts and negotiate. In many cases online interactions allow users to remain anonymous, and in the absence of real-time feedback, can create opportunities for children to exhibit negative behavior such as cyberbullying (Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Cyberbullying has been linked to a variety of negative social and psychological outcomes.

Although the literature raises serious concerns related to the development of social skills, there is a growing body of research that reports on the positive

impact of digital technologies on social development. Digital platforms that allow multiple users to interact with one another such as multi-player video games and online forums, can provide opportunities for children to work together collaboratively, develop team-work skills, communicate with other users and develop social skills in a variety of different social environments (Granic et al., 2014). Specifically, digital technology can develop specific types of social competence, namely, digital communication skills that are becoming increasingly relevant in today's society. Additionally, digital technology can provide children with a sense of belonging and social support, even children who may struggle in traditional face-to-face social environments (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

It is important to note that the impact of digital technology on social skills is not consistent, but is influenced by a number of moderators. Specifically, the type of digital activity, appears to be a key moderator. Active and socially interactive digital activities have been generally positively correlated with children's social skills, whereas passive digital consumption has not (Domoff et al., 2019). The duration of time children spend engaging with digital technology is also a significant moderator, excessive screen time has consistently been negatively correlated with social development. Parental mediation and guidance, have also been identified as a key mediator of the type of digital media children engage with and the degree to which they benefit or are harmed by it.

3.2 Impact of Digital Technology on Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI), defined as the capacity to identify, comprehend, manage, and express emotion appropriately, is an important part of children's sociemotional growth (Mayer et al., 2004). The development of EI is directly related to children's interpersonal experiences, especially those which include direct, face to face contact, where children learn to read emotional cues, to respond to the emotions of others, and to control their own emotions. Digital technologies now play an increasingly important part of children's everyday life, providing new types of interpersonal experience. Interacting with digital technologies can either support or impede children's developing abilities.

The most significant concern about digital media use, expressed in the literature, is that high levels of digital media use will reduce opportunities for children to practice the emotional skills they need to succeed in the real world. Direct social interactions provide children with abundant emotional information, through facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language, all of which are often diminished or missing from digital communications (Turkle, 2011). Children who spend most of their time communicating through digital means therefore have fewer opportunities to develop empathy and to

develop emotional knowledge. There is empirical evidence to support this concern; for example, Uhls et al. (2014) found that decreasing the amount of time children spent using digital media was positively correlated with better recognition of non-verbal emotional cues, supporting the idea that direct social interaction is necessary for the development of emotional intelligence.

Digital media can also negatively affect children's ability to manage their emotions. The rapid pace and great stimulation of digital media, especially video games and social media, has been associated with an increase in impulsiveness and a decrease in tolerance for frustration (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). The instant feedback provided by likes and other digital rewards may encourage children to seek immediate satisfaction, thereby undermining their ability to delay their responses to emotionally charged situations and to effectively manage their negative emotions. Additionally, children exposed to online social comparisons and negative social interactions, such as cyberbullying, may be at risk for emotional distress, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem (Keles et al., 2020).

However, while there are potential dangers of digital media for children's emotional intelligence, there are also ways that digital media may provide opportunities for the development of some aspects of emotional intelligence. Through digital media, children can find ways to express their emotions, whether through text, images, or multimedia, and many children may feel safer exploring their identities and building social confidence in a digital environment (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Exposure to a wide variety of perspectives through digital media can help children develop greater awareness of emotions and a wider range of emotional experiences.

The relationship between digital technology and emotional intelligence is influenced by a number of factors. The way children engage with digital media is one of the most important. Interactive and socially-oriented engagements with digital media tend to have a more positive effect on children's emotional development than passive consumption of digital media (Domoff et al., 2019). Parents also have a significant impact on their children's digital media use through mediation, when parents guide children in interpreting their digital experiences and develop emotional responses to those experiences. Finally, both age and individual differences in children will likely shape how children process and respond to digital media.

3.4 Screen Time and Self-Regulation

Self-regulation refers to children's ability to control their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors toward achieving long-term goals. Self-regulation is an important part of children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Blair & Raver, 2015) and involves a number of abilities such as attention

control, impulse inhibition, and delaying gratification. Children who possess self-regulatory abilities tend to do better academically and socially, and are generally happier and healthier than those without them. Recently, researchers have started paying more attention to how much time children spend watching television or playing video games and how this affects their ability to self-regulate.

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence indicating that excessive screen time has been found to result in less effective self-regulation among children. Fast paced and high-stimulation content can cause children to have difficulty focusing and impulsive behaviors (Christakis et al., 2018). The rapid stimulation children receive from these digital sources can create expectations for constant stimulation; therefore, children will find it more difficult to focus and complete tasks such as classroom work or interacting with peers. Research has shown that prolonged periods of screen time have resulted in children having trouble with their executive functions such as working memory and cognitive flexibility (Domoff et al., 2019).

One other way that screen time can affect a child's ability to self-regulate is through poor sleep. Studies have shown that exposure to screens, especially before bedtime, can disrupt sleep patterns and reduce sleep duration. This occurs because screens stimulate cognition and interfere with the body's natural circadian rhythm through the effects of blue light (Hale & Guan, 2015). Impaired sleep has strong associations with decreased emotional regulation, shorter attention spans, and increased behavioral issues in children. Therefore, this demonstrates another indirect path that digital technologies can have on a child's self-regulatory capabilities.

Additionally, many digital platforms have been designed to encourage engagement through immediate rewards. These rewards often come in the form of likes, points, or notifications. These immediate rewards can contribute to the development of habituated or compulsive patterns of use among children. This makes it more difficult for children to disengage from their devices and self-regulate their own behavior (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017). Ultimately, over time, this can lead to weakened internal self-control mechanisms as children become accustomed to relying on external digital stimuli to guide their actions and decisions.

It is also important to consider that not all forms of screen use are detrimental to children's self-regulation. There is some emerging research suggesting that certain types of digital activities, such as those that are interactive, educational, and goal-directed, can actually enhance the development of executive functioning skills (Granic et al., 2014). For example, children who play problem-solving games and participate in structured digital learning programs may develop greater attention control, planning and persistence. Thus, the

impact of screen time on self-regulation is not solely determined by the amount of screen time, but also by the type and context of screen-based activity.

The extent to which children use digital media appropriately also depends upon parental guidance. Parents who co-view with children, set limits consistently, and guide their children's media usage have been shown to support more positive developmental outcomes (Domoff et al., 2019). When parents engage with their children in relation to digital experiences, they can assist in developing reflective thinking and facilitate the development of self-regulatory abilities.

4. Discussion

The previous literature review focused on how digital technologies impact children's social skills, emotional intelligence, and self regulation. The results were based on a large body of evidence, showing a complicated, and complicated relationship between digital technology and development. Instead of creating a completely negative or positive narrative of the impacts of digital technology, the evidence indicates the influences of digital technology are largely dependent on context and the numerous factors that interact to create that context.

A common theme throughout the literature reviewed was that children will have fewer opportunities to engage in the necessary social skills that require face to face interaction, if they spend too much time using digital technology without structure. Social skills that include empathy, active listening, and interpreting non-verbal cues are learned through the direct social interactions we encounter daily (Denham et al., 2003) and developing emotional intelligence requires the repeated exposure to other people's genuine emotional expressions, which can be limited in a digitally-mediated environment (Mayer et al., 2004). Thus, excessive amounts of passive screen time seem to negatively affect many of the key developmental processes.

However, the literature also identifies that digital technologies can be utilized as tools to enable social connections and facilitate the expression of emotions. Platforms that allow for the interaction of multiple users (i.e. multiplayer games and online communities) provide opportunities for collaboration, communication, and exposure to diverse viewpoints (Granic et al., 2014; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Additionally, digital spaces can be an opportunity for children with social anxiety or those who struggle in traditional social situations to feel confident in their abilities to develop social competence. These findings indicate that digital technology itself does not inherently inhibit

the development of social and emotional skills, rather it creates new ways for them to be developed.

An additional finding that emerged from this review, is the importance of recognizing the differences between various forms of digital engagement. Digital consumption in the form of passive viewing (e.g. extended video watching) has been shown to be consistently correlated with negative developmental outcomes including decreased attention, lower levels of empathy, and higher levels of social withdrawal (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Domoff et al., 2019). On the contrary, the forms of digital technology that promote active and social interaction appear to be correlated with positive developmental outcomes. This difference emphasizes the need to go beyond simplistic measures of "screen time" and examine the quality, context, and intended purposes of the digital engagement.

Additionally, the role of environmental and contextual variables is crucial in determining the developmental outcomes. In line with Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), children's experiences with digital technologies occur within larger systems of influence, including family practices, school environments, and cultural norms. Parental mediation appears to be a significant protective factor. Guiding children, being engaged in activities with children, and establishing limits and expectations, can minimize potential risks and enhance the benefits of digital technologies (Domoff et al., 2019). However, the absence of supervision and unrestricted access to digital technology can increase the likelihood of experiencing adverse outcomes.

This review also highlighted several areas of gaps in the existing literature. A majority of the studies reviewed are cross-sectional, and therefore do not provide enough information to determine long-term developmental effects. Furthermore, a majority of the studies were completed in Western societies, leaving little examination of cultural variation in technology use and its effects. This is especially true for countries experiencing rapid digitalization, where the manner of use and parental practices may be substantially different.

5. Implications

The results of this literature review provide important implications for parents, teachers, and government officials especially as we continue to become more technologically connected. Due to the complexity of how technology affects children's development across a variety of different contexts, a balanced and educated approach will be necessary.

5.1 Implications for Parents

Parents have a significant role in the digital lives of their children. The literature has shown that parents who actively mediate their children's digital experience can create a protective environment for their children which can lead to enhanced positive outcomes and reduced negative outcomes. Instead of simply limiting the amount of time that children spend using screens, parents should focus on the type and the way that they engage with digital technology. For example, co-viewing digital content and discussing it with your children can improve your children's ability to think critically and emotionally. Establishing rules about when children can use devices (especially in the hour leading up to bed), as well as setting clear and consistent limits on how much time they spend on their devices, can also encourage healthy self-regulation and sleep habits.

In addition, parents should encourage a balance between their children's use of digital technology and non-digital forms of social interaction. This will help foster social competence and emotional development.

5.2 Implications for Teachers

Teachers are being asked to incorporate technology into their classrooms to enhance student learning and to prepare students for a highly technological world. The results of this review indicate that technology should not replace opportunities for students to interact socially. Rather, classroom practices should be developed to allow for both collaborative learning and social-emotional growth through social interactions. In addition, teachers have the opportunity to assist students in developing "digital emotional literacy" or the ability to identify, interpret and regulate emotions in online contexts. Finally, structured digital activities that are focused on specific goals, can assist students in developing self-regulation and executive functioning skills (Granic et al. 2014).

5.3 Implications for policy makers

Policy makers are responsible for creating policies related to children and their use of technology. The current policies regarding children and technology have been limited and based on very simple recommendations (e.g. limit screen time). Rather than focusing on screen time limits, policies should focus on the quality and educational value of children's digital experiences. Policy makers should invest money in parent and teacher training programs so that these adults will be able to provide guidance to children in regards to their digital experiences. Finally, because there are large differences in children's access to technology and their levels of digital literacy, policies should take into consideration the cultural and socioeconomic contexts of children and

work to eliminate the inequities that currently exist (Livingstone & Smith 2014).

5.4 Implications for Future Research

This review indicates that additional longitudinal and cross-cultural research is needed to fully understand the effects of digital technology on child development over time. In addition, future research should distinguish between types of digital experiences (i.e. passive vs. interactive) and explore the effect of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, on children's social and emotional abilities. Finally, including qualitative methods in future research may provide a more in-depth look at children's actual experiences in digital environments.

6. Conclusion

The rapid incorporation of digital technology into the everyday lives of children has significantly altered where and how children develop socially/emotionally. A review of the research indicates that there is a complex and multi-dimensional relationship among the amount/quality of time children spend using digital technologies, their social skills, emotional intelligence and ability to self-regulate; and the nature of the specific digital technology(s) they are exposed to.

There is a significant body of research indicating that children who engage in excessive and unmediated exposure to screens (i.e., television, video games, computer programs etc.) will likely have fewer opportunities to interact with other people in person, less opportunity to empathize with others, and may experience difficulty regulating their emotions. There are also numerous studies indicating that digital technology can provide many opportunities for children to communicate, collaborate, and express their emotions.

What determines whether technology has positive or negative developmental outcomes for children is not necessarily the type of technology children are exposed to, but rather the manner in which, when, and under what conditions it is used. The same applies to factors such as content quality, degree of interactivity, parental mediation and the broader cultural/socio-economic environment in which children grow up.

An important implication of this review of the literature is that we must move away from simplistic views of technology as either "good" or "bad." Rather, a more nuanced view of technology is needed—one that acknowledges technology as a normal component of children's ecological environments, and aims to promote the use of technology in a way that is balanced, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate.

In the current era of increasing reliance upon digital technology, the question is no longer whether technology should be allowed in children's lives, but rather how it can best be integrated to support children's optimal development. Through developing informed parental practices, adaptable educational strategies, and evidence-based public policy, the benefits of digital technology can be maximized, and its risks minimized.

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The role of schools in safe internet use education and protection of students emotional well-being

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Abstract: There is an increasing integration of the use of digital technology in students’ lives for personal and school- related purposes. Despite many educational and developmental benefits, the increased internet use has exposed students to various psychological, emotional and social risks, like anxiety, interpersonal conflicts, cyberbullying, exposure to violent content etc. Schools have an important role in promoting online safety and in preventing the risks associated with internet use among children. Through a quantitative approach, this study aims to examine and provide a comprehensive view of the role of schools in education for safe internet use of students in lower secondary education in Albania and the contribution to the protection of their emotional well-being. The study analyzes how schools digital education contributes to the students’ ability to recognize and manage online risks such as cyberbullying or emotional difficulties related to online interactions, how effective are the psycho-educational interventions of schools perceived by students and the importance of continuous education for internet safety. The findings suggest that schools play a key role in preventing problems related to children internet use, but also in their emotional well-being by regularly raising students’ awareness of safe online behaviors and positive relationships among students.

Keywords: *emotional wellbeing; cyberbullying; digital education; safe internet use education*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the use of technology has increased significantly among all age groups, but the impact and consequences of its misuse are still

insufficiently studied. Currently, we are facing a generation of children who have been born and are growing up in a digitalized environment, where the boundaries between physical reality and virtual reality are becoming increasingly unclear. Human society is still in the early stages regarding the impact that the use of technology has and will have in the future, its integration in all areas of life, but above all, the recognition of the risks of its use, and their prevention, is and should be in the focus of researchers, especially for the protection of school-age children. In this context, the recognition of risks related to internet use and their prevention should be the focus of scientific research especially in the direction of protecting school-age children. Currently, in Albanian schools various awareness campaigns are carried out for the protection of children from the risks of internet use, but little is known about their effectiveness and the emotional well-being of children. Teachers likewise operate in an unfamiliar terrain for them, both due to the fact that this is a “new” problem, which they themselves have not faced during their upbringing, but also because of the lack of clear, specific, official guidelines for methods, techniques or information with proven positive results in this direction. It is worth emphasizing that the same phenomenon also occurs with parents, who likewise are unprepared for this reality in which their children are growing up. For these reasons, the study of this phenomenon emerges as a necessary need of the time, and especially the study of the real effectiveness of the educational work of schools in the prevention of problems as well as the emotional well-being of students.

The aims of this study is to examine and provide a comprehensive view of the role of schools in education for safe internet use of students in lower secondary education in Albania and the contribution to the protection of their emotional well-being. The main objectives are:

- To analyze the relationship between school-based safe internet education and emotional well-being.
- To investigate the association between negative online experiences and students subjective emotional well-being.
- To explore whether school support or reduces the impact of negative experiences on students emotional well-being.

This study was conducted with students of lower secondary schools in Albania, an age group in which online experiences are combined, as digital technology is used for school-related activities, but also for personal purposes. While the digital technology can help and support learning, evidence shows that children’s digital use also brings meaningful risks—ranging from exposure to harmful content and online abuse to indirect effects on mental health through reduced in-person connection, sleep disruption, and stress (OECD, 2025). Cyberbullying is becoming one of the most important school-

associated online risks, which also affects the emotional outcome for students and also it is related to peer-relational difficulties. Meta-analytic work has documented the scope and impact of cyberbullying involvement among youth, underlining its relevance as a public health and educational concern (Camacho et al, 2023). At the same time, broader frameworks on children’s online risks emphasize that risk exposure is shaped by contextual factors (including school and family environments), and that harm is not inevitable but depends on children’s coping resources, adult mediation, and institutional support (LSERO, 2011). In recent years there has been an increase in the reporting of cases of children who have experienced different forms of online bullying in Albania. A recent study in partnership between One Albania and the Faculty of History and Philology at the University of Tirana presents that 1 in 5 young people have been affected by cyberbullying in Albania, concerning high rate, which further emphasizes the role of education, particularly teachers, in promoting online safety education and the emotional well-being of students. This research relates to the conference theme, “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society” because it focuses on how educational institutions respond to the opportunities and risks created by digital technology.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Recent studies show that early exposure and use of technology may be associated with significant impacts regarding the cognitive, emotional and social development of children, raising concerns about their psychological well-being and their healthy development. Currently there are few studies that analyze students’ well-being, internet addiction or the problems related to regular internet use at school age, in terms of children’s safety and protection. For this reason, it becomes necessary to deepen scientific research on the long-term effects of the use of technology, especially in critical periods of development, such as the age of preadolescence and adolescence, a transitional period during which important developmental processes occur, especially in socio emotional. During the use of the internet, in an online context, detached from their everyday reality, but at the same time interconnected, adolescents may explore different online identities, creating alternative versions of the self, which may serve as a space for experimentation and self-expression, but may also increase the pressure for social comparison, or evaluation through likes, comments or followers. In relation to social comparison (Festinger, 1954), and the most recent studies on social media show that continuous exposure to idealized images may negatively affect self-esteem and body satisfaction, especially among adolescent girls (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). Likewise, there is

evidence that problematic internet use and addiction to social media have been associated with an increase in symptoms of anxiety, depression and social isolation (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012; Twenge et al., 2018). In the aspect of relationships with peers, adolescents experience an increase in sensitivity to acceptance and social belonging. According to Steinberg and Monahan (2007), the influence of peers reaches its peak during early adolescence, especially in risk behaviors. In the online environment, this sensitivity may translate into involvement in dangerous viral challenges, pressure for digital conformity or experience of cyberbullying. Studies show that online victimization is associated with an increase in depressive symptoms, a decrease in self-esteem and problems in academic functioning (Kowalski et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the model of “Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects” (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013), which suggests that the effects of digital media are not uniform, but depend on individual characteristics (such as personality, self-esteem), social factors (family, peers) and the context of use. This implies that some adolescents may benefit from internet use (increase in digital competencies, social support, access to information), while others may be more vulnerable to negative effects. Precisely here the school plays a very important role.

In the joint instruction no. 20 dated 19.08.2025, “On the 2025–2026 school year in the pre-university education system,” awareness-raising activities on cyber security are foreseen. Based on the National Cyber security Strategy 2025–2030, Policy Objective 2 focuses on the online protection of citizens and the promotion of cyber culture. Education and public awareness constitute a continuous process aimed at equipping citizens with knowledge and practical tools to address current challenges and to make informed decisions. Likewise, it is important to promote cyber ethics and respect for educational rules online, as well as the prevention of online radicalization, by encouraging the use of respectful and responsible language. The National Cyber security Strategy 2025–2030 focuses on establishing the necessary mechanisms for the online protection of citizens, particularly the protection of children, young people, and underrepresented groups. Therefore, coherent and sustainable awareness among children is planned; however, at present there appear to be no concrete instruments with proven results regarding student awareness in schools or tools for teachers. In this context, a study by Mitchell and Glazzard (2018) concluded that schools should involve students in the development of digital policies and provide them with opportunities to co-construct the digital curriculum. This would ensure that the curriculum addresses the issues that students themselves consider important. Likewise, the schools staff should be trained on how to identify and support children with mental health needs or who have developed mental health needs due to the use of technology. The

strategies undertaken in recent years by the Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, in cooperation with the line ministries for their implementation in the pre-university education system, have highlighted the need for continuous studies in various fields of student education, as in the case of this study which focuses on digital education.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted during the period January–February 2026. In this study are included lower secondary education students from two lower secondary schools in Tirana and one lower secondary school in Kukës. Data were collected through a questionnaire administered directly in the schools included in the study. A total of 306 participants took part in the study. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling approach. To complete the research, a questionnaire on internet use and the influence of teachers on education for internet use, as well as the Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire, were administered.

The questionnaire on internet use and the influence of teachers in education for internet use: is a short questionnaire that aims to measure students’ subjective perceptions of the influence of teachers and the school as a whole on safe internet use, prevention and intervention when necessary, to collect data on cyberbullying that students of this age may have experienced so far, as well as the time they spend on the internet and the social networks they use most frequently. The questionnaire is in Likert format with responses ranging from “never” to “always”. It consists of 21 statements. The reliability coefficient in this study was $\alpha = .799$

Students’ emotional well-being: To measure students’ emotional well-being, the *Student Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire* was used. It is a 16-item self-report behavior rating scale designed to measure youths’ school-specific well-being. It consists of four subscales.

1. *Joy of Learning*: refers to experiencing positive emotions and cognitions while engaged in learning tasks.
2. *School Connectedness*: refers to relating well to and feeling cared for by others at school, including peers and adults.
3. *Educational Purpose*: refers to valuing school and academic tasks as important and meaningful.
4. *Academic Efficacy*: refers to evaluating one’s academic behaviors as effectively meeting school demands. (Renshaw et al, 2015)

The questionnaire is in Likert format with responses ranging from “never” to “always”. The reliability coefficient in this study was $\alpha = .891$

Ethical approval was obtained from the schools directors. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and the data were used exclusively for research purposes.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

Characteristics of the participants

In the study participated 306 students of lower secondary education, of whom 156 (51%) were females and 150 (49%) were males with an average age $M=13.19$. participant age was from between 11–16 years ($M = 13.19$). The majority of participants were between 12 and 14 years old (68.7%), with 14-year-olds representing the largest group (25.2%).

Internet use from students and social media

The time of internet use is a very important indicator of this study. According to the self-reports of the students: Most common use: 2 hours (20.3% of students) and 3 hours (20.9%) are the average of internet use. Or 41.2% in total. Minimal use: 0 hours (4.2% of students) – these students do not use the internet for school. A small number of students report that they use more than 5 hours. Maximum use: 13 hours (1 student) – these are the most extreme users. Although there are some students who use up to 12 hours, the majority are in the 0–5 hour interval

About which social media students use, data shows that the most used platforms by students in lower secondary schools:

- TikTok: 48% of students use this social media platform.
- Snapchat: 34% of students use this social media platform.
- Instagram: 26% of students use this social media platform.

Other platforms, such as YouTube (23%), Gemini (14%), and WhatsApp (37% with a different coded maximum) are used by a smaller proportion of students. Facebook, FreeFire, Roblox, Minecraft, as well as other games have had minimal use, under 5% of students. The majority of students use 2–3 different social networks, suggesting a moderate diversity of social media use.

Students' report of cyberbullying

In Table 1 are presented the statistics of cyberbullying which indicate low levels of self-reported cyberbullying among lower secondary school students. The mean scores for all measured forms of online victimization were close to the minimum value of the scale (1–5), suggesting that such experiences are reported infrequently. Specifically, the experience of online bullying showed a low mean score ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 1.08$), indicating that most students reported rarely or never experiencing online victimization. Similarly, the sharing of

rumours or personal secrets ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 1.08$), unauthorized sharing of photos or videos ($M = 1.31$, $SD = 0.96$), and sharing of private conversations through screenshots ($M = 1.33$, $SD = 0.94$) were reported at low levels. Slightly higher but still low levels were observed for conflicts originating on social media and later escalating at school ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 1.22$), suggesting that online interactions may occasionally contribute to interpersonal conflicts in the school environment. Overall, these findings suggest a relatively low prevalence of cyberbullying experiences within the students included on this study. However, the moderate standard deviation values indicate variability in responses, implying that a small proportion of students may experience higher levels of online victimization. These results may reflect effective preventive measures within schools, although the possibility of underreporting due to social desirability bias cannot be excluded.

Table 1: cyberbullying of students
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have experienced being bullied online.	300	1.00	5.00	1.4767	1.08322
I have experienced conflicts that began on social media which later escalated at school with other students.	297	1.00	5.00	1.5623	1.21796
My photos or/and videos have been shared on social media without my permission.	303	1.00	5.00	1.3168	.95526
Rumours or personal secrets about me have been shared on social media.	306	1.00	5.00	1.4706	1.08376
My private conversations with other peers have been shared as screenshots.	304	1.00	5.00	1.3322	.94300
Valid N (listwise)	291				

Students' perception of school digital education

This study findings is that students report high levels of awareness and education regarding safe internet use provided by schools. The mean scores for most items were above the midpoint of the scale (1–5), suggests positive student perceptions of school-based digital education and teacher support. The highest mean score was found for students' awareness of internet-related risks ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.94$), indicating that most students feel well informed about potential online dangers. Similarly, students reported that teachers clearly explain rules for internet use ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.03$), provide important

information regarding internet use ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.13$), and offer advice about potential online problems ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.11$). Students also reported that they learn how to use the internet safely at school ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.11$) and perceive educational classes on internet safety as necessary and helpful ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.05$). Moderate mean scores were observed regarding institutional responses and support mechanisms. Specifically, the perception that schools take action when internet-related problems occur showed a lower mean score ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.34$), indicating less certainty about schools' direct intervention practices. Similarly, students expressed a moderate perception of school-organized awareness activities ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.13$) and teachers' willingness to provide support ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.24$). Additionally, students expressed a desire for more educational activities related to safe internet use ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.18$). The findings suggest that schools play an important role in promoting awareness and knowledge about safe internet use among students. However, *the relatively lower scores regarding school intervention and support indicate a potential gap between awareness-raising efforts and practical response mechanisms, highlighting the need for more structured and comprehensive school-based support strategies.*

**Table 2: Internet use education
Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am informed about the risks that may come from using the internet	304	1.00	5.00	4.4901	.94042
The rules for using the internet are clearly explained to us by teachers.	303	1.00	5.00	4.2079	1.02599
The school takes action when we have problems related to internet use	302	1.00	5.00	3.4338	1.34458
We learn how to use the internet safely at school.	302	1.00	5.00	4.1026	1.10844
At school, we have educational lessons that talk about the risks of using the internet.	300	1.00	5.00	3.9867	1.17092
Educational classes are necessary because they help me understand safe internet use online.	305	1.00	5.00	4.1443	1.05077
I am advised at school about problems that may occur on the internet.	304	1.00	5.00	4.1842	1.11350

I believe the school organizes many activities to inform students about internet risks	301	1.00	5.00	3.9236	1.12730
I would like that school organize more educational activities about safe internet use.	303	1.00	5.00	3.9637	1.18294
Teachers are willing to help me when I have using the internet.	304	1.00	5.00	3.8750	1.24446
Teachers provide important information regarding the use of the internet	300	1.00	5.00	4.0200	1.13308
Valid N	274				

Students' emotional well-being

The result of student' emotional well-being questionnaire, *show strongest correlations are between: I consider myself a successful student and I achieve good grades in my schoolwork* → $r = 0.552$. Conclusion: Students who feel successful also report higher grades. *I feel free to be myself at school and I feel that I am treated with respect at school* → $r = 0.540$. Conclusion: When students feel respected, they also feel freer to express themselves. *I feel happy while working and learning at school and I am truly interested in what I do at school* → $r = 0.567$. Conclusion: Interest in school activities is associated with happiness during learning. *The weakest correlations ($r < 0.35$) include: I feel that what I do at school is important with other items* → $r = 0.307 - 0.401$ Conclusion: This indicates that this feeling is less strongly related to success and happiness, but still statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

We also analyzed the relationships among several items related to students' feelings about school, academic success, satisfaction, and motivation experienced during learning and various school activities. *Strongest correlations and their interpretation: “I consider myself a successful student” and “I achieve good grades in my schoolwork”* ($r = 0.572$, $p < 0.01$): Interpretation: There is a *strong positive correlation* between students' self-perception as successful students and their academic performance. This means that students who perceive themselves as successful also tend to achieve good academic results. This is an indicator that high self-esteem contributes to academic performance. *“I am truly interested in what I do at school” and “I feel happy when I learn things at school that will help me in my life”* ($r = 0.554$, $p < 0.01$):

Interpretation: The strong correlation suggests that students who are interested in schoolwork also feel happy when learning things that will help them in life. This indicates that interest in learning is associated with positive feelings toward learning and education at school. *“I believe that school is important*

and should be taken seriously” and “I feel happy while working and learning at school” ($r = 0.563$, $p < 0.01$): Interpretation: These two items are also strongly related. Students who perceive school as an important activity that should be taken seriously tend to feel happy while working and learning at school. This is an important indicator that a positive attitude toward school may increase students’ satisfaction in learning. *“I feel that the staff at my school cares about me” and “I feel that I am treated with respect at school”* ($r = 0.587$, $p < 0.01$):

Interpretation: There is a strong positive relationship between the perception of care from school staff and the respect students feel at school. Students who feel supported and respected by school staff are more likely to feel valued and motivated. *“I feel free to be myself at school” and “I feel happy while working and learning at school”* ($r = 0.554$, $p < 0.01$):

Interpretation: The correlation suggests that students who feel free to express themselves at school often feel happy while working and learning. This is an important indication that an open and supportive environment contributes to students’ positive feelings at school.

The findings of this study confirm the important role of schools in promoting safe internet use and supporting students’ emotional well-being. Students reported high levels of awareness regarding internet risks, suggesting that school-based educational initiatives contribute positively to digital literacy. However, lower ratings for school intervention in addressing online problems indicate a potential gap between awareness-raising activities and concrete support mechanisms.

The relatively low levels of reported cyberbullying may reflect effective prevention strategies or possible underreporting due to social desirability bias. The absence of significant gender differences in internet use suggests that digital engagement is similarly distributed across male and female students.

The findings highlight the need for structured school-based digital education programs and teacher training in identifying and addressing online risks. Schools should implement comprehensive internet safety curricula, strengthen psycho-educational support services, and promote collaboration between teachers, parents, and students. Policy makers should develop evidence-based guidelines for digital education and cyber safety in the pre-university education system.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study analyzed internet use, the experience of online bullying, their risks, and academic performance among students of 9-year education, where 306 participants aged 11–16 years from 6th to 9th grade took part. The largest part

of the participants in the study were aged 12–14 years (68.7%). From the data analysis, the results showed that students have knowledge about the risks that come from internet use and are informed by teachers about safe internet use. The results for knowledge of risks had a mean of 4.49 on the scale from 1–5, while interventions for support from the school for addressing online problems were lower (mean 3.43).

Findings regarding experiences of online bullying and the sharing of photos/videos in an unauthorized manner resulted in low levels (mean 1.48), while the use of social networks that may encourage conflicts among students resulted in a mean of 1.56 based on the measurement scale from 1–5.

The internet use time spent by students resulted on average in 3.43 hours per day on the internet, mainly in the interval of 2–4 hours. From the data analysis regarding gender differences in time spent on the internet, there were no statistically significant differences (Chi-square $p = 0.606$). The most used social networks were TikTok (48%), WhatsApp (36%), Instagram (25%) and Snapchat (33%), while networks such as Facebook, Google, ChatGPT and some gaming platforms were less used (<10%).

From the academic aspect, students reported a positive perception of their success and the importance of school. The correlations between variables measuring motivation and academic performance were strong and positive ($r = 0.37$ – 0.57 , $p < 0.01$), suggesting that students who feel successful and motivated often achieve better results and express greater satisfaction with school activities.

The limitations of this study: use of a convenience sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings. Also, data were based on students' self-reports, which may be influenced by social desirability bias.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence on the role of school-based digital education in promoting safe internet use and emotional well-being among lower secondary students in Albania. It also highlights the importance of institutional support and educational interventions in shaping adolescents' online experiences in developing educational contexts.

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Values Education in Pre-University Education: An Integrated Approach to Students’ Civic Development—An Empirical Case Study

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Abstract: This paper critically examines values education in the pre-university education system as a central dimension of students’ holistic development and the cultivation of democratic school culture. Despite its recognized importance in educational policy and theory, values education often remains fragmented and insufficiently integrated into everyday school practice. Addressing this gap, the study aims to conceptualize and empirically explore an integrated model that connects ethical, moral, and civic values with both pedagogical processes and community engagement. The study is grounded in an empirical case study conducted at “Turgut Ozal” school in Durrës, employing a mixed-methods, practice-based research design. A one-year intervention was implemented, combining classroom-based activities (discussions, debates, reflective practices), extracurricular initiatives (workshops, educational visits, awareness campaigns), and structured community engagement (collaboration with parents and local stakeholders). The research design is informed by contemporary frameworks of social and emotional learning (SEL), experiential learning, and competence-based education. The findings suggest that values education, when systematically embedded and experientially enacted, contributes significantly to the development of students’ social, civic, and personal competencies. In particular, it strengthens dispositions such as responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and ethical awareness, while simultaneously fostering a more inclusive and collaborative school climate. However, the study also reveals structural limitations, including the absence of formalized institutional frameworks and the need for sustained teacher professional development. The paper argues that values education should be reconceptualized as a transversal and transformative dimension of schooling, rather than as a supplementary component. It contributes to current scholarly debates by proposing a context-sensitive and scalable model aligned with OECD and European Union

educational frameworks, with implications for policy, practice, and future research.

Keywords: *Values education; pre-university education; civic competencies; holistic development; school–community partnership.*

1. Introduction

In contemporary educational systems, values education has emerged as a critical component of holistic student development, particularly in the context of rapid social change, digital transformation, and increasing cultural complexity. Schools are no longer viewed solely as institutions for academic instruction but as environments for shaping responsible, ethical, and engaged citizens.

The research problem addressed in this study relates to the **lack of structured, integrated, and systematically monitored approaches to values education** in pre-university institutions. Despite the recognition of its importance, values education is often fragmented, implicit, or limited to isolated activities rather than embedded within the broader educational framework.

The main objective of this study is to **develop and analyze an integrated model of values education**, implemented through a school-based project that connects curriculum, extracurricular activities, and community engagement.

The study seeks to:

- examine current practices and challenges in values education;
- evaluate the impact of integrated interventions on student development;
- propose a sustainable framework aligned with contemporary educational standards.

This study is directly aligned with the conference theme “*Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society*”, as it addresses the need for innovative, value-oriented educational models that respond to the demands of a rapidly evolving social and technological landscape. This study contributes to the field by bridging the gap between normative frameworks of values education and their empirical application in school settings, offering a context-sensitive model that can be adapted across similar educational environments.

2. Literature review

Values education is grounded in a rich interdisciplinary tradition, drawing from moral philosophy, educational theory, and developmental psychology.

Moral development theory (Kohlberg). Kohlberg’s theory of moral development emphasizes the progression of individuals through stages of moral reasoning, from obedience-based ethics to principled reasoning (Kohlberg, 1984). In the educational context, this framework highlights the importance of creating learning environments that stimulate moral reflection and ethical decision-making.

Experiential learning (Dewey). John Dewey (1938) argued that education should be rooted in experience, interaction, and reflection. Values are not transmitted through instruction alone but are constructed through meaningful participation in social and practical activities. This perspective underpins the integration of classroom and community-based learning in values education.

Social and emotional learning (SEL). The SEL framework (CASEL, 2020) identifies key competencies such as self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. These competencies are closely aligned with values education and are essential for students’ personal and social development.

European and global frameworks. International policy frameworks, such as the **OECD Learning Compass 2030** and the **European Union Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018)**, emphasize the development of civic responsibility, ethical awareness, and social engagement. These frameworks reinforce the importance of integrating values into education systems to prepare students for democratic participation.

Research gap. Despite extensive theoretical grounding, there remains a gap between theory and practice, particularly in:

- the systematic integration of values into curricula;
- the use of measurable indicators for values development;
- the alignment between school practices and community engagement.

This study addresses these gaps by proposing an applied, evidence-based model. The integration of these theoretical perspectives suggests that values education should be understood not as a separate curricular component, but as a transversal and embedded dimension of the educational process, requiring coherence between policy, pedagogy, and school culture.

3. Methodology

Research design. The study adopts a **mixed-methods case study design**, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of values education practices.

Participants. The research was conducted in a pre-university institution, involving:

- 212 students

- 112 parents
- 25 teachers

The study involved students, teachers, and parents from the selected school. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

Group	Total Population	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
Students	263	212	80.6%
Parents	520	112	21.5%
Teachers	32	25	78.1%

Table 1. Sample Characteristics.

As shown in Table 1, the study achieved a high participation rate among students and teachers, ensuring the reliability of the collected data.

Instruments and procedures. Data were collected using:

- structured questionnaires (students, parents, teachers);
- focus group discussions (student representatives and teachers);
- observation and documentation of school activities.

Data analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and insights.

Ethical considerations. The study ensured:

- informed consent of participants;
- anonymity and confidentiality;
- adherence to institutional ethical standards.

4. Results

Findings. The main findings of the study are summarized in Table 2.

Dimension	Key findings
Values awareness	High level of exposure to values such as respect and cooperation
Behavioral impact	Over 80% of students reported improved behavior
School climate	Students feel safe and respected
Program structure	Lack of formal integrated program
Community involvement	Strong need for school–community collaboration

Table 2. Summary of Key Findings.

These findings highlight both the strengths and structural gaps in the current implementation of values education.

The findings reveal several key trends:

1. **High awareness of values education.** Most students reported frequent exposure to values such as respect, cooperation, and empathy in school activities.

Most students reported frequent exposure to values such as respect and cooperation.

Response category	Percentage (%)
Very often	65%
Often	25%
Sometimes	8%
Rarely	2%

Figure 1. Frequency of Values Education in School

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of students are frequently exposed to values education activities, indicating a strong presence of values-based practices within the school environment.

2. **Positive behavioral impact.** Over 80% of students indicated that values education improved their behavior and interpersonal relationships.

Over 80% of students reported that values education improved their behavior.

Response category	Percentage (%)
Yes	82%
Partially	14%
No	4%

Figure 2. Impact of Values Education on Student Behavior.

Figure 2 demonstrates that a significant majority of students perceive a positive impact of values education on their behavior, confirming its effectiveness in shaping attitudes and interpersonal conduct.

3. **Strong school climate.** Students reported feeling safe and respected, reflecting a positive and inclusive school environment.

Students reported feeling safe and respected in the school environment.

Response category	Percentage (%)
Feel safe and respected	78%
Mostly safe	17%
Not always safe	5%

Figure 3. Students' Perception of School Climate.

As illustrated in Figure 3, the majority of students perceive the school environment as safe and respectful, reflecting a positive and inclusive school climate.

4. **Need for structured programs.** Despite positive practices, the absence of a formal, integrated program was identified as a major limitation.
5. **Importance of community involvement.** Both teachers and students emphasized the role of community-based activities in reinforcing values.

5. Discussion

The findings support Kohlberg’s view that moral development is enhanced through active engagement and reflection, as well as Dewey’s emphasis on experiential learning. The integration of practical activities—such as debates, community service, and collaborative projects—proved effective in translating abstract values into lived experiences.

Furthermore, the results align with SEL frameworks, demonstrating that values education contributes to emotional intelligence, social interaction, and responsible decision-making.

However, the study also highlights structural challenges, including:

- lack of institutional frameworks;
- limited teacher training;
- insufficient monitoring mechanisms.

These findings suggest that values education must be institutionalized through policy, curriculum integration, and professional development. From a policy perspective, the findings indicate the necessity of aligning school-level practices with broader educational frameworks such as the OECD Learning Compass and EU competence-based education models, particularly in fostering agency, co-agency, and transformative competencies among students.

6. Conclusion and limitations of the study

This study demonstrates that values education, when implemented through an integrated and participatory approach, significantly enhances students’ civic, social, and personal development. It contributes to the creation of a positive school climate and fosters active citizenship.

Implications

- Schools should adopt structured, integrated models of values education.
- Teacher training programs should include methodologies for values-based teaching.
- Strong partnerships with families and communities are essential.

Limitations

- The study is based on a single case, limiting generalizability.
- Data rely partly on self-reported perceptions.
- Long-term impact requires further longitudinal research.

Future Research

Future studies should explore:

- comparative models across schools;
- digital tools in values education;
- long-term effects on civic engagement.

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From neurons to algorithms: information literacy and knowledge mediation in school libraries in the age of AI

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Abstract: This article investigates the transformation of Information Literacy (LI) from a traditional technical instructional model to a fundamental cognitive competence necessitated by the complexities of the 21st-century digital landscape. As Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) permeates information retrieval, the librarian's role must evolve into that of an "attention mentor," safeguarding the user's cognitive autonomy. Utilizing a qualitative analysis centered on the "Instituto Pentágono" case study, the research explores the neurobiological foundations of information processing specifically the synergy between the frontal, temporal, and parietal lobes and the semiotic shifts inherent in AI-generated outputs. The study demonstrates how elementary methods of cognitive load reduction, such as symbolic classification and color coding, provide a scalable neuro-ergonomic framework for university and specialized libraries. By integrating Piaget's theories of neuroplasticity and Ausubel's meaningful learning, the paper argues that the automation of signification by AI threatens to induce "cognitive dependency" and neural atrophy of retrieval circuits. The conclusion asserts that LI is no longer merely a pedagogical objective but a biological necessity for preserving human attention and critical evaluation in a fragmented digital culture.

Keywords: *Information Literacy, Neuroscience, Artificial Intelligence, Semiotics, Cognitive Autonomy*

1. Introduction: the digital fragmentation of knowledge

The "21st Century Learner" navigates a landscape defined by informational superabundance and the rapid obsolescence of data. Historically, the primary obstacle in information science was the retrieval of scarce resources; today, the challenge has pivoted toward the management of attention and the

filtration of digital noise. Information Literacy (LI), defined by the American Library Association (ALA, 1989) and expanded by Gasque (2010), involves the sophisticated ability to recognize an informational need and the capacity to locate, evaluate, and effectively utilize information.

This evolution marks a shift from a "Technical Model" focusing on the mechanics of digital databases to "Critical Competence." In our current digital culture, knowledge is often presented in a fragmented, hypertextual format that overwhelms the human cognitive architecture. The modern librarian, therefore, must transcend the role of a collection organizer to become a mediator of knowledge, facilitating the transition from passive data consumption to the active, strategic transformation of information into internalized wisdom.

2. Literature review: the cognitive and semiotic nexus

2.1 Neurobiological Foundations of Information Processing

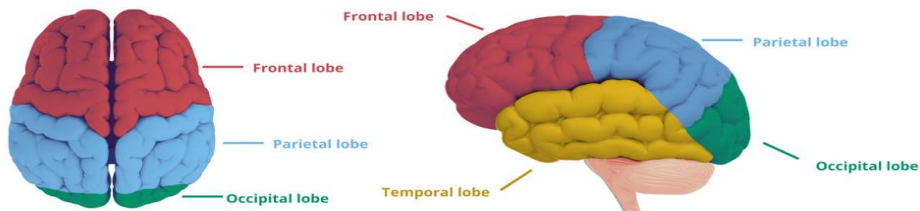
Information retrieval is not a mechanical task but a "symphony of brain functions" that necessitates the formation of complex neural circuits. The search process engages specific regions:

- **Frontal Lobe:** The epicenter of planning, strategy, and decision-making. Within this region, the Pre-motor Cortex becomes significantly more active during the formulation of search strategies, representing the most "attentive" phase of the brain's engagement.
- **Temporal Lobe:** Essential for identifying, interpreting, and recovering past meanings, allowing the learner to integrate new data into an existing intellectual framework.
- **Occipital and Parietal Lobes:** The occipital lobe interprets visual stimuli, while the parietal lobe manages spatial orientation. Together, they allow the user to navigate the physical and digital geography of the library.
- **Wernicke's Area:** Acting as a "convergence zone" for the occipital, temporal, and parietal lobes, this area is critical for language synthesis and deep comprehension. It is here that "Deep Reading" occurs, transforming symbols into profound understanding.

Learning Theory and Neuroplasticity: Drawing from Piaget, the acquisition of information involves Assimilation (the appropriation of new knowledge) and Accommodation (the mental reorganization of existing structures). This process is a mechanism of neuroplasticity, where the formation of new neuronal circuits depends on the active engagement of the brain. Furthermore,

Ausubel’s theory of Meaningful Learning posits that new content must be organized hierarchically and anchored to prior knowledge to be effectively internalized.

Figure 1 Hemispheres



Lobe	Main functions
Frontal	Planning, cognition, motor control, language
Parietal	Sensory integration, spatial orientation
Temporal	Memory, emotions, language
Occipital	Visual processing

Source: Prepared by the author (2026).

2.2 Semiotics in Information Retrieval

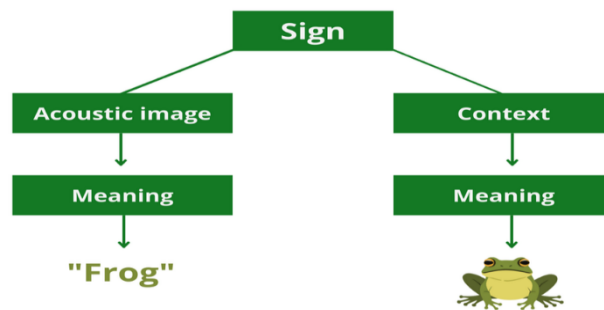
Semiotics provides the framework for understanding the interaction between users and classification systems. Utilizing the frameworks of Santaella (2007) and Barthes (1984), the library is viewed as an ecosystem of signs:

- Signifier: The material part of the sign (e.g., a CDU code or a keyword).
- Signified: The conceptual representation (the scientific concept).
- Signification: The act of uniting the signifier and signified to produce meaning.

Santaella illustrates that a single object, such as a “House”, can be represented by various signifiers a floor plan, a photograph, or the word "house" each requiring different levels of cognitive processing. The librarian acts as a "translator of signs," ensuring that the researcher’s "acoustic image" or query correctly maps to the intended scientific signified.

In other words, understand that a sign is a symbol that takes the place of anything known through experience. For example, the word “frog” has a meaning based on the general experience of humans, in which anyone living on an island where frogs do not exist would not know what this word refers to.

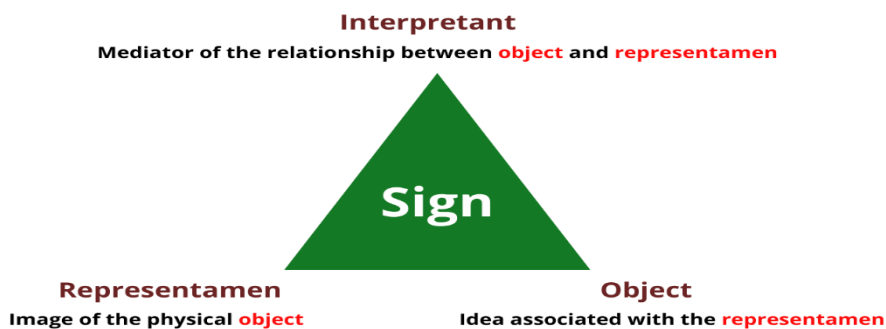
Figure 2: Illustration of significant understanding and meaning



Source: Prepared by the author (2026).

The signifier, the comprehensible element of the sign that constitutes, in a way, an “acoustic image,” is located on the level of form, that is, its material part, language; meaning is not a thing, but the mental representation of that thing. It is the concept. It is located on the level of content and, therefore, of the message, of interpretation.

Figure 3: Semiotic Triangle



Source: Prepared by the author (2026)

3. Methodology: the pentagon institute case study

This qualitative research is based on the practical application of IL at the Pentagon¹⁰ Institute of Education. The study observed how symbolic

¹⁰ This case study draws on professional practices and data originally developed during the author’s undergraduate thesis conducted at the Pentagon Institute. The material was reanalyzed and updated for the purposes of the present study.

classification and color coding were used to develop information autonomy in elementary school students.

Application to specialized environments: The use of symbols (e.g., a tree for ecology) or colors (e.g., blue for literature) serves to minimize the cognitive load on the occipital and parietal lobes. Although these methods are elementary, they apply directly to specialized university libraries. By utilizing the flexibility of the Universal Decimal Classification (UDC) to detail complex subjects and supplementing it with clear visual cues, librarians allow the researcher's frontal lobe to conserve metabolic energy. Instead of exhausting cognitive resources on the "physical location" of data, the researcher can devote that energy to "deep analysis" and critical synthesis.

4. Results and Discussion: The AI Challenge and the Attention Crisis

4.1 The AI Paradigm Shift: Neural Atrophy and Automated Signification

Generative AI fundamentally alters the semiotic "Sign." In traditional retrieval, the user engages the Pre-motor Cortex to plan a search and the Frontal Lobe to evaluate the results. In the AI paradigm, the machine automates the signification process: the Signifier (prompt) leads to a Signified (output) based on statistical probability rather than objective reality.

This shift obfuscates the semiotic link and creates a profound risk of Cognitive Dependency. By bypassing the strategic planning phase of retrieval, AI may lead to the neural atrophy of the search-and-recovery circuit. The user no longer exercises the critical evaluation necessary to join signifier and signified, delegating the act of "thinking" to the algorithm.

While Gasque (2010) defines literacy as the ability to evaluate information, the scenario for 2026 requires that this evaluation be extended to the algorithmic biases of Generative AIs, at the risk of atrophy of the neural planning circuits described by Cosenza and Guerra (2011).

4.2 Screens and Inattention Blindness

Hypertextual digital environments bombard the Frontal Lobe with constant stimuli and notifications. To conserve energy, the brain enters a state of Inattention Blindness, prioritizing quick, dopamine-driven stimuli over deep perception. A powerful manifestation of this is when users, saturated by digital noise, fail to perceive basic physical cues such as a notice board (placa de aviso) directly in their field of vision. This cognitive exhaustion undermines the ability to engage in the "slow reading" required for academic rigor.

4.3 The Librarian as "Mentor of Attention"

The modern librarian must evolve into a "Curator of Algorithms" and a promoter of "Deep Reading." By facilitating environments that encourage "slow reading," the librarian protects the user's cognitive health. The librarian does not just organize books; they manage the ecology of the user's attention, ensuring the brain remains capable of complex synthesis rather than mere data consumption.

4.4 Visual Systems for Specialists

Symbolic signaling, traditionally reserved for children, should be adapted for adults and specialists to mitigate "digital fatigue." Using clear visual stimuli for complex sub-disciplines reduces navigation effort, allowing researchers to dedicate their finite cognitive energy to the synthesis of knowledge rather than the mechanics of the search.

5. Conclusion and limitations

Information Literacy is no longer merely a technical skill; it is a matter of "cognitive health." The library must remain a "port of clarity" and a "dynamic center of resources" in an age of informational noise. By applying neuroscience and semiotics, the librarian ensures the "21st Century Learner" retains the autonomy to "read the world."

Limitations: The rapid evolution of generative models outpaces traditional literacy frameworks. Future research must continuously adapt cognitive scaffolding to increasingly opaque algorithmic interfaces to prevent the erosion of human critical agency.

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The Author declares that she used the DeepL tool to translate the text.

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The role of personality and training in achieving longevity

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"Every person is the architect of their own destiny" - Sallust

"Thought is the architect of health and longevity" - Professor A. Beschastnova

Abstract: Each person is the architect of their own destiny. The thought is the architect of health. Excellent health and longevity require powerful nervous energy accumulated in nerve cells and in the cells of the body, which controls the work within the organs. The mental representation of the individual, the training of the individual on the basis of revived abilities, life experience, mentalities of mental and physical health create the opportunity to achieve longevity. If the individual is in a state to control mental and physical health, intelligence in the field of learning, then he is in a state to act on health and achieve longevity. The source of aging of the body is associated with its energy, which operates according to the laws of nature. To maintain the purity of the internal organism, these are biological rules: increase the number of young cells, transform toxins, salts, eliminate salts, fight microbes, restore weakened organs. All this is very important for longevity. Gerontology believes that the main reason for longevity is still a psychological cause. An objective process can be overcome easily, overcome aging, overcome stress, organize correctly, cause the opposite, a vital tendency to act, live a long time to stay in shape intellectually and emotionally. It is necessary to establish a program, a physical program that will improve living conditions. Marriage, food, heredity, and level of education are all factors that play a significant role in achieving longevity. Culture, hobbies, interests, and independence, feeling well at all times are all important factors. We've been conducting research for 15 years on the impact of mental health and personality on longevity. For the past six years, we've been exploring the role of education and learning in achieving longevity. The results of our research demonstrate that both personality and learning play a significant role in achieving longevity.

Keywords: *Longevity, mental health, learning, education, gerontology*

1. Introduction

As many authors have noted, the diversity of psychogenic influences and the instability of social conditions, namely the current economic situation, relationships within the team, and everyday problems within the family, negatively impact mood, communication, well-being, mental and physical health, consciousness, and thinking, all of which, in turn, determine quality of life and longevity.

The relevance of our work and our research was determined by the fact that, despite numerous studies aimed at exploring the cause-and-effect relationships between quality of life and longevity, they are currently insufficient. Therefore, we focused our research on a more detailed examination of the factors influencing quality of life and how to achieve longevity.

To achieve this goal, we addressed the following interrelated tasks:

- analyzed literary sources
- established the main research areas
- determined the experimental sample
- selected appropriate psychodiagnostic methods
- studied the characteristics of the participants' thought processes and learning processes
- developed and tested methods for adjusting the quality of life, managing and properly organizing one's life to achieve longevity.

Practical research and corrective work were conducted through consultations, seminars, personal conversations, and training sessions.

The focus of our research is on the individual's attitude toward their health, the correct formation of thoughts, the quality of their life, and its extension. By learning to be mindful and take care of one's mental and physical health, a person becomes more self-confident, healthy, happy, able to learn and achieve longevity.

Our research findings confirm the role of personality in learning and achieving longevity.

The role of personality and learning to live long, stay in shape: intellectual, mental and physical health, and live long years.

The scientific novelty and practical significance of our research lies in the fact that we have created models of a system for professional and overall longevity through the role of personality and learning. The ability to manage thoughts and create quality of life is essential for achieving longevity. For this purpose, we used our results, which confirm the need to implement psychocorrection

and training into practice, aimed at maintaining professional health and longevity, a cheerful spirit, ability to work, a positive attitude, and optimism—all of which contribute to achieving longevity. A comprehensive study of the factors influencing longevity allowed us to evaluate the role of the individual in building a quality life and training them to achieve longevity.

The aim of the research was:

- to identify and systematize scientific factors that support our hypothesis.
- to study the processes of creating a quality life, mental and physical health, as well as mentality, thinking, and intelligence.
- to develop methods and models for professional health and longevity.
- to develop recommendations for psychocorrection consultations for changing thoughts and thinking and directing them toward maintaining health, creating quality of life, and achieving longevity.

2. Theoretical framework

The problem of the relationship between learning and personal development is of practical significance.

Its solution determines the content of education and the choice of teaching forms and methods.

By learning, we mean not the process of "transferring" ready-made knowledge from teacher to student, but:

- a broad interaction between teacher and student
- a method of implementing the pedagogical process with the goal of personal development by organizing the student's assimilation of scientific knowledge
- methods of activity.

This is the process of stimulating and managing the student's external and internal activity, resulting in the acquisition of human experience.

By development, as applied to learning, we understand two different but closely interconnected categories of phenomena:

- the biological, organic maturation of the brain, its anatomical and biological structures
- mental (intellectual) development, as a specific dynamic of its levels, as mental maturation.

The organic maturation of brain structures depends on the environment, learning, upbringing.

There are three points of view on the relationship between learning and development.

1. Learning and development are viewed as two independent processes.

Learning is built upon brain maturation. Learning is understood as a purely external use of opportunities that arise during development. V. Stern wrote

that learning follows development and adapts to it. J. Piaget noted that mental development follows its own internal laws, so learning can slow or accelerate this process. Until a child has matured logical operational thinking, there is no need to teach them logical reasoning.

2. Scientists (James, Thorndike), who adhere to the second point of view, merge learning and development.

3. Combining the first two and supplementing them with a new principle, learning can occur not only following development but also ahead of it, a new formation. L.S. Vygotsky formulated the thesis of personality development. He also identified two levels of actual mental development: the current level of a student's readiness, which he can perform independently; the second, higher level of development, means that the child cannot learn independently, without assistance.

The current view of dialectical personality development:

There can be no full development of personality without learning.

Learning, as an activity, is where a person's actions are guided by the conscious goal of acquiring:

- specific knowledge

- skills

- abilities

Learning is a specific human activity; it is possible only at that stage of human psyche development when a person is capable of regulating their actions with a conscious goal.

Demands are placed on cognitive processes:

- memory

- ingenuity

- imagination

- flexibility of mind

volitional qualities:

- attention management

- regulation of feelings

Learning activity combines the cognitive functions of activity:

- perception

- attention

- memory

- thinking

- imagination

needs:

- motives

- emotions

- will

3. Methodology

The methodological basis of the research was the conceptual works of N.V. Amosov "Thinking about Health," G. Selye, "Stress without distress," and others in the field of studying the importance of the individual and training in maintaining mental and physical health, quality of life, and achieving longevity. The issues surrounding the study of longevity and its achievement are becoming increasingly important. Based on this, we studied: socio-psychological, constitutional-biological, professional factors that influence longevity. The selection of subjects allowed us to address several research criteria. We conducted the study over 15 years, observing 307 of our regular patients and students. These individuals represented a wide range of genders, ages, and occupations. The surveys were conducted in the psychological counseling office, in the family, in the hospital, during consultations and training sessions, in parks, at workplaces, and during training sessions. These included analysis of documents, observations, questionnaires, meditation methods, psychotechnical exercises, relaxation, and analysis of training results.

INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY records were created, updated, and supplemented. We used psychological tests and questionnaires:

- Luscher Test
- Rotter's Locus of Control Test
- Dellinger's "Psycho-Geometric Figures" Test
- "Goals and Values in Life" Questionnaire
- LIRI Test
- "Your Attitude to Health" Test
- Eysenck Test

In the area of education and training, we used various types of assessment to determine the attainment of a certain level of knowledge. Specifically, tests, reports, practice, long-term assessment, final assessment, written assignments, listening. In the psycho-educational field, monitoring motivation levels. In our research, we used methods and methodological tools that enabled us to observe and study personality, the ability to learn and strive to improve knowledge, and the ability to take responsibility for quality of life and achieving longevity.

The methodological tools for the work included:

- Document analysis
- Observations
- Questionnaires
- Directed psychological interviews

- Active learning methods
- Psychological training
- Psychological exercises
- Active learning methods.
- Drawing
- Storytelling based on a painting

Example of one of our psychological tests that we created for our research:

"How do you imagine quality of life to achieve longevity"

Answer: yes/ no /sometimes

1. If life is based on full-blooded self-love, then life should be:

-easy

-healthy

-prosperous

-joyful

2. You feel

your physical space

your mental space

3. You know how to control yourself

4. You know how to say "no"

5. You consider yourself a victim

6. You have your own boundaries

7. You take responsibility for your life

8. You are satisfied with your life

9. You take care of yourself

10. You have defined your priorities

11. You analyze the positive aspects of your life

12. You care about your health

13. You have internal conversations

14. You respect your needs, values

15. You are engaged in self-education

16. You are satisfied with your job

17. You consider the environment and neighborhood where you live to be a healthy one

18. You are often subject to stress

19. You channel your vital energy into:

- an active life

- creativity

- joy

- hobbies

- active recreation

- physical fitness

20. You believe that thought is the architect of health

4. Results

The scientific results obtained through the application of the above methods and tools, with the participation of our patients and students who participated in the research, resulted in the proposition that the role of personality and learning is important in achieving longevity. All this made it possible to satisfy the novelty, reliability and practical value in creating quality of life and achieving longevity. Based on scientific observations of subjects, we concluded:

1. When individuals took responsibility for their health and quality of life—for their thoughts, actions, behavior, and mood - the results were significantly different from those where subjects relied on doctors, family members, friends, and colleagues.

2. By using a locus of control approach, we were able to identify subjects' levels of:

-independence

-activity

-self-reliance

3. Using the "Values and Goals in Life" questionnaire, i.e., quality of life, we were able to identify the values and goals patients used to determine their quality of life. For example: statement: before testing after testing

active life activity before - 124 after - 180

health before - 201 after - 237

life before - 109 after - 173

beauty of nature and art before - 112 after - 181

interesting work before - 189 after - 231

materially secure life before - 171 after - 244

knowledge, education before - 178 after - 283

productive life before - 124 after - 200

self-confidence before - 164 after - 257

happy family life before - 178 after - 225

freedom before - 200 after - 289

4. The health attitude questionnaire allowed us to record the influence of basic social attitudes among respondents and trainees on maintaining physical and mental health, which in turn determined quality of life and longevity.

Dynamics of the main socio-psychological attitudes regulating an individual's attitude toward health, professional longevity, and longevity in general under the influence of training and consulting activities.

A comparison of the results showed that the correction increased the level of social attitudes toward cognition and the importance of the individual in understanding and shaping a quality life and achieving longevity.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Excellent health and longevity require powerful nervous energy stored in the body's nerve cells, which control the functioning of the organs. A person's mental representation and learning, based on innate abilities, life experience, mentality, and mental and physical health, create the opportunity to achieve longevity.

If a person is able to control their mental and physical health and strives for and knows how to learn, then it follows that, in a certain sense, they are able to influence their health and achieve longevity.

Each person is the master of their own quality of life and aging.

The source of aging is related to the body's energy, which acts in unison with the laws of nature to maintain the purity of the internal organism. These biological rules are:

- increasing the quality of young cells
- transformation of toxins and salts
- combating microbes
- restoring weakened organs

Gerontology, the science of longevity, believes that the fundamental principle of longevity is psychological.

Although aging is an objective process, stress can be easily overcome by organizing one's thoughts correctly. Reverse the trend of reality: live long and stay in good intellectual, emotional, and physical shape. It is necessary to establish a program that improves living conditions and connects oneself with the environment.

Marriage, nutrition, heredity, education level, income level, social status, the ability to learn and adapt, culture, hobbies, interests, independence, and the fact that one feels good always and everywhere - these factors are of great importance for achieving longevity.

The whole secret to prolonging life lies in not shortening it. The human body is a wise, self-adjusting machine. It is necessary to learn to master your mental processes:

- reduce internal tension,
- combat various fears and anxieties,
- achieve rapid mental rest
- restore mental performance
- peace of mind.

In our modern world, full of stress, internal tension, and conflict, achieving longevity requires exercises that allow you to:

- achieve inner peace
- attitude with yourself
- avoid negative psychological complexes
- restore freshness and clarity of thought.
- This should not be episodic, but continuous, gradually transforming the personality. Complete liberation from neuroses and psychogenic illnesses.

Cultivating a sense of kindness toward the surrounding world, toward all living things, a joyful perception of the world, peace of mind, and a creative approach to your work—this is what should be the most important thing in achieving longevity. Also important in achieving longevity and learning is mental self-impact, which can simulate:

- reparative and restorative processes for any illness
- emotions and the desired mood
- physiological sensations
- physical metabolism
- behavior in a given environment.

The following help achieve longevity and learning:

- Autogenic training,
- self-regulation,
- emotional-vegetative functions
- optimization of rest and activity
- increasing the potential for realizing the individual's psychophysiological reserves.

A good life is a process, not a state of being. This direction is chosen by the entire body, with psychological freedom to move wherever it pleases. This aspect of the process involves moving from the pole of defensive reactions to the pole of openness to one's experience, the ability to feel oneself, to hear oneself, to experience what is happening within oneself.

We fully agree with Rogers that "by observing and evaluating one's experience, a person comes to know oneself." Life experience is an integral part of the self. The self can best be known only to oneself. Therefore, the importance of learning, the ability to adequately perceive oneself and feel comfortable in oneself, are signs of mental health and longevity. Many people live with habitual ideas about themselves. To discover new possibilities, one must abandon old ideas about oneself. To achieve longevity, one must create a new self-project. This is where training is needed, to change oneself as needed. Growth, development, and learning are the key to moving forward

and achieving longevity. Achieving longevity and good mental and physical health all depends on the individual, their efforts, will, and desires.

When the purpose of life is to live a happy life and achieve longevity, we recommend:

1. Improve your quality of life
2. Respect your needs and values
3. Set healthy boundaries
4. Understand your limits
5. Increase your satisfaction with your life
6. Determine your priorities
7. Learn to listen to yourself and appreciate yourself
8. Remember three positive moments a day; this will help you focus on the good
9. Create an archive of positive stories, write down your achievements and successes, happy moments, and reread them during difficult times
10. Pay attention to the world around you: a beautiful sunset, a child's smile
11. Analyze your feelings and decisions to strengthen the connection between your brain and body
12. Get active
13. Be honest with yourself
14. Gain knowledge and apply it every day
15. Don't allow your nervous system to become exhausted due to overwork
16. Learn to organize your rest
17. Learn to manage fear and get rid of it altogether
18. Trust your body
19. Maintain peace of mind in the hustle and bustle of the modern world
20. Have the desire to live long
21. Don't make friends with difficult people
22. Focus on the bright side of life
23. Ignore talk about worries
24. Find yourself and be yourself
25. Do not involve emotions in your thinking
26. Create a positive emotional state
27. Create a life:
 - easy
 - harmonious
 - healthy
 - joyful
 - happy
 - prosperous

We also created the following longevity module. If you want to be healthy, physically and mentally, and achieve longevity, you need to think about quality of life.

1. Be confident
2. Develop your intuition
3. Don't be a victim
4. Have a clear idea of your:

tastes
 interests
 preferences
 desires
 values

recognize where yours begins and someone else's begins

5. Set strong personal boundaries

It is necessary to build healthy boundaries that can be opened and closed at your will

6. Create quality life

- choose comfortable furniture
- tasty and high-quality food
- professional doctors and specialists
- have understanding, accepting, and supportive friends

Longevity

Our life is what we think about it.

Start the day with a smile.

Quality of life	Health	Thought
Positive emotional state	Increasing of	Self-recovery
Program of recovery of	protective strength of	Overcoming loneliness
soul and body	the body	Confirmed in joy and
Professional longevity	Correction of	enthusiasm
Maintaining inner	functional	Skills
youth	disorders	
and energies	Care for the healing	
Acquired knowledge	powers of the body	
Will		

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Technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults: implications for education, independence, and quality of life

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Abstract: Population ageing has emerged as a major public health concern, creating significant challenges for rehabilitation and long-term care systems. Physiotherapy plays a critical role in promoting functional independence and quality of life in older adults, while recent technological advancements have expanded opportunities for innovative and accessible service delivery. This paper presents a narrative review of technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults, emphasizing their implications for education, independence, and quality of life. The reviewed evidence demonstrates that telerehabilitation, wearable devices, and digital exercise platforms can effectively complement traditional physiotherapy by providing remote supervision, real-time feedback, and continuous monitoring. These technologies enhance accessibility, support patient education, and encourage self-management and adherence, leading to improved autonomy and engagement in rehabilitation. When integrated within physiotherapist-led frameworks, technology-assisted interventions represent a sustainable and effective approach to gerontological care. Their implementation has the potential to strengthen health education, preserve functional independence, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life in ageing populations.

Keywords: *older adults, telerehabilitation, wearable technology, digital health, physiotherapy, independence, quality of life*

1. Introduction

Population ageing is a global demographic trend that poses significant challenges for health care systems worldwide. Increasing age is commonly associated with declines in physical function, reduced mobility, higher

prevalence of chronic conditions, and increased risk of dependence, all of which negatively affect quality of life in older adults (World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). Physiotherapy plays a central role in gerontological care by addressing impairments in strength, balance, gait, and functional mobility. Exercise-based physiotherapy interventions have been consistently shown to reduce fall risk, improve functional performance, and support independent living among community-dwelling older adults (Sherrington et al., 2020). Despite these benefits, traditional face-to-face physiotherapy models may be limited by accessibility barriers, difficulties in maintaining long-term adherence, and challenges related to continuity of care, particularly for older adults with mobility restrictions or those living in remote areas. In recent years, technological advancements have led to the development of technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions aimed at complementing conventional rehabilitation approaches. Telerehabilitation has emerged as one of the most widely studied models, enabling the remote delivery of physiotherapist-led exercise programs while maintaining professional supervision. Evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicates that telerehabilitation is effective and, in many cases, comparable to standard in-person physiotherapy for improving physical function and clinical outcomes in older adults (Cottrell et al., 2017). More recent evidence further supports the role of physiotherapist-led, exercise-based telerehabilitation in geriatric populations. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Wicks et al. (2023) demonstrated that telerehabilitation interventions for older adults can lead to meaningful improvements in patient outcomes while also offering potential benefits in terms of health service efficiency. These findings highlight telerehabilitation as a viable and sustainable model of care within ageing societies. Beyond telerehabilitation, technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions increasingly incorporate digital tools such as wearable devices, remote monitoring systems, and interactive platforms. These technologies enable continuous monitoring of physical activity, provide real-time feedback, and may enhance engagement and adherence to exercise programs. Adherence to technology-based exercise interventions has been identified as a key factor influencing rehabilitation outcomes in older adults (Valenzuela et al., 2018). Importantly, technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions have implications that extend beyond physical rehabilitation. Digital platforms and monitoring tools can support patient education, promote self-management strategies, and encourage active participation in care. Such educational components are essential for fostering autonomy and sustaining functional independence over time, and they may contribute to improved quality of life in older adults (Piau et al., 2019). Given the growing ageing population and the increasing demand for innovative and

accessible rehabilitation models, a comprehensive understanding of technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions is required. The aim of this narrative review is to examine current evidence on technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults, with particular emphasis on their implications for education, independence, and quality of life.

2.Methodology

This article was designed as a narrative review aimed at synthesizing current evidence on technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults, with a specific focus on education, independence, and quality of life.

2.1 Literature search strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using the following electronic databases: PubMed, Scopus, and the Cochrane Library. In addition, relevant reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) were consulted to provide contextual information on ageing and health.

The search strategy combined keywords and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) related to gerontology, physiotherapy, and technology-assisted rehabilitation. The primary search terms included: *older adults*, *ageing*, *physiotherapy*, *exercise-based rehabilitation*, *telerehabilitation*, *telephysiotherapy*, *technology-assisted rehabilitation*, *education*, *independence*, and *quality of life*. Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the search and identify relevant publications.

2.2 Eligibility criteria

Studies were included if they met the following criteria:

- focused on adults aged 60 years and older;
- examined physiotherapy or exercise-based rehabilitation interventions supported by technological tools;
- reported outcomes related to physical function, independence, education, adherence, or quality of life;
- were published in peer-reviewed journals;
- were written in English.

Both systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and high-quality original studies were considered. Studies not related to physiotherapy practice, those focusing exclusively on pharmacological interventions, or articles not available in full text were excluded.

2.3 Study selection and data synthesis

Titles and abstracts were screened to assess relevance. Full texts of eligible articles were reviewed to confirm inclusion. Key information was extracted from the selected studies, including study design, type of technology-assisted intervention, target population, and reported outcomes.

Given the narrative nature of this review and the heterogeneity of interventions and outcome measures, a qualitative synthesis of findings was performed rather than a quantitative meta-analysis. The results were organized thematically, focusing on major categories of technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions and their implications for education, independence, and quality of life in older adults.

3. Technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults

3.1 Telerehabilitation in geriatric physiotherapy

Telerehabilitation represents one of the most extensively studied technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults. It refers to the remote delivery of physiotherapy services through digital communication technologies, allowing physiotherapists to supervise, guide, and monitor exercise-based rehabilitation programs without the need for in-person visits. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that telerehabilitation can produce clinical outcomes comparable to those of conventional face-to-face physiotherapy in older populations. In particular, physiotherapist-led, exercise-based telerehabilitation has been shown to improve physical function and patient outcomes while maintaining treatment safety and effectiveness (Cottrell et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2023). These findings suggest that telerehabilitation can serve as a viable alternative or complement to traditional rehabilitation models, especially when in-person access is limited.

From an educational perspective, telerehabilitation facilitates continuous interaction between the physiotherapist and the older adult, creating opportunities for individualized education and feedback. Through real-time supervision and remote communication, patients receive guidance on correct exercise execution, progression, and self-monitoring strategies. This ongoing educational component may enhance understanding of therapeutic goals and promote active participation in the rehabilitation process. Telerehabilitation also has important implications for independence in older adults. By enabling rehabilitation to take place within the home environment, telerehabilitation supports functional training in real-life contexts and reduces reliance on transportation or institutional care. This approach may contribute to increased autonomy and sustained engagement in physical activity, both of which are critical factors in maintaining functional independence and quality of life with advancing age.

Despite these benefits, telerehabilitation is not without challenges. Barriers such as limited digital literacy, access to appropriate technology, and the need for initial training may affect uptake among some older adults. Addressing these barriers through tailored education and user-friendly technological design is essential to maximize the effectiveness and inclusivity of telerehabilitation interventions.

3.2 Wearable technologies in physiotherapy for older adults

Wearable technologies represent an increasingly important component of technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults. These devices typically include accelerometers, inertial measurement units, and commercially available activity trackers that enable continuous monitoring of movement patterns, physical activity levels, and functional performance in real-life settings.

Evidence from systematic reviews suggests that wearable devices can support physiotherapy interventions by providing objective data on physical activity and movement behavior. Larsen et al. (2019) reported that physical activity monitors may contribute to increased activity levels in older adults, particularly when embedded within structured programs supervised by health professionals. Such objective monitoring allows physiotherapists to individualize exercise prescriptions and track functional progress over time. From a rehabilitation perspective, wearable technologies have demonstrated potential value in enhancing engagement and adherence to exercise-based interventions. A systematic review and meta-analysis by Brickwood et al. (2019) showed that consumer-based wearable activity trackers are associated with increased participation in physical activity, indicating their usefulness as adjunct tools in physiotherapy programs for older adults.

In the context of physical rehabilitation, wearable devices have been extensively reviewed for their application in monitoring movement quality, functional performance, and rehabilitation outcomes. (Kristoffersson, A., & Lindén, M. 2022). highlighted that wearable devices can be effectively integrated into rehabilitation settings to support assessment, feedback, and long-term monitoring of physical function. Their review emphasizes the role of wearable technologies as complementary tools that enhance, rather than replace, physiotherapist-led rehabilitation. Wearable technologies also have important educational implications. By providing continuous or periodic feedback on activity levels and movement performance, these devices support self-monitoring and promote greater awareness of physical behavior. This educational function aligns with the goals of geriatric physiotherapy, which emphasize patient empowerment and active involvement in health management (Dobkin & Dorsch, 2011).

Furthermore, wearable devices may contribute to maintaining independence and quality of life by encouraging sustained physical activity and facilitating home-based rehabilitation. However, their effectiveness depends on usability, user acceptance, and appropriate instruction. Barriers such as limited digital literacy and challenges in interpreting feedback should be addressed through targeted education and professional support to ensure successful implementation (Kristoffersson, A., & Lindén, M. 2022). Overall, wearable technologies should be considered supportive tools within physiotherapist-led programs, where monitoring, feedback, education, and individualized exercise prescription are combined to optimize outcomes for older adults.

3.3 Digital exercise platforms and remote monitoring in older adults

Digital exercise platforms and remote monitoring systems represent an important extension of technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults. These platforms typically include web-based programs, video-guided exercise applications, and remote supervision tools that allow physiotherapists to prescribe, monitor, and adapt exercise programs outside the clinical setting.

Evidence suggests that digital exercise platforms can support the delivery of structured, exercise-based rehabilitation programs while maintaining professional oversight. In the context of older adults, such platforms enable individualized exercise prescription and facilitate continuity of care, particularly for individuals with limited access to in-person physiotherapy services. Telerehabilitation systems that incorporate digital exercise platforms have been shown to achieve functional outcomes comparable to traditional face-to-face interventions (Cottrell et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2023).

Remote monitoring functions embedded within digital platforms allow physiotherapists to track exercise adherence, progression, and patient-reported outcomes. Adherence is a critical determinant of rehabilitation success in older adults, and systematic evidence indicates that technology-based exercise interventions may improve adherence by offering structured programs, feedback, and ongoing supervision (Valenzuela et al., 2018). These features are particularly relevant in geriatric populations, where motivation and long-term engagement can be challenging. From an educational perspective, digital exercise platforms support learning through repetition, visual demonstration, and feedback. Older adults can review exercises at their own pace and gain a clearer understanding of correct movement execution and therapeutic goals. This educational component reinforces self-management strategies and encourages active participation in rehabilitation, which are essential for sustaining functional gains and independence. Remote monitoring and digital platforms also contribute to independence and quality of life by supporting

home-based rehabilitation. By reducing the need for frequent clinic visits, these technologies may decrease reliance on external assistance and promote autonomy in daily life. However, successful implementation depends on usability, digital literacy, and appropriate clinical guidance. Physiotherapist involvement remains essential to ensure safety, correct exercise progression, and meaningful interpretation of monitored data. Overall, digital exercise platforms and remote monitoring systems should be considered integral components of technology-assisted physiotherapy when embedded within physiotherapist-led models of care. Their value lies in enhancing access, supporting education and adherence, and facilitating long-term management of physical function in older adults.

4. Implications for education, independence, and quality of life

Technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions have implications that extend beyond physical rehabilitation outcomes, particularly in relation to patient education, functional independence, and quality of life in older adults. When integrated into physiotherapist-led models of care, technologies such as telerehabilitation, digital exercise platforms, and wearable sensors can support learning processes, promote autonomy, and facilitate long-term self-management.

4.1 Implications for education

Education is a fundamental component of physiotherapy in gerontological care, as older adults benefit from understanding their condition, therapeutic goals, and the rationale behind prescribed exercises. Technology-assisted interventions provide multiple opportunities to reinforce education through visual demonstrations, repeated exposure to exercise instructions, and ongoing professional feedback.

Telerehabilitation and digital exercise platforms enable physiotherapists to deliver individualized education remotely while maintaining supervision and interaction. Evidence indicates that such models support patient understanding and engagement by allowing continuous guidance and clarification outside traditional clinical encounters (Cottrell et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2023).

Wearable sensors and monitoring technologies further contribute to educational processes by supporting self-monitoring. By providing objective information about physical activity and movement patterns, these technologies can help older adults develop greater awareness of their functional behavior and the relationship between exercise adherence and outcomes. Qualitative evidence suggests that feedback from wearable devices may enhance motivation and support learning, although usability and clarity of feedback

remain important considerations (Moore et al., 2021; Kristoffersson & Lindén, 2022).

4.2 Implications for independence

Preserving independence is a central goal of physiotherapy in older adults. Technology-assisted interventions contribute to this goal by enabling rehabilitation to take place in the home environment and reducing dependence on frequent clinic visits. Telerehabilitation allows older adults to engage in structured, supervised exercise programs while remaining in familiar surroundings, which may enhance confidence and autonomy in daily activities (Wicks et al., 2023).

Remote monitoring and wearable technologies further support independence by facilitating ongoing assessment of functional performance outside the clinical setting. These tools can assist physiotherapists in identifying changes in activity levels or movement patterns and adjusting interventions accordingly. When used appropriately, such monitoring may help prevent functional decline and support sustained participation in physical activity (Kristoffersson & Lindén, 2022).

4.3 Implications for quality of life

Quality of life in older adults is influenced by physical function, autonomy, confidence, and participation in meaningful daily activities. Exercise-based physiotherapy interventions have been shown to improve functional outcomes that are closely associated with quality of life (Sherrington et al., 2020). Technology-assisted delivery models may enhance these benefits by supporting adherence, continuity of care, and long-term engagement in rehabilitation.

By facilitating education, supporting independence, and enabling home-based rehabilitation, technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions may contribute indirectly to improved quality of life. However, these benefits depend on appropriate implementation, user acceptance, and ongoing professional guidance. Evidence highlights the importance of tailoring technological solutions to individual capabilities and preferences to ensure meaningful and sustainable use (Moore et al., 2021).

5.Challenges and future directions

Despite the growing body of evidence supporting technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions in older adults, several challenges remain that may limit their widespread implementation and effectiveness. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that technological innovations translate

into meaningful clinical benefits within gerontological care. One of the primary challenges relates to digital literacy and accessibility. Older adults represent a heterogeneous population with varying levels of familiarity and confidence in using digital technologies. Limited experience with smartphones, wearable devices, or online platforms may reduce engagement and hinder effective use of technology-assisted interventions. Studies exploring older adults' experiences with wearable devices highlight usability issues, difficulties in interpreting feedback, and concerns related to device complexity (Moore et al., 2021). These factors underscore the need for user-centred design and tailored education strategies.

Another important challenge concerns clinical integration and professional oversight. Technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions are most effective when embedded within physiotherapist-led models of care. Without appropriate clinical supervision, there is a risk that digital tools may be underutilized, misinterpreted, or applied inappropriately. Ensuring that physiotherapists are adequately trained to select, implement, and interpret technological tools is therefore a key requirement for safe and effective practice (Cottrell et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2023). Adherence and long-term engagement also remain critical issues. While technology-assisted interventions may initially increase motivation, sustaining engagement over time can be challenging. Factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and meaningful feedback influence long-term adherence. Evidence suggests that interventions combining technology with ongoing professional support are more likely to achieve sustained participation among older adults (Valenzuela et al., 2018).

From a research perspective, future studies should aim to strengthen the evidence base by including larger and more diverse older adult populations, standardized outcome measures, and longer follow-up periods. Many existing studies focus on short-term outcomes, limiting conclusions regarding long-term effectiveness, independence, and quality of life. In addition, future research should explore how different technologies can be optimally combined to support personalized rehabilitation pathways. Finally, ethical and practical considerations, including data privacy, informed consent, and equitable access to technology, should be carefully addressed. As technology-assisted physiotherapy continues to evolve, ensuring that innovations do not exacerbate health inequalities among older adults will be a critical priority.

Overall, while technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions offer promising opportunities to enhance gerontological care, their successful implementation depends on addressing technological, clinical, and individual-level challenges through interdisciplinary collaboration, education, and evidence-based practice.

6. Conclusion

Technology-assisted physiotherapy interventions represent a promising and evolving approach within gerontological care. Evidence synthesized in this narrative review indicates that technologies such as telerehabilitation, digital exercise platforms, and wearable sensors can effectively support physiotherapist-led rehabilitation for older adults when appropriately implemented. These interventions offer important advantages by improving access to care, supporting continuity of rehabilitation, and enabling home-based exercise programs. In addition to physical benefits, technology-assisted approaches have meaningful implications for patient education, as they facilitate ongoing guidance, feedback, and self-monitoring. Such educational components play a key role in promoting engagement, adherence, and active participation in the rehabilitation process.

Technology-assisted physiotherapy also contributes to the preservation of independence by supporting functional training in real-life environments and reducing reliance on frequent in-person visits. When combined with professional supervision, these interventions may help older adults maintain autonomy and sustain functional abilities over time, which are closely linked to quality of life. However, the successful integration of technology into geriatric physiotherapy requires careful consideration of individual capabilities, digital literacy, usability, and access. Physiotherapist involvement remains essential to ensure safe application, appropriate progression, and meaningful interpretation of technological data. Future research should focus on long-term outcomes, standardized evaluation methods, and strategies to optimize user-centred design and clinical integration.

In conclusion, technology-assisted physiotherapy should be viewed as a complementary and supportive component of gerontological rehabilitation rather than a replacement for traditional care. When embedded within evidence-based, physiotherapist-led models, these interventions have the potential to enhance education, independence, and quality of life in older adults.

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The impact of art therapy on social development of toddlers {a kindergarten case study}

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Abstract: Social development in toddlerhood is a critical aspect of early childhood education, yet young children often face challenges in emotional expression, peer interaction, and self-regulation. This study employs a single-case study design to examine the use of art therapy techniques in a kindergarten classroom and their impact on toddlers’ social development. The case study focuses on a classroom of toddlers engaged in structured and semi-structured art activities, including painting, drawing, sensory exploration, and collaborative art-making, integrated into daily routines. Data were collected through detailed classroom observations, educator reflective journals, and visual documentation of children’s creative processes. Triangulation of these data sources allowed for an in-depth understanding of individual and group social behaviors. Findings highlight how art therapy techniques supported emotional expression, peer interaction, cooperation, and self-regulation, creating a safe and relational environment for social learning. This study provides practical insights for educators and therapists seeking to implement art-based interventions in early childhood settings.

Keywords: *case study, art therapy, toddlerhood, social development, early childhood education*

1. Introduction

Social development in toddlerhood is a fundamental aspect of early childhood education, as it shapes children’s ability to regulate emotions, to build relationships, and to be engaged in learning experiences (Denham et al., 2012). During this stage, children begin to interact more frequently with peers and adults outside the family, making it a crucial period for developing the social

competence. However, toddlers often face challenges in emotional expression, cooperative play, and self-regulation, particularly in group settings, where their verbal communication skills are still developing (Elias & Berk, 2002). These limitations can lead to frustration, misunderstandings, or difficulties in forming positive peer relationships.

In this context, art therapy techniques offer developmentally appropriate and effective support for social-emotional learning. Young children naturally express themselves through play and creativity, art-based activities provide a meaningful alternative to verbal communication. Structured and semi-structured experiences—such as drawing, painting, sensory exploration, and collaborative art-making—allow toddlers to explore and express their emotions while interacting with others. These activities not only encourage emotional expression, but also promote cooperation, sharing, and engagement within a group. Furthermore, the sensory and repetitive nature of art-making can help children develop self-regulation skills by improving focus, patience, and emotional control (Malchiodi, 2012).

Importantly, art therapy techniques are most effective, when are implemented within a safe and supportive environment. When educators provide guidance in a responsive and non-judgmental way, children feel more secure and confident in expressing themselves. This sense of safety enhances relational connections and supports both: emotional and social development.

This study uses a single-case study design to explore how art therapy techniques, applied within a kindergarten classroom, influence toddlers’ social development. By focusing on real-life classroom interactions and experiences, the study aims to provide practical insights for early childhood educators, seeking to integrate creative, evidence-informed approaches into their practice.

2. Literature Review

Social Development in Toddlerhood

Social-emotional competence in toddlerhood includes key abilities, such as emotional expression, self-regulation, and peer interaction, all of which serve as a foundation for later social relationships and academic success (Thompson, 2014). During this developmental stage, children begin to move from solitary or parallel play toward more interactive and cooperative forms of play. This transition is significant, as it allows toddlers to practice essential social skills, such as sharing, turn-taking, negotiating, and resolving simple conflicts (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2011).

However, this process is gradual and often challenging. Toddlers may struggle with impulse control, frustration, and understanding others’ perspectives,

which can lead to conflicts in group settings. For this reason, supportive interventions are essential in helping children navigate the early social experiences. Research suggests that approaches combining play, creativity, and responsive adult guidance are particularly effective in promoting positive social behaviors (Cohen & Sandy, 2007; Elias & Berk, 2002). Educators play a crucial role, by modeling appropriate interactions, scaffolding children's behavior, and creating environments that encourage cooperation and emotional understanding.

Art Therapy in Early Childhood

Art therapy offers a valuable and developmentally appropriate approach to support young children's emotional and social development. Toddlers often lack the verbal skills needed to fully express their thoughts and feelings, art provides an alternative form of communication that is both natural and accessible (Rubin, 2016; Malchiodi, 2012). Through activities such as drawing, painting, and sensory exploration, children can express emotions, process experiences, and communicate in symbolic ways. Sensory-based and collaborative art activities are particularly beneficial in early childhood settings. These experiences allow toddlers to engage actively with materials, while also interacting with peers. For example, shared art projects encourage cooperation, while individual creative tasks provide opportunities for self-expression and emotional release. Such activities also support the development of self-regulation by helping children with focus attention, manage impulses, and cope with frustration (Gabel & Hoover, 2017). Despite the recognized benefits of art therapy, much of the existing research has focused on older children or clinical settings. There is still limited evidence regarding its systematic application with toddlers in everyday classroom environments. This gap highlights the importance of case-based research in early childhood education, as it can provide in-depth insights into how art therapy techniques function in real-life contexts. Expanding this area of study can contribute to more effective, evidence-informed practices that support young children's holistic development.

3. Methodology

Research Design: This study employed a single-case study design to examine the effects of art therapy techniques on toddlers' social development (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). A case study approach was selected, because it allows for an in-depth and contextually rich exploration of complex developmental processes as they occur in natural settings. Rather than isolating variables, this design focuses on understanding behaviors,

interactions, and experiences within their real-life environment. The case was clearly bounded to one kindergarten classroom consisting of 20 toddlers aged between 3 and 4 / 4.5 years. This bounded system enabled close observation of both individual children and group dynamics over time. The classroom setting provided a meaningful context, in which art therapy techniques were integrated into daily routines, allowing the researcher to capture authentic social interactions, emotional responses, and developmental changes. By focusing on a single group, the study was able to generate detailed and nuanced insights into how toddlers respond to creative, therapeutic interventions in an educational environment.

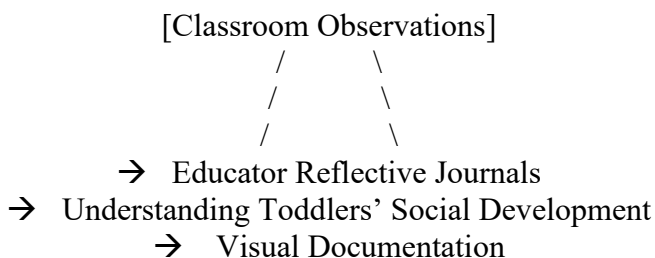
Data Collection: Data were collected over a eight-week period, using multiple qualitative methods to ensure depth, credibility, and a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon. The use of multiple data sources allowed triangulation, strengthening the trust worthiness of findings.

- **Classroom Observations:** Systematic observations were conducted to document children’s social behaviors, peer interactions, and emotional expressions during art activities and daily routines. Particular attention was given to behaviors such as sharing, cooperation, conflict resolution, and engagement levels. Observations provided direct, real-time insights into how toddlers interacted with both peers and materials in the classroom setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).
- **Educator Reflective Journals:** Educators maintained reflective journals throughout the study, recording their observations, experiences, and interpretations of children’s behaviors and responses to the art therapy activities. These reflections offered valuable pedagogical insights and helped capture subtle changes in children’s emotional and social development over time. Reflective journaling also supported a deeper understanding of the relational and instructional context in which the activities took place (Denham et al., 2012).
- **Visual Documentation of Artwork:** Children’s artwork was collected and analyzed as an additional source of data. This included drawings, paintings, and collaborative creations produced during the intervention period. Visual documentation provided evidence of creative processes, symbolic expression, and levels of engagement. It also offered insight into how children communicated emotions and interacted with peers through shared artistic experiences (Gabel & Hoover, 2017; Rubin, 2016).

Together, these data collection methods created a comprehensive and detailed picture of toddlers’ social development within the context of art therapy. The combination of observational, reflective, and visual data allowed for a deeper

interpretation of both individual behaviors and group interactions, enhancing the overall rigor and richness of the study.

Figure 1. Data triangulation framework illustrating the integration of classroom observations, educator reflective journals, and visual documentation of children’s artwork.



Triangulation of these sources allowed for a nuanced understanding of social-emotional behaviors, consistent with qualitative case study standards (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Art Therapy Techniques

Table 1. Art Therapy Techniques and Targeted Social Skills

Technique	Description	Targeted Social Skills
Sensory art	Finger painting, clay, textured materials	Emotional regulation, calming
Individual art	Free drawing and painting	Emotional expression, self-awareness
Collaborative art	Group murals, shared materials	Cooperation, turn-taking
Semi-structured tasks	Theme-based guided activities	Focus, shared attention

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase process, outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, review of themes, definition and naming of themes, and final reporting. This approach was chosen, because it allows for a flexible and systematic examination of qualitative data, making it suitable for exploring patterns in children’s behaviors and interactions. The analysis began with repeated reading of observation notes, educator journals, and visual documentation to ensure deep familiarization with the data. During the initial coding phase, open coding was used to identify

recurring behaviors and patterns, such as emotional expression, peer interaction, and engagement in art activities. These codes were organized through axial coding, which helped to explore relationships between categories, particularly how emotional expression, cooperation, and self-regulation were interconnected within the context of art-based experiences. In the final stage, selective coding was applied to refine and integrate the data into core themes that reflected the overall impact of art therapy techniques on toddlers’ social development. Themes were reviewed and clearly defined to ensure they represented the data and were supported by multiple sources. This structured manner is interpretive process, enhanced on the depth and credibility of the findings, aligning with qualitative research standards (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

5. Findings

Four primary themes emerged: *emotional expression, peer interaction and cooperation, self-regulation, and relationally safe learning environment.*

Table 2. Observed Social Behaviors Before and During Art Therapy Interventions

Social Behavior	Before Intervention	During Intervention
Emotional expression	Limited, behavioral	Symbolic, visual
Peer engagement	Predominantly parallel play	Increased cooperative play
Turn-taking	Frequent conflict	Improved patience
Self-regulation	Low frustration tolerance	Increased calm and focus

Emotional Expression

Art activities offer toddlers a powerful and developmentally appropriate channel for expressing emotions, particularly because their verbal language skills are still emerging. Through drawing, painting, and sensory exploration, children can communicate feelings such as happiness, fear, frustration, or excitement without needing to articulate them in words. This aligns, with the understanding of art therapy as a tool for fostering emotional competence, where the process of creating becomes a form of communication (Rubin, 2016; Malchiodi, 2012; Gabel & Hoover, 2017). For example, the choice of colors, the intensity of movements, or the themes represented in a child’s artwork, can provide insights into their emotional state. Over time, engaging in such activities, helps toddlers become more aware of their emotions and supports the early development of emotional literacy. It also provides a safe

outlet for releasing tension, reducing anxiety, and processing everyday experiences in a constructive way.

Peer Interaction and Cooperation

Collaborative art-making, plays a significant role in enhancing toddlers' social development. When children participate in shared creative activities, such as working on a group mural, sharing materials, or engaging in joint sensory play, they naturally practice essential social skills. These include turn-taking, cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Research on social play highlights, such interactions, are foundational for building peer relationships and learning how to function within a group (Elias & Berk, 2002; Gabel & Hoover, 2017). During art-therapy activities, toddlers often encounter situations, where they must communicate their needs, respect others' ideas, and adapt to shared goals. These experiences, not only strengthen their ability to interact positively with peers, but also foster empathy, as children begin to recognize and respond to the feelings and perspectives of others.

Self-Regulation

Structured and sensory-based art activities, are particularly effective in supporting the development of self-regulation in early childhood. Self-regulation refers to the ability to control one's emotions, behaviors, and attention, especially in challenging situations. Activities such as molding clay, painting with repetitive motions, or engaging in guided creative tasks require focus, patience, and persistence. These experiences help toddlers, learning to manage impulses, tolerate frustration, and remain engaged in an activity for extended periods. As noted in research, on social play and creative engagement, such structured experiences provide opportunities for children, to practice regulating their behavior in a supportive context (Elias & Berk, 2002). For instance, waiting for a turn to use materials, or completing a step-by-step art task, encourages children to develop discipline and emotional control, which are critical skills for later academic and social success.

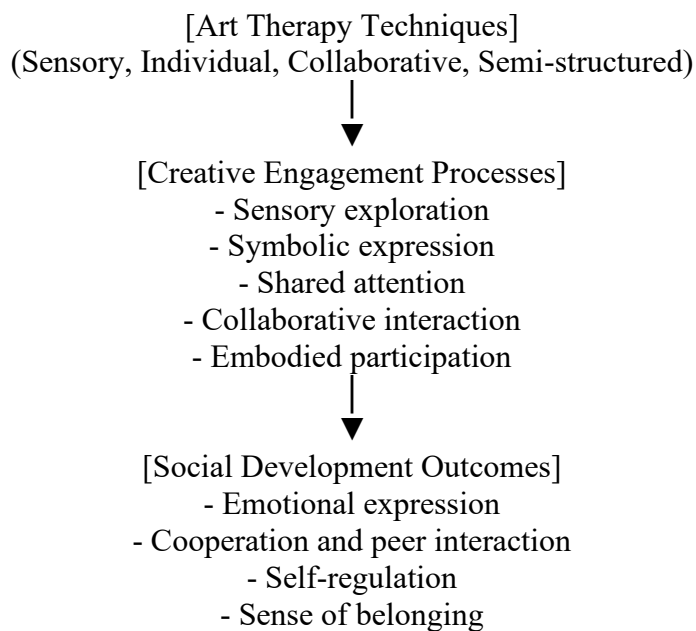
Safe and Relational Learning Environment

Art therapy activities contribute significantly, creating a safe, nurturing, and relational learning environment in early childhood settings. When educators facilitate art experiences in a supportive and non-judgmental manner, children feel secure in expressing themselves freely. This sense of safety, is essential for fostering trust and building positive relationships between children and adults. According to Denham et al. (2012) and Cohen & Sandy (2007), emotionally supportive environments enhance both, social and emotional development by promoting open communication and relational engagement.

In such settings, children are more likely to take risks, explore new ideas, and engage deeply in learning activities. Additionally, the shared experience of creating art can strengthen the emotional connection between educators and children, as well as among peers, reinforcing a sense of belonging and community, within the classroom. Overall, these interconnected elements as: emotional expression, peer interaction, self-regulation, and a safe relational environment, demonstrate how art, based on activities serves as a holistic approach, supporting toddlers’ development. By integrating creative experiences into early childhood education, educators can nurture not only cognitive growth, but also the emotional and social well-being, that underpins lifelong learning and healthy development

Conceptual Model

Figure 2. Conceptual model, showing the relationship between art therapy techniques, creative engagement processes, and social development outcomes (emotional expression, cooperation, self-regulation, and sense of belonging).



6. Discussion

The findings of this study, indicate that: the integration of art therapy techniques into early childhood settings, can play a significant role in supporting toddlers’ social and emotional development. Through consistent engagement in creative activities, children were able to access nonverbal

forms of communication, that are more aligned with their developmental stage. This is particularly important in toddlerhood, where expressive language is still developing, and emotions are often experienced intensely but cannot always be verbalized. Art based on experiences, allowed children to externalize their inner feelings in a safe and meaningful way, contributing to improved emotional awareness and expression.

In addition, the study highlights how creative engagement fosters, peer interaction and social competence. As toddlers participated in shared art activities, they were naturally encouraged to cooperate, share materials, and negotiate roles within a group. These interactions provided real-life opportunities, to practice essential social skills, such as turn-taking, empathy, and conflict resolution. Over the time, children became more comfortable engaging with peers, demonstrating increased confidence and a greater willingness to collaborate. This supports the idea, that social development in early childhood is best nurtured, through interactive and play-based experiences.

Another key outcome of the findings, is the role of art therapy in promoting self-regulation. The structured and flexible nature of art activities, offered children opportunities to focus attention, follow simple routines, and manage impulses. Sensory-rich experiences, such as working with paint, clay, or textured materials, were particularly effective in helping children to calm themselves and sustain engagement. These activities provided a balance between freedom of expression and gentle guidance, enabling toddlers to practice patience and emotional control within a supportive framework.

Importantly, the study also emphasizes the value of a safe and relational learning environment. The presence of supportive educators, who facilitated art activities in a non-judgmental and responsive manner, contributed significantly to children’s sense of security and belonging. When children feel emotionally safe, they are more likely to explore, take risks, and engage in meaningful interactions. The relational aspect of the classroom, characterized by trust, warmth, and responsiveness, enhanced the overall impact of the art therapy techniques.

The use of triangulated qualitative data, further strengthens the credibility of these findings. By combining multiple sources of information, such as observations, reflections, and documentation, the study provides a rich and nuanced understanding of how art therapy supports development. This approach is consistent with established case study methodologies (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which emphasize depth, context, and the interpretation of complex human experiences. The convergence of data from different sources, increases the trustworthiness of

the results, and allows for a more comprehensive interpretation of children’s behaviors and interactions.

Overall, the discussion suggests, that art therapy is not only an expressive tool, but also a developmental resource, that supports multiple domains of early childhood growth. Its integration into daily kindergarten routines, offers a practical and effective way to enhance children’s emotional and social competencies, while respecting their developmental needs.

7. Conclusion

This single case-study demonstrates that incorporating art therapy techniques into kindergarten routines can have a meaningful and positive impact on toddlers’ development. The findings show clear improvements in emotional expression, as children gained opportunities to communicate feelings through creative means. Peer cooperation was also enhanced, with children engaging more actively in shared activities, and developing important social skills. Additionally, art-based experiences supported the development of self-regulation, helping children to manage their emotions, focus attention, and navigating challenges more effectively.

Another important outcome is the strengthened sense of belonging observed among the children. Through consistent participation, in a supportive and creative environment, toddlers developed a greater sense of connection to their peers and educators. This sense of inclusion is fundamental for fostering confidence, engagement, and overall well-being in early childhood.

The study provides valuable and practical implications for early childhood educators and therapists. It highlights the importance of integrating structured and flexible art-based interventions into daily routines as a way to support holistic development. These approaches are not only accessible and adaptable, but also grounded in evidence, that emphasizes the importance of play, creativity, and relational learning in early years of education. However, as a single case-study, the findings are context-specific and may not be fully generalizable to all settings. For this reason, future research should aim to replicate similar interventions across multiple classrooms, age groups, and cultural contexts. Expanding the scope of research, would help to validate the effectiveness of art therapy techniques, and refine their implementation in diverse educational environments. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights, into the long-term impact of such interventions on children’s developmental trajectories.

In conclusion, the integration of art therapy techniques represents a promising and effective approach, supporting young children’s emotional, social, and behavioral development. By embracing creative, child-centered practices,

educators can create enriching learning environments that nurture not only academic growth but, also the foundational skills, necessary for lifelong well-being and success.

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Relation of art therapy and well-being for children in kindergarten

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between art therapy and the well-being of kindergarten children, focusing on emotional regulation, social competence, self-esteem, and stress reduction. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative behavioral assessments with qualitative interviews from teachers and parents. Thirty children participated in 12 weekly structured art therapy sessions. Participation in art therapy, resulted in significant improvements in emotional expression, social interaction, self-confidence, and reduced stress levels. Qualitative findings supported the quantitative results, highlighting enhanced peer cooperation and emotional communication. Schools should integrate structured art therapy into early childhood curricula and provide teacher training to maximize its benefits. This study provides comprehensive empirical evidence, supporting art therapy as a preventive and developmental intervention, in early childhood education.

Keywords: *Art therapy; well-being; kindergarten children; emotional regulation; social development; early childhood education*

1. Introduction

Early childhood represents a critical period for *emotional, social, and cognitive development* (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Kindergarten is often the first structured educational setting, where children must regulate emotions, interact with peers, and adapt to new routines.

Emotional difficulties during this stage, may negatively affect long-term academic and social outcomes (Denham et al., 2012). Well-being in early childhood is *multidimensional*, encompassing emotional stability, social

competence, resilience, and self-esteem (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Children with higher well-being, exhibit more in classroom engagement, better peer relationships, and enhanced problem-solving skills. Early interventions, that target emotional and social development, can have *long-term benefits*, including reduced anxiety and improved academic performance (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Art therapy integrates psychological theory with creative processes, to enhance emotional well-being (Malchiodi, 2018). Young children, who may have limited verbal skills, benefit particularly from nonverbal forms of expression such as drawing, painting and sculpting. Through these activities, children can explore feelings, develop coping mechanisms, and improve social skills in a safe environment. This study, investigates the relationship between art therapy participation and well-being, in kindergarten children. Despite its growing application, empirical research on the impact of art therapy on kindergarten children’s well-being, remains limited. This study explores the following research questions:

1. How does participation in art therapy affect emotional expression, at kindergarten’s children?
2. What impact does art therapy have on social skills and peer interaction?
3. Does regular engagement in art therapy, influence self-esteem and stress levels in children?

The study aims to provide *evidence based to recommendations*, for integrating art therapy into early childhood education programs.

2. Literature Review

Art Therapy in Early Childhood

Art therapy in early childhood is a developmentally appropriate approach, that uses creative processes, such as drawing, painting, sculpting, and imaginative play, to support children’s emotional, cognitive, and social growth. Defined as the use of artistic expression for therapeutic purposes, art therapy allows children to explore feelings, resolve conflicts, develop self-awareness, and improve coping skills in a safe and supportive environment (AATA, 2017). Unlike traditional talk, based on interventions, art therapy does not rely heavily on verbal communication, making it particularly effective for young children, whose language abilities are still emerging. Through images, colors, and symbolic representations, children can communicate complex emotions and experiences, that they may not have the words to express.

In early childhood, this nonverbal mode of communication is essential. As Kramer (2000) emphasizes, the creative process itself, rather than the final

product, holds therapeutic value. When children engage in art-making, they externalize internal thoughts and feelings, which can help reducing anxiety, the process trauma of the beginning of kindergarten, and build emotional resilience. For example, a child who has experienced stress or change, may use drawing to depict their feelings indirectly, allowing therapists or educators to understand better, their inner world, without requiring direct verbal explanation. Additionally, art therapy supports developmental milestones by enhancing fine motor skills, visual-spatial awareness, and problem-solving abilities. It also encourages imagination and creativity, which are critical components of cognitive development. Socially, art activities can foster cooperation and empathy, when is done in group settings, as children learn to share materials, respect others’ work, and interpret different perspectives.

Furthermore, art therapy can be particularly beneficial for children, facing developmental challenges, behavioral issues, or emotional difficulties. It provides a structured and flexible outlet for expression, helping children to regulate emotions and develop a sense of control and accomplishment. The relationship between the child and the educator, also plays a key role, as it creates a trusting environment, where the child feels seen, heard, and valued. In educational settings, integrating art therapy techniques into early childhood programs, can enhance overall well-being and support holistic development. Teachers and caregivers can use simple art-based activities to observe children’s emotional states and provide opportunities for expression and reflection. Overall, art therapy is a powerful and accessible tool, that aligns with the natural ways, that young children learn and communicate, making it an essential component of early childhood care and development.

Forms of art therapy include:

- **Expressive Art Therapy:** Free-form activities, that allow children to explore emotions without constraints.
- **Directive Art Therapy:** Structured activities guided by therapists, with specific developmental objectives.
- **Group Art Therapy:** Collaborative projects, that enhance social learning, teamwork, and empathy.

Research suggests, that art therapy promotes *cognitive flexibility, neural development, and problem-solving skills*, while providing a safe space for emotional exploration (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Well-Being in Kindergarten for Children

Well-being in early childhood is *multifaceted*, including emotional, social, cognitive, and physical dimensions (Pollard & Lee, 2003). Emotional regulation is a core component, enabling children to manage stress, frustration, and impulses (Denham et al., 2012). Social skills, including sharing,

cooperation, and empathy, are critical for positive peer relationships and classroom integration. Children with high levels of well-being, tend to be *more engaged, resilient, and confident*, which promotes both academic and social success (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Well-being in early childhood is a complex and multidimensional concept, that encompasses emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development (Pollard & Lee, 2003). These interconnected dimensions, collectively shape a child's overall quality of life, and influence their ability to grow, learning, and the interact with others effectively. Rather than being limited to the absence of problems, well-being in young children refers to a positive state, in which they feel safe, supported, engaged, and capable of expressing themselves. One of the most critical components of early childhood well-being is emotional regulation.

This refers to a child's ability to recognize, understand, and manage their emotions in different situations. As highlighted by Denham et al. (2012), emotional regulation enables children to cope with stress, control impulses, and respond appropriately to challenges or frustrations. For instance, a child who can manage feelings of anger or disappointment, is more likely to resolve conflicts peacefully and to be adapted to a new or difficult situations. Developing these skills early in life, lays the foundation for mental health and emotional stability in later years. Equally important are social skills, which play a central role in children's interactions and relationships. Skills such as sharing, cooperation, communication, and empathy allow children to build positive connections with peers and adults. In early childhood settings, like preschool or kindergarten, these abilities are essential for successful classroom integration. Children who can take turns, listen to others, and understand different perspectives, are more likely to form friendships and participate actively in group activities. These early social experiences, contribute significantly to a child's sense of belonging and self-worth.

Cognitive well-being, is another key dimension, involving curiosity, attention, problem-solving, and the ability to engage in learning. When children feel emotionally secure and socially connected, they are more open to exploring their environment and acquiring new knowledge. Physical well-being, also supports overall development, as good health, proper nutrition, and regular physical activity, which are necessary for energy, concentration, and growth. Research by Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) emphasizes, that children with high levels of well-being tend to be more engaged, resilient, and confident. Their positive self-image and motivation not only enhance the academic achievement, but also promote healthy social development. In contrast, children who experience low well-being, may struggle with anxiety,

withdrawal, or behavioral difficulties, which can hinder their overall development.

Furthermore, early childhood well-being, is strongly influenced by the environment, including family relationships, educational settings, and community support. Warm, responsive caregiving and stable routines, provide children with a sense of security, while supportive teachers and inclusive classrooms encourage participation and growth. When these environmental factors, align with children’s developmental needs, create a strong foundation for lifelong well-being.

In conclusion, well-being in early childhood is a holistic construct, that integrates emotional, social, cognitive, and physical aspects of development. By fostering emotional regulation, promoting social competence, and ensuring supportive environments, caregivers and educators can help children thrive. Investing in early well-being, not only benefits individual children, but also contributes to healthier, more resilient communities in the future.

Empirical Evidence Linking Art Therapy and Well-Being

Studies have consistently shown that art therapy:

- Facilitates **emotional expression**, allowing children to communicate complex feelings nonverbally (Malchiodi, 2018).
- Reduces **stress and anxiety**, providing a calming and enjoyable outlet for emotion regulation (Slayton et al., 2010).
- Enhances **social development** through group, based on activities that encourage cooperation and empathy.
- Improves **self-esteem**, as children take pride in creating and presenting artwork.

Previous research indicates, that art therapy can reduce *disruptive behaviors*, enhance *peer interactions*, and increase *emotional awareness* (Kramer, 2000). These findings suggest, that art therapy is both therapeutic and preventive, particularly for young children in their early educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two primary frameworks:

1. **Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory:** Highlights the importance of social interaction in learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). Art therapy provides scaffolded social experiences, that support emotional and social growth.
2. **Expressive Arts Theory:** Emphasizes the therapeutic benefits of creative expression, as a tool for emotional and psychological development (Malchiodi, 2018).

Together, these frameworks support the use of structured art therapy interventions, as a means to enhance kindergarten children’s well-being.

3. Methodology

Research Design: A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating quantitative behavioral assessments with qualitative interviews from teachers and parents. This approach provides a triangulated evidence of the impact of art therapy, on children’s well-being.

Participants

Thirty kindergarten children aged 3–4,5 years from a nonpublic early education center participated. Four teachers and 30 parents were involved in the qualitative component. Participants were selected, based on availability and parental consent, ensuring diversity in gender, socio-economic status, and prior exposure to creative activities.

Intervention Procedure

Children participated in 12 weekly structured art therapy sessions of 45 minutes each. The intervention included:

1. Free Drawing: Children expressed emotions without constraints.
2. Thematic Painting: Children explored feelings or social scenarios through guided painting.
3. Clay Modeling: Encouraged tactile engagement and problem-solving.
4. Collaborative Mural Projects: Promoted teamwork, communication, and peer cooperation.

Data Collection:

Quantitative Measures

- **Behavioral Observation Checklist:** A 5-point Likert scale assessed emotional expression, social interaction, and self-confidence.
- **Pre- and Post-Test Ratings:** Evaluated children’s behavioral changes before and after the intervention.

Qualitative Measures

- **Teacher Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews explored classroom behavior, emotional expression, and social interactions.
- **Parent Interviews:** Explored children’s emotional regulation and social behavior at home.

Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Paired t-tests and descriptive statistics were used to assess changes in pre- and post-intervention scores.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns in teacher and parent observations.

5. Results

Quantitative Findings - Table 1. Pre- and Post-Intervention Behavioral Scores

Variable	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Difference	t-value	p-value
Emotional Expression	2.8	3.7	+0.9	5.32	<0.001
Social Interaction	3.0	3.9	+0.9	4.98	<0.001
Self-Confidence	2.9	3.8	+0.9	5.10	<0.001
Stress Indicators	3.5	2.4	-1.1	6.02	<0.001

Note. Based on a 5-point Likert scale. Paired t-tests show statistically significant improvements post-intervention.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis revealed four main themes:

1. **Enhanced Emotional Expression:** Children verbalized feelings and discussed art-work more openly.
2. **Improved Social Interaction:** Collaborative projects increased sharing, empathy, and peer cooperation.
3. **Increased Self-Confidence:** Children displayed pride and satisfaction with completed art-works.
4. **Reduced Stress:** Teachers and parents noted fewer tantrums and withdrawal behaviors.

Activity - Collaborative Mural

Caption: Children engaged in a mural activity, demonstrating teamwork and emotional expression.

6. Discussion

Art therapy significantly improved emotional regulation, social competence, self-esteem, and stress management. These findings align with previous research highlighting art therapy’s developmental and therapeutic benefits (Malchiodi, 2018; Slayton et al., 2010). Collaborative art activities enhanced peer interaction and empathy, while free-form activities allowed safe emotional exploration. The positive outcomes indicate that art therapy can serve as a preventive and developmental tool, in early childhood education, supporting both academic engagement and social-emotional learning.

Practical Implications

- Integrate structured weekly art therapy sessions into kindergarten curricula.
- Provide teacher training in creative arts facilitation.
- Encourage parental involvement in home, based on art activities.
- Advocate for policy-level inclusion of art therapy in early childhood programs.

Limitations and Future Research

- Single-site study limits generalizability.
- Moderate sample size (N=30).
- Short-term (12-week) intervention; long-term impacts unknown.

Future research should include *multi-center trials*, *larger samples*, and *longitudinal studies* to assess sustained effects of art therapy.

7. Conclusion

Art therapy has a significant and positive influence on kindergarten children’s emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Through structured and creative activities, children are provided with meaningful opportunities to express their emotions, in ways that are appropriate to their developmental level. This supports the development of emotional regulation, helping children better manage feelings such as frustration, anxiety, and excitement.

In addition to emotional benefits, art therapy also enhances social competence. As children engage in collaborative art activities, they learn to share, cooperate, and communicate with peers, which strengthens their ability to form positive relationships. These interactions contribute to a greater sense of belonging and inclusion within the classroom environment. Furthermore, participating in creative processes, fosters self-esteem, as children gain confidence in their abilities, and take pride in their work.

Art therapy also plays a role in reducing stress and promoting overall psychological well-being. The calming and engaging nature of sensory and creative activities, provides children with a safe outlet to process their experiences and release tension. This is particularly important in early childhood, where children may not yet have the skills to cope with challenges in other ways. Given these benefits, it is important for schools to consider integrating art therapy techniques into early childhood curricula. Providing training for educators, in the use of art, based on strategies, can further enhance their ability to support children’s holistic development. By incorporating such approaches into everyday classroom practice, educational settings can better address not only academic needs, but also the emotional and social foundations, that are essential for lifelong learning and well-being.

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Digital library education: shaping library professionals

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Abstract: The rapid transformation of the information environment has redefined the role of librarians, positioning digital competencies at the core of professional practice. Within National School of Librarianship program, the course Digital Library has become a foundational component of its curricula, aiming to prepare library professionals for the challenges of the digital knowledge society. This paper examines the educational role of digital library as a course within Library and Information Science curricula and its contribution to shaping the profile of the digital librarian. The course introduces students to the concept, historical development, typologies, and emerging trends of digital libraries, while emphasizing their socio-economic and cultural significance. It provides theoretical and practical knowledge on digital library architecture and technologies, digitization processes, digital preservation, institutional repositories, evaluation of digital libraries, user interfaces, and information access and retrieval in digital environments. Through this framework, students develop an understanding of how digital collections are created, organized, accessed, used, and assessed. By integrating digital library into Library and Information Science education, the National School of Librarianship at the National Library of Albania plays a critical role in fostering lifelong learning, digital literacy, and professional adaptability, ensuring that librarians are capable of supporting knowledge creation, cultural heritage preservation, and inclusive access to information in an increasingly digital society.

Keywords: *Digital Library, Digital Librarian, Digital competencies, National School of Librarianship, National Library of Albania*

1. Introduction

The rapid transformation of the global information environment has fundamentally reshaped the mission, services, and professional identity of libraries. Digital technologies have altered how knowledge is created, organized, preserved, accessed, and disseminated. Consequently, the

professional profile of librarians has evolved from custodians of physical collections to mediators of digital knowledge infrastructures. Within this context, digital knowledges and competencies have become central to Library and Information Science (LIS) education. Courses dedicated to digital libraries are no longer supplementary components but foundational pillars of contemporary curricula. It was precisely the 2000s that brought the first innovations in the development of the program of the National School of Librarianship at the National Library of Albania with a new course related to information and communication technology. While from 2012 the course of digital library was added to this program. This paper examines the educational role of the Digital Library course within the National School of Librarianship at the National Library of Albania and analyses its contribution to shaping the profile of the digital librarian in Albania and situates the Albanian experience within broader international developments in digital librarianship education, highlighting how curriculum reform reflects technological, institutional, and socio-cultural transformations in the library sector. Digital library education has received much attention around the world and has become indispensable part of LIS education.

2. Theoretical framework

The concept of the digital library, as an entity distinct from the traditional physical library, emerged in the middle of 1990s. Prior to this period, many libraries had already begun acquiring electronic resources and digitizing parts of their collections. However, these digital resources were not conceptualized as independent collections or as separate institutional models. During the early stages of development, various terms were used to describe this phenomenon, including “electronic library,” “virtual library,” and “library without walls”. The term “digital library” gained prominence through the National Information Infrastructure Initiative in the United States. This initiative was closely linked to the High-Performance Computing Act of 1991, which supported the development of high-performance computing and network infrastructure. Since the early 1990s, a significant amount of money has been invested in digital libraries (DL) research (Pomerantz et al., 2006; Pomerantz et al. 2009; Audunson & Shuva, 2016; Aparac-Jelušić, 2017), including on how DLs can support education processes at all levels, but there has been no parallel investment to support teaching and learning about DLs or on how to find the most suitable approaches and teaching methods to prepare future professionals. Thus, the future of the educational programs-regardless of their situational place inside the university (e.g., being affiliated to a certain school, faculty, or department), or their program and institutional title-seems to be

unpredictable and very challenging (Aparac-Jelušić 2017). Audunson and Shuva (2016) have identified a number of studies focused on exploring DL courses in various schools around the world and explore course contents and related things. The majority of the research on DL is conducted in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Ma et al. (2006) noted that the number of institutions offering programmes or courses in digital library education is increasing and most courses offered are based on a combination of theory and practice, and are available at different levels. Liu (2004) suggested that a curriculum designed for digital libraries should include these areas: history and definitions of digital library, building and organizing digital libraries, integrating and interoperating digital information, policy and legal issues in digital libraries, interface design and services, digital library evaluation, collaboration and global perspectives on digital libraries, and the future of digital libraries in society. From the other side Tammaro (2015) describes the design and delivery of the curriculum of the International Master DILL (Digital Library Learning), that is an international master for the education of digital librarians, selected and financed from the Erasmus Mundus Program, started in 2006 and delivered by a Consortium of Universities coordinated by Oslo Akershus University (Norway), together with the Tallin University (Estonia) and the University of Parma (Italy). She explains how participants developed a common understanding using a “workshop model”. The IFLA Section on Education and Training (SET) from its beginning has been a most active one not only within the IFLA system but also in its relationships with the organisations outside with similar concerns on their agendas (Tammaro, 2011). Through the IFLA Guidelines for Professional Library and Information Science (LIS) Education Programmes the Building Strong LIS Education (BSLISE) working group introduces the following definition:

Library and information science/studies (LIS) is a field of study, research and application. In education and scholarship, it is concerned with information in all its formats and processes, the technologies that process it, and human interaction with information and associated technologies. As a professional practice, LIS engages all aspects of the information life cycle, utilises appropriate technologies in order to connect people anywhere to information, and is carried out in cultural heritage institutions and a wide range of information environments. (Chu et al., 2022)

The definition emphasizes three core elements:

- Information in all its formats and processes
- The technologies that process information
- Human interaction with information and technology

The digital library represents precisely the space where these three elements converge in practice. It addresses digital information in terms of its creation, organization, preservation, access, and evaluation. It relies on advanced technologies, including metadata standards, repository systems, interoperability frameworks, and digital preservation infrastructures.

It places strong emphasis on users, interfaces, information retrieval, and accessibility. Therefore, the digital library curriculum constitutes a concrete application of the LIS definition within the digital context. It prepares students to understand and manage the information life cycle in digital environments by integrating theoretical foundations, technological competencies, and the human dimension.

On April 21, 2009 UNESCO and 32 partner institutions launched the World Digital Library, a website that features unique cultural materials from libraries and archives from around the world (UNESCO, 2010; IFLA Digital Unification WG, 2019). The National Library of Albania also became part of this worldwide initiative, being represented in the world digital library with the outstanding antiquarian book by Marin Barleti “*Historia de vita et gestis Scanderbegi Epirotarvm principis*”. During this period, the National Library of Albania, under the influence of technological changes, but also of the guidelines of IFLA and UNESCO, according to Luga and Buzo (2008) drafted a project for the digitization of rare collections. The implementation of this project also required qualified staff with the necessary knowledge of the digitization process. But only in the 2012-2014 program was it possible to include the course of Digital Library in the library education curriculum at the National School of Librarianship.

3. Methodological approach

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach focusing on the Digital Library course included in the curriculum of the National School of Librarianship. The case study method was selected in order to provide an in-depth examination of how digital library education is conceptualized and implemented within a specific institutional context. The primary data sources for the study are the official course syllabi developed and used since the introduction of the course. A comparative document analysis was conducted to examine the evolution of the course content over time. The analysis focuses on identifying the main themes, topics, and issues addressed in the syllabi, as well as changes in emphasis, structure, and learning objectives. Through this systematic comparison, the study aims to evaluate how the Digital Library course reflects broader developments in digital librarianship and aligns with international trends in digital library education.

4. The Introduction of Digital Library in library education curriculum

The introduction of the Digital Library course into the Albanian library education curriculum marked a significant step in aligning professional training with the transformations brought about by the information society. The first version of the course program was primarily focused on the profound changes occurring in the information landscape under the influence of the Internet and rapid technological developments. Particular attention was given to the conceptual framework of the information society, emphasizing how digital technologies were reshaping knowledge organization, communication practices, and user expectations. The course aimed to provide students with a critical understanding of these transformations, positioning digital libraries not merely as technological systems but as institutional responses to broader socio-economic and cultural changes. The development of the initial syllabus (2012–2014) was strongly influenced by the policy frameworks and normative documents produced by IFLA and UNESCO. As two leading international organizations advocating for inclusive information societies, free and open access to information, and equitable knowledge distribution, they issued a series of manifestos, guidelines, and strategic documents addressing the role of libraries in the digital age. These documents emphasized principles such as universal access to information, intellectual freedom, digital inclusion, and the preservation of cultural heritage. The syllabus design of the Digital Library course during the 2012–2014 period was grounded in these international frameworks. It incorporated themes related to open access, digital inclusion, cultural heritage digitization, and the evolving mission of libraries within networked environments. Relying exclusively on theoretical instruction proved insufficient for the Digital Library course to fully accomplish its intended mission. While the initial syllabus provided a strong conceptual foundation - addressing the information society, policy frameworks, and the evolving role of libraries in digital environments - it did not adequately equip students with the practical competencies required to design, manage, and evaluate digital library systems. Digital librarianship, by its very nature, demands applied knowledge and hands-on experience. Competencies such as metadata creation, digitization workflows, repository management, and digital preservation strategies cannot be effectively developed through theoretical discourse alone. During the early phase of the course, these practical skills were partially addressed through a separate course in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), where students acquired foundational technological knowledge. However, the separation between conceptual digital

library education and technological practice created a structural gap in the curriculum. Recognizing this limitation, a curriculum revision was undertaken in 2016 (Demo, 2024) within the framework of the National School of Librarianship. As a result of this revision, several topics, both practical and theoretical, related to information technology were integrated directly into the Digital Library course. These included:

- Selection of software/platforms for building a digital library;
- Development of digital collections;
- Metadata creation;
- Electronic publications.

This curricular reorganization significantly enriched the syllabus of the Digital Library course. By consolidating theoretical perspectives with applied technological components, the course achieved greater coherence and pedagogical effectiveness. The integration ensured that students could connect conceptual frameworks with practical implementation, thereby strengthening their preparedness for professional practice in digital library environments.

5. Reinforcing knowledge in digital library

Meanwhile, the 2023-2025 digital library syllabus undergone to another review. The rapid developments in information and communication technology, but also the new IFLA guidelines regarding digital libraries, had their impact in this revision. What competencies should a digital librarian have? Can we call digital libraries today as “laboratories” for the development of digital humanities? We had these questions in mind when we designed the new syllabus, for the conception of which we also relied on the IFLA Guidelines for Setting Up a Digital Unification Project (IFLA Digital Unification WG, 2019). The revised course of Digital Library aims to familiarize students with the concept, development, typologies, and emerging trends of digital libraries. It focuses on the creation, organization, access, use, and evaluation of digital libraries, with particular attention to their socio-economic and cultural implications. It provides comprehensive knowledge on the history and definitions of digital libraries, as well as on digital library architecture and technologies. It addresses key areas such as digitization processes, digital preservation strategies, institutional repositories, evaluation methods for digital libraries, user interfaces in digital environments, and information access and retrieval systems. The overarching objective is to equip students with the competencies required to understand the challenges of digital environments and to develop the ability to design, organize, and deliver digital services in library institutions according to best professional practices.

Furthermore, the course seeks to enhance students’ understanding of the impact of the digital environment on the evolving role of the information professional within the knowledge society. The main issues that make up the revised digital library curriculum, in addition to the historical aspect, are:

- Concepts of digitization, digitalization, and digital transformation;
- Typologies of digital libraries;
- Main components of digital libraries (digital content, metadata, indexing & cataloguing systems, user interface & user experience, digital rights management, archiving and long-term preservation, access control, planning & analysis, selection of library materials, use of scanning & photography equipment, conversion to suitable formats, use of OCR, platform development and accessibility, security and long-term management, promotion and use, digital library interface design).

As Pomerantz et al. (2009) emphasize, we also teach library specialists who attend digital library course through close observation of the processes carried out by specialists from the National Digitization Centre at the National Library of Albania. At the end of the course, participants are required to realize, in a group or alone, the conception of a digital library with all the basic elements they learned during it.

6. Models’ comparison

A comparison between the Digital Library course at the National School of Librarianship in Albania and the program offered by the School of Librarianship at the Vatican Apostolic Library reveals both shared foundations and distinctive emphases. The Albanian curriculum is primarily theoretical rather than practical oriented and institutionally focused. It covers the full lifecycle of digital libraries, including digitization, typologies of digital libraries, metadata, indexing and cataloguing systems, user interface design, digital rights management, access control, platform development, and long-term management. The program emphasizes operational competencies and aims to prepare professionals capable of implementing and managing digital libraries within national and institutional contexts. The Vatican program, while also addressing core areas such as digitization, metadata, accessibility, copyright, and digital preservation, demonstrates a stronger orientation toward international standards, research infrastructures, and cultural heritage projects. It places particular emphasis on best practices, international collaboration, Open Access and FAIR principles, Artificial Intelligence applications in libraries, and communication strategies for scholarly audiences. Its framework is closely connected to humanities research and large-scale heritage

digitization initiatives. In summary, the Albanian model prioritizes professional and institutional implementation of digital libraries, focusing on practical skills and service delivery. The Vatican model, while equally attentive to technical and preservation aspects, is more explicitly research-driven and internationally oriented, integrating open science principles, advanced metadata practices, and emerging technologies within a heritage-focused academic environment.

Pomerantz et al. (2006) have launched a curriculum development project in the area of DLs based on the "5S" model developed by Fox and his students at Virginia Tech. This curriculum framework includes 19 modules, 9 of which are core topics, such as: Digitization, Storage, Interchange; Digital objects, Composites, Packages; Metadata, Cataloguing; Naming, Repositories, Archives; Spaces; Architectures, Interoperability; Services (searching, linking, browsing, etc.); Intellectual property rights management, Privacy, Protection (watermarking). Related topics are: Multimedia streams/structures, Capture/representation; Compression/coding; Content-based analysis, Multimedia indexing and retrieval; Multimedia presentation and rendering; Documents, E-publishing, Markup; Info needs, Relevance, Evaluation, Effectiveness; Thesauri, Classification, Categorization; Bibliographic information, Citations; Routing, Filtering, Community filtering; Search & search strategy, Info seeking behaviour, User modelling, Feedback; Information summarization, Visualization.

Saracevic (2008) suggests a range of topics for general digital library courses in contemporary and ever-changing digital environments by concentrating on a description of a specific course of School of Communication, Information and Library Studies, Rutgers University.

The course is organized into 14 topics grouped by the themes enunciated above:

Overview: Introduction to the course and the complex world of digital libraries.

Theme A. Concepts

What is a digital library? What are the essential elements and relationships? Differences in definitions, expectations, constituencies, visions and realities. Evolution. History and predecessors. Events and forces that shaped emergence and rapid growth of digital libraries. Keeping up with information and changes. Sources of information about digital libraries.

Theme B. Collection

Diversity of digital libraries. Large assortment by resources and institutions. What is a collection in a digital library? Integration with traditional library resources.

Theme C. Organization

Metadata. Representation of different media: text, images, sounds, multimedia. Standards and protocols. Digitization. Decisions, standards and approaches.

Theme D. Services

Services. Variety of services provided by digital libraries. Access and use. Evaluation of digital libraries and their services. Criteria and methods.

Theme E. Research & development

Research projects in digital libraries. Digital Libraries Initiatives. National and international projects. Preservation of digital objects and collections. Problems, efforts and approaches.

Theme F. Context

Economic issues. In-library, in larger environment. Legal issues. Copyright. Fair use. Public domain. Trends. Projections in the future.

The modular curriculum model of Pomerantz et al. (2006) and the thematic structure suggested by Saracevic (2008), both highlight core areas including digitization, metadata, services, interoperability, intellectual property, and the broader socio-technical context of digital libraries. Together, these models illustrate the multidimensional nature of digital library education, integrating technological, organizational, and contextual dimensions.

However, practical training plays a crucial role in developing digital competencies among librarians. To date, the Albanian Digital Library course has often placed greater emphasis on theoretical instruction rather than on practical application. If LIS education aims to prepare professionals capable of responding to the challenges posed by contemporary digital libraries, students must be trained through hands-on engagement in the creation, development, and enrichment of digital library systems. Such experiential learning enables future librarians to translate theoretical knowledge into effective professional practice. But what roles should the digital librarian have in a library? According to Tammaro (2006), two workshops on digital library education were held in Italy in 2005. The workshop participants defined the role of the digital librarian as:

- a bridge between digital resources and users (the traditional role of literature mediator, also, remotely);
- an agent of innovation, of citizenship, of information literacy etc. (the concept for the digital librarian as a facilitator of learning, a mentor, as a friend of the user, as a personal trainer who guides the user);
- communication skills are important for the social role of the librarian which is still

prominent, and even more so in a digital environment (the concept of a social role, for active citizenship and social inclusion in the Learning Society, also the collaboration needed with stakeholders);

- pedagogical skills are enforced in a digital environment (the role of educator, teaching digital librarian) – the concept of the digital library as a virtual classroom.

These roles illustrate that the digital librarian operates not only as a mediator between digital resources and users but also as a facilitator of learning, innovation, and social inclusion. In digital environments, communication and pedagogical competencies become essential, reinforcing the librarian’s function as an educator and active contributor to the development of an informed and engaged learning society. As librarians reimagine their roles and libraries transform into vibrant digital hubs, they are poised to continue shaping the future of information access and knowledge dissemination in an increasingly digital world (Thiruppathi, 2024).

7. Conclusion

The paper shows that the inclusion of the Digital Library course in the curriculum of the National School of Librarianship has been a crucial step in aligning Albanian library education with the demands of the digital information environment. The progressive revision of the syllabus has strengthened the course by integrating theoretical foundations with practical competencies such as digitization, metadata creation, digital preservation, and the development of digital collections. Effective digital library education requires a balance between theory and hands-on practice. The involvement of a well-prepared IT specialist in teaching is essential to ensure that students develop the technical skills necessary for building, managing, and sustaining digital libraries. Furthermore, in today’s context, Digital Humanities plays a critical role, and digital libraries should function as laboratories for learning and research across disciplines such as history, geography, literature, and linguistics.

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Aging in the Middle Ages Perceptions, realities, and early forms of care

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Abstract: The study of aging in the Middle Ages reveals a historical context in which human life was deeply shaped by social order, religious beliefs, and the harsh conditions of everyday existence. Aging was not defined solely by biological age, but by social status, one’s role within the community, and the ability to contribute physically and economically. Older people often experienced a dual form of treatment: they could be respected for their wisdom and experience, yet also face dependency, abandonment, or marginalization, particularly in the absence of family support. Religion played a central role in shaping perceptions of old age, linking longevity to morality, devotion, and suffering understood as part of the human condition. Within the feudal system, the position of the elderly largely depended on property ownership and hierarchical relationships. Despite these challenges, the Middle Ages also witnessed the emergence of early forms of organized care. Monasteries, religious communities, and charitable initiatives provided shelter and assistance to elderly individuals, especially those living in poverty or without family support. Although these practices did not yet constitute formal welfare systems, they laid the foundations for later models of social care. Drawing on historical sources, religious texts, and modern scholarship, this article examines medieval perceptions of aging, lived realities, and early care practices. It aims to highlight an often-overlooked dimension of European social history and to demonstrate how care for the elderly was deeply rooted in cultural and religious traditions long before the rise of modern welfare institutions.

Keywords: *Middle Ages; aging; social perceptions; religion; feudal order; care for the elderly; medieval religious institutions.*

1. Introduction

The Middle Ages represent a long historical period in which individual life was strongly shaped by economic, social, and religious circumstances. Average life expectancy was relatively low, largely as a result of harsh living conditions, limited medical knowledge, and the heavy physical demands of labor, although it was not uncommon for individuals to reach advanced old age (Fossier, 1986). Within this context, “old age” was not defined solely by the number of years lived, but rather by the position an individual occupied within the family and the feudal order. The loss of the ability to work and increasing dependence on others often marked the transition from maturity to old age.

Shulamith Shahar (1997) demonstrates that perceptions of aging in the Middle Ages were deeply intertwined with religious morality and communal norms, resulting in an understanding of old age as both a period of wisdom and a phase of vulnerability. Religion played a central role in shaping these views: Christianity interpreted advanced age as a time for spiritual reflection and moral reconciliation, thereby granting the elderly a distinctive position within the community (Brown, 1988).

At the same time, feudal structures created markedly different living conditions for the elderly, depending on property ownership, inheritance arrangements, and social status. Those who owned land or belonged to extended family networks generally enjoyed greater protection and respect, whereas elderly individuals without family ties often faced poverty and marginalization (Bloch, 1961).

Drawing on these historical dimensions, the present article aims to analyze perceptions, lived realities, and early forms of care for the elderly in the Middle Ages. It examines how religion, feudal structures, and communal organizations shaped the social position of older people and contributed to the emergence of the earliest forms of institutional care.

2. Perceptions of aging in the middle ages

In the Middle Ages, aging was not understood merely as a biological process associated with the number of years lived, but rather as a category rich in social and symbolic meanings. Older people—especially those who had endured the hardships of medieval life—were often perceived as bearers of wisdom,

custodians of communal memory, and transmitters of family traditions. In a society in which literacy was limited and practical experience held irreplaceable value, advanced age frequently commanded respect, particularly within rural settings and small communities (Fossier, 1986).

Religion played a powerful role in shaping these perceptions. In Christian sermons and texts, long life was often associated with morality and devotion. Christian thought suggested that old age represented an appropriate time for reflection, spiritual preparation, and moral purification—a phase in which individuals drew closer to an awareness of mortality and religious hope (Brown, 1988). In this sense, advanced age was imagined not only as a period of physical decline, but also as a stage of deeper inner reconciliation. Suffering, illness, and physical limitations accompanying aging were often interpreted within a spiritual framework, viewed as human trials that strengthened character and faith.

Nevertheless, positive perceptions were not universal. Shahar (1997) emphasizes that old age carried a dual status: it could inspire respect and honor, but in many cases also prejudice and social distancing, particularly when elderly individuals lost functionality, property, or family support. This ambivalence makes clear that perceptions of aging were always shaped by concrete living conditions, rather than by religious or cultural ideals alone.

A key aspect in understanding aging in the Middle Ages lies in the distinction between biological age and social age. In a society characterized by high mortality, the ability to contribute physically and economically was more significant than chronological age. Many individuals were considered "old" as early as their forties, especially if they lost the strength required to work the land or practice their trade, which immediately reduced their value within the family and the community (Bloch, 1961).

In this context, "old age" was not merely a matter of the biological body, but a functional category defined by social circumstances. Unlike modern societies—where retirement and a formal age threshold confer a new social status—medieval society associated old age primarily with the loss of physical capacity and increasing dependence on others. If an individual retained physical strength and the ability to work, he or she was not regarded as old, regardless of chronological age.

Shahar (1997) further observes that old age was often experienced as a "premature" condition. Disease, poor nutrition, and harsh living conditions rendered bodies more fragile, and individuals of the same age could be perceived very differently depending on physical resilience and family support. In this way, social age was fundamentally an elastic category, shaped by family dynamics, economic relationships, and the hierarchical structure of the feudal order.

Understanding this distinction helps clarify how medieval society closely linked concepts of age, labor, and social status. Old age was not simply a phase of life, but a social position that could shift dramatically depending on personal and communal circumstances—a reality far removed from modern conceptions of aging.

3. The role of religion in the understanding of aging

In medieval societies, where Christianity constituted the central axis of daily life and patterns of thought, aging acquired a strong spiritual significance. For many people of this period, the transition into old age was not merely a physical process, but an inner phase of what was understood as "spiritual purification." Christian theology associated aging with an approach toward the afterlife, placing the elderly individual in a position of deeper reflection on morality, virtue, and one's relationship with God. Brown (1988) notes that Christian traditions viewed the body and its experiences—including gradual physical decline—as part of a broader spiritual journey.

The writings of the Church Fathers, which were widely read and interpreted throughout the Middle Ages, portrayed old age as a period of "spiritual maturity." Physical weakness was not seen solely as a burden, but as an opportunity to cultivate wisdom, humility, and deeper devotion. Shahar (1997) emphasizes that many contemporary representations placed the elderly in a position of respect, even if not always of privilege: a person worn by life, yet closer to moral integrity and the divine.

This spiritual understanding strongly influenced how society approached older individuals. Within the family, the presence of an elderly member often carried a sacred dimension—not only because the individual embodied tradition, but also because he or she was believed to stand closer to the world beyond. Fossier (1986) observes that the entire cultural structure of the Middle Ages was deeply interwoven with religious symbolism, and aging itself was often perceived as a test of moral character.

Beyond its spiritual dimension, religion also played a profoundly practical role in the lives of the elderly. Christian teachings on mercy, charity, and assistance to the "weak" fostered a culture of social support that extended from families to religious institutions. Sermons encouraged a moral obligation to assist the poor, the orphaned, the sick, and the elderly—an idea that, according to Shahar (1997), served as the foundation for many early forms of social solidarity.

Monasteries constituted the primary centers in which this moral obligation took concrete form. Bloch (1961) points out that within feudal society, religious institutions were often the only structures capable of providing a degree of sustained care. Many monasteries maintained dedicated spaces for

the sick, the poor, and the elderly, where they could find shelter, food, and basic care.

Studies by Constable (1964) show that monasteries administered tithes and other economic resources that were frequently used for charitable purposes, while Knowles (1963) documents how monastic orders in England developed organized practices of assistance, becoming some of the earliest institutions to function as “safety nets” for vulnerable individuals. This role was indispensable in an era in which the state lacked formal systems of social welfare.

In this way, religion functioned as a broad protective mechanism: it taught people the moral duty to care for the elderly, while religious institutions provided the practical means through which such care was organized. In many rural communities, everyday solidarity—sharing food, assisting with household tasks, and offering protection from hardship—was deeply rooted in Christian values, creating forms of support that were not always abundant, but were nonetheless crucial for survival.

4. Feudal mentality and the position of the elderly

Medieval society was organized around the feudal system, which shaped not only political and economic relations but also the internal structures of the family. Within this rigidly hierarchical framework, older people occupied a particular position—at times honored, at times vulnerable—depending on their economic and social status. In his classic analysis of feudal society, Marc Bloch (1961) emphasizes that family authority within the feudal estate was fundamental, and that the figure of the patriarch often enjoyed special respect by virtue of age and experience.

In families that owned land or property, the elderly retained a stable role in decision-making. They embodied family memory and tradition, and their presence was perceived as a source of continuity and stability. Duby (1968) observes that in rural communities, especially those dependent on agriculture, elderly landowners exercised both moral and practical authority, safeguarding the interests of the family and lineage. This respect derived not only from economic power, but also from the belief that age conferred knowledge, maturity, and a deeper understanding of the social order.

However, respect was not guaranteed for all elderly individuals. The patriarchal structure of medieval society did not treat men and women equally. Shahar (1997) notes that older women were often in more precarious positions, particularly when they lacked family support. Unlike men, their authority depended less on age itself and more on their position within the family and the goodwill of their descendants.

In this context, old age in the Middle Ages was closely intertwined with the feudal and familial order. Aging did not carry a universal meaning; rather, it was determined by property ownership, patriarchal position, and the function an individual fulfilled within the community.

At the opposite end of the feudal hierarchy stood elderly individuals without land, family, or economic means. For them, old age was often synonymous with poverty, insecurity, and abandonment. Duby (1968) describes how, in the medieval rural economy, the ability to work constituted the sole guarantee of survival; once physical strength declined, individuals lost their primary means of subsistence. This made aging a particularly dangerous phase of life for many, especially landless peasants, tenant farmers, and servants.

When families lacked the economic capacity or moral willingness to support elderly members, these individuals often fell into extreme poverty. Fossier (1986) documents numerous cases of elderly people wandering between settlements in search of assistance, relying on the charity of the community or religious institutions. Such aid was often sporadic and failed to provide long-term stability, especially during periods of famine, warfare, or epidemic disease. The contrast between rural and urban settings was pronounced. In villages, communities were smaller and support depended largely on local solidarity. In cities, although access to religious and commercial institutions was greater, competition for resources was more intense. According to Shahar (1997), elderly individuals in urban environments frequently experienced isolation, particularly in communities where familial solidarity was weak.

Elderly individuals without family support constituted the most vulnerable group of all. Knowles (1963) and Constable (1964) indicate that monasteries attempted to admit those in need, but their capacities were limited and not always specifically organized to care for the elderly. In many cases, only a small portion of the impoverished population could be accommodated, and often only temporarily.

For this reason, the marginalization of the elderly in the Middle Ages was not simply a consequence of the feudal structure itself, but rather the result of an interaction between harsh economic conditions, the absence of state-run social institutions, and the limited capacities of families and religious organizations. Aging, in this sense, had many faces: honor and authority for those who possessed resources and experience, but profound insecurity for those who remained unprotected.

5. Early forms of care for the elderly

Although the Middle Ages lacked well-developed social structures in the modern sense, religious institutions functioned as the earliest centers of

support for the elderly and other vulnerable groups. Monasteries were not only spiritual and administrative hubs, but also frequently served as places where the sick, the abandoned, and the elderly could find temporary shelter. Rosenwein (1989), in her study of the property and social organization of Cluny, demonstrates that many abbeys managed resources that were directly used to feed and house the poor, including older individuals.

In many cases, monasteries established simple institutions known as *xenodochia* or *hospicia*, where individuals without family support could find refuge. Henderson (2006), in analyzing the evolution of hospitals from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, argues that the concept of the "hospital" in the medieval period extended far beyond medical treatment: it referred to spaces of reception, shelter, and consolation, where the elderly could receive basic care, food, and protection. These institutions fulfilled multiple functions simultaneously, operating as sites of charity, care, and refuge.

In some instances, monastic communities developed specific rules for the admission of elderly individuals, particularly those who had contributed to the community earlier in life. Knowles (1963) documents that monastic orders in England often accepted elderly people who had served the community during their productive years, offering them support in old age. Similarly, in Francophone and Italian regions, as documented by Bloch (1961) and Fossier (1986), monastic resources functioned as a form of "safety net" for those who had lost economic and familial support.

Beyond religious institutions, local communities themselves played a crucial role in supporting the elderly. Charity, inspired by Christian teachings on mercy and compassion toward the weak, became one of the most widespread social mechanisms of the Middle Ages. Fossier (1986) emphasizes that interfamily and communal solidarity was often essential for the survival of elderly individuals living outside monastic structures.

In rural communities, assistance took the form of spontaneous practices: villagers shared food, grain, or helped with household tasks for elderly people without family support. Duby (1968) describes this phenomenon as "practical philanthropy"—a model of solidarity based not on formal institutions, but on close-knit communal ties. Although this form of support was fragile and varied according to economic conditions, it nonetheless represented a social structure that had functioned across generations.

In urban settings, where social organization was more complex, guilds, religious brotherhoods, and craft associations often created small funds to assist elderly members. These practices, documented by Woolgar (1999), constituted an early precursor to community-based pensions: a modest yet significant system that linked the survival of elderly individuals to their participation in social and professional life during earlier stages.

Although the Middle Ages did not yet produce specialized social institutions dedicated exclusively to the elderly, they laid the initial foundations of what might be described as a “pre-institutionalization” of care. Assistance for older people was decentralized and often spontaneous, yet it existed in a variety of forms.

Testamentary bequests represented an important element in the support of the elderly. Many individuals donated property to religious institutions in exchange for the guarantee of care in old age, a practice extensively documented by Rosenwein (1989). Constable (1964) similarly notes that donations to churches and monasteries were often accompanied by clauses ensuring support for the donor in later life.

In this way, care for the elderly emerged as a blend of religious practices, communal norms, and personal interests. While state-based social institutions had not yet developed—they would appear much later—there existed a form of social self-organization that recognized old age as a condition requiring protection and support.

6. Conclusions

Aging in the Middle Ages represents one of the most complex social realities of the period, in which religious, economic, and familial dimensions were closely intertwined. As historical studies demonstrate, medieval perceptions of the elderly extended far beyond biological considerations; they were embedded within a broader worldview shaped by Christian belief, feudal hierarchy, and patriarchal structures. Religion interpreted aging as a phase of spiritual maturity, while the feudal order framed old age in terms of property, authority, and social rank. Consequently, old age was not a uniform category, but a highly variable experience that differed significantly from one individual to another, depending on the resources and forms of support available.

The early forms of care for the elderly—most often associated with monasteries, local communities, and religious philanthropy—occupy a significant place in European social history. Although these practices did not yet constitute organized welfare systems in the modern sense, they fostered an early culture of solidarity rooted in charity, devotion, and communal bonds. The studies of Henderson (2006), Rosenwein (1989), and Constable (1964) clearly demonstrate that many practices now regarded as standard—such as social housing, institutional care, and assistance for the poor—have their origins in medieval initiatives centered on religious institutions and community-based relationships.

Understanding aging in the Middle Ages, with all its inherent contradictions—between respect and abandonment, honor and poverty—also allows for a

clearer interpretation of contemporary social processes. Many of the challenges faced today in policies of elderly care, intergenerational relations, and conceptions of welfare have deep historical roots. The study of this period thus provides a valuable perspective on how past communities understood dependency, vulnerability, and solidarity—issues that remain fundamentally relevant in the present.

Ultimately, the analysis of medieval aging reveals that care for the elderly is a practice shaped by culture, values, and economic circumstances. Despite the profound transformations that have occurred over the centuries, the fundamental aim has remained unchanged: to provide support for those who are most vulnerable. It is precisely here that the importance of historical studies lies—they enable us to understand not only the past, but also the challenges of the present and the possibilities of the future.

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New dimensions of early childhood education in the European Renaissance

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Abstract: The European Renaissance represents one of the most significant periods of cultural and intellectual transformation in Western history, during which a new approach to early childhood gradually emerged. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as art, science, and philosophy began to move beyond medieval constraints, new ways of thinking developed regarding the human being and personal formation from the earliest years of life. Childhood was no longer viewed as an undifferentiated stage barely distinct from adulthood but increasingly understood as a unique phase characterized by specific needs, an inner world, and natural rhythms of growth. Within this renewed cultural climate, influential humanist figures such as Erasmus of Rotterdam, Juan Luis Vives, and Vittorino da Feltre made significant contributions to the understanding of early education. Their writings emphasized affectionate care, moral formation through positive example, and the role of play as a natural and essential component of learning. Humanist philosophy, grounded in the dignity and potential of the individual, gradually extended its focus to the young child, reshaping ideas about the family, the mother, and the educational environment. Against this historical background, the present paper examines how these new dimensions of early childhood education emerged and were articulated during the Renaissance. Drawing on philosophical writings and contemporary sources, it views the Renaissance not merely as a convergence of ideas, but as a decisive moment in the development of a more human-centered understanding of early childhood.

Keywords: *European Renaissance; humanism; early childhood education; Erasmus; Vives; play in education; history of pedagogy.*

1. Introduction

The European Renaissance, extending primarily from the mid-fifteenth to the late sixteenth century, is widely recognized as a period in which interest in the human being, knowledge, and the material world was profoundly renewed, bringing about a deep transformation in European thought. During this era, through the rediscovery of classical authors and new developments in art, philosophy, and science, an intellectual climate emerged that challenged long-established modes of thinking. Among these transformations, particular attention was given to the way childhood was conceptualized and to the role attributed to education in the earliest years of life. Prior to the Renaissance, in many parts of Europe, childhood was often regarded as a brief stage, only weakly differentiated from the adult world, while education was largely shaped by religious structures and strict forms of discipline (Ariès, 1962).

With the emergence of humanism—the philosophical movement that placed human dignity and potential at its center—understandings of human development underwent a significant shift. Humanist thinkers devoted special attention to the child, arguing that the child is not merely a “small adult,” but a being characterized by distinct developmental rhythms and needs that call for understanding, gentleness, and sustained care (Kristeller, 1961). This renewed perspective fostered an intellectual awakening in the conception of early education, linking it not only to the transmission of knowledge but also to the moral, emotional, and aesthetic formation of the individual from the earliest years of life.

During this period, advances in science and pedagogical thought contributed substantially to changing perceptions of the child. New insights into nature, the human body, and behavior created the conditions for a more systematic observation of early development. Thinkers such as Erasmus, Vives, and later Comenius drew upon classical sources, contemporary pedagogical experience, and humanist ideals to rethink the role of education in childhood. They emphasized that education should not begin solely with formal schooling, but rather at a much earlier stage, through positive example, natural play, and a healthy family environment (Garin, 1965; Erasmus, 1529/2009).

Even within Albanian studies on the history of education, the European Renaissance is regarded as a period that exerted a direct influence on the way human formation was conceptualized. Hajrullah Koliqi, in his scholarly work on the history of Albanian pedagogical thought, argues that the humanist ideals of this era laid the foundations upon which later pedagogical approaches

in Albanian lands were built, particularly during subsequent phases of cultural and educational development in the Balkans (Koliqi, 2004). This historical perspective situates early childhood within a broader social and cultural framework, demonstrating that its recognition as a stage of particular value was not merely a gradual adjustment, but rather a profound transformation that originated at the very heart of the Renaissance.

In this sense, the Renaissance brought not only a revival of classical values, but also a fundamental shift in the ways of thinking about the education of infants and young children. For the first time, numerous writings addressed the early years of life as a distinct subject, describing them as a crucial period for character formation and the development of early capacities and abilities (Comenius, 1657/1907). This conceptual shift represents one of the most significant moments in the history of education, as it prepared the ground for the pedagogical developments that would unfold in the centuries to come.

2. The concept of early childhood during the renaissance

During the Middle Ages, childhood was not perceived as a stage clearly distinct from the adult world. Children grew up within the same rhythms of life, often without particular attention to their emotional or developmental needs. The historian Philippe Ariès (1962) explains that in many medieval contexts, children were treated as “small adults,” with expectations that they would become involved at an early age in work, household duties, or physically demanding activities. It was precisely against this uncertain background of childhood that the Renaissance introduced a profound conceptual shift. Humanist thinkers began to articulate the idea of the child as a being endowed with a sensitive inner world, characterized by specific rhythms of growth and needs that could not be reduced to mere imitation of adult behavior.

Humanism, as an intellectual movement, placed the human being at the center of philosophical and educational reflection. Within this framework, the figure of the child acquired new meanings. Erasmus and other Renaissance thinkers insisted that the child is fragile and that his or her formation requires a gentle, calm, and carefully structured environment (Erasmus, 2009). The notion that children should not be treated with the harshness that characterized certain medieval practices represents one of the key distinctions between the Renaissance and earlier centuries.

Humanist writings of the sixteenth century reveal a renewed focus on the family as the primary educational institution. Various authors of the period emphasized the importance of early emotional bonds between mother and child, considering the mother to be the first agent of moral and emotional

education. Erasmus (2009), in his treatise on the education of children, stresses that the mother serves as the first model of proper conduct, moral integrity, and character formation. He argues that love, gentleness, and a consistent educational approach exert a profound influence on the development of the child’s personality.

In contrast to earlier practices in which children were often separated from their families at a young age—sent to live with relatives or to engage in work—Renaissance humanists emphasized that emotional stability and closeness to the mother and family were fundamental to healthy development. This idea marked a clear departure from previous traditions that did not regard the family as a central site of early moral education.

Renaissance humanists also demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to the emotional and moral development of the child. Rather than relying on approaches grounded in fear and punishment, authors such as Comenius argued that education should be based on positive example, explanation, and a moderate approach that supports natural growth and development (Comenius, 1907). This perspective was innovative for its time, as it moved away from medieval models that often employed physical punishment as an educational tool.

Comenius (1907) emphasized that the child is sensitive and vulnerable, and that the educator must demonstrate patience, calmness, and understanding. He suggested that morality cannot be imposed by force, but is shaped through experience, the modeling of virtuous behavior, and the creation of an atmosphere in which the child feels respected and valued. The impact of this renewed interpretation of childhood left a lasting mark on pedagogical thought and became one of the foundational pillars in the development of modern pedagogy.

3. New dimensions of early childhood education

The European Renaissance introduced fundamental changes in the way society conceptualized childhood and the process of education during the earliest years of life. Humanist thinkers of this period no longer viewed the child as a “small adult” expected to imitate adult behavior, but rather as a developing being with distinct emotional, physical, and intellectual needs. This more sensitive approach to childhood laid a new pedagogical foundation that would later influence the formation of modern educational theories.

Humanism emphasized the value and dignity of the individual, including the young child. Within this framework, several new dimensions of education emerged, representing the core of the pedagogical transformations characteristic of the Renaissance.

Education through gentleness and affection

One of the most significant advances of this period was the adoption of a gentle approach to education. Erasmus of Rotterdam, one of the central figures of humanism, openly criticized the harsh practices and physical punishments that were common in medieval schools. In *The Education of Children*, he argues that education should be grounded in patience, gentleness, and the establishment of a trusting relationship between educator and child (Erasmus, 2009).

For Erasmus, fear does not cultivate genuine virtue; it merely constrains behavior temporarily. He emphasizes that children learn more effectively when they feel accepted and secure, when they observe positive models of behavior, and when they are encouraged in a balanced and thoughtful manner. In this sense, his ideas mark a clear departure from medieval disciplinary traditions and lay the groundwork for educational principles that are now regarded as fundamental.

Play as a means of education

Another important dimension of education during the Renaissance was the emphasis on the role of play. Humanist thinkers recognized that play is not a trivial activity, but a natural means through which children learn to interact with the world, develop motor skills, and stimulate curiosity.

Juan Luis Vives—whose works are less accessible in contemporary editions—argues in the 1925 translation of *The Education of a Christian Woman* that children learn more easily when they are joyful and emotionally free. Although the work primarily addresses the education of girls, it offers valuable reflections on the nature of learning and the importance of pleasurable activities. For Vives, play represents a natural learning process that should be used wisely to develop both the mind and the character of the child (Vives, 1925).

This vision of play as an educational activity would later re-emerge in the pedagogical approaches of Froebel and Montessori, yet its roots can be traced directly to the humanist ideals of the Renaissance.

The educational and health environment

Humanist thinkers did not confine their attention solely to moral or intellectual issues; they also placed strong emphasis on the physical environment in which children grow and are educated. Comenius, inheriting and further developing the humanist tradition, stressed that education cannot be separated from health and physical well-being.

In *The Great Didactic*, he argues that children require a clean, safe, and well-organized environment in order to develop properly (Comenius, 1907). Cleanliness, healthy nutrition, fresh air, and calm surroundings were not incidental concerns for Comenius; they were essential preconditions for

successful learning. This perspective marks the emergence of a more integrated concept of education, in which body and mind are viewed as inseparable.

The education of girls

Among the most forward-looking dimensions of humanist thought was the advocacy for the education of girls. At a time when female education was limited or considered unnecessary, Vives was among the first to argue systematically that girls should receive moral and intellectual education equal to that of boys. In *The Education of a Christian Woman*, he emphasizes that girls possess the same capacity to learn and to cultivate virtue as boys, and that a more just and virtuous society cannot be built without their education (Vives, 1925).

This idea was revolutionary for its time and marked a significant step toward educational equality. It drew a clear line between medieval thinking and the new humanist vision, placing the education of girls firmly on the intellectual agenda of the sixteenth century.

4. Major renaissance thinkers and their contributions

The European Renaissance was shaped by a group of humanist thinkers who introduced an entirely new way of thinking about education and childhood. Each of them contributed in a distinctive manner to the formation of principles that are now regarded as foundational to modern early childhood education. Grounded in humanist values, their ideas emphasized the sensitive nature of the child, the need for a gentle educational approach, the importance of play, the role of the educational environment, and the education of girls. Collectively, these ideas became cornerstones in the development of European pedagogy.

Erasmus of Rotterdam

Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), one of the most influential figures of humanism, articulated a clear vision of children’s education in his work *The Education of Children* (*De pueris instituendis*, 1529). In this treatise, he emphasizes that education should begin in the earliest years of life, when habits and character are most easily formed (Erasmus, 2009). For Erasmus, the child is highly sensitive to the manner in which he or she is treated, learning more effectively through example than through commands or punishment.

Erasmus argues that love, gentleness, and moderation are essential elements of education, placing them at the center of the formative process. He explicitly rejects the harsh practices characteristic of medieval schooling and maintains that educators should act as moral guides who inspire rather than as authorities

who impose fear. This vision, grounded in humanist principles, positions Erasmus as one of the founders of modern early childhood pedagogy.

Juan Luis Vives

Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540), another prominent humanist thinker, is well known for his advanced ideas on the education of girls and the nature of learning. In *The Education of a Christian Woman* (1524), translated into English in 1925, he argues that education should be adapted to the natural rhythms of the child, respecting emotional and intellectual development (Vives, 1925).

Although *Introductio ad Sapientiam* is primarily a philosophical work, Vives’s key reflections on childhood and play are dispersed throughout his more pedagogically oriented writings. According to Vives, play is not mere amusement, but a natural mode of learning through which the child develops reason, imagination, and motor skills. By valuing play as an educational process, Vives contributed to its recognition as an essential element of early education—an approach that would later be further developed by Froebel and Montessori.

Vittorino da Feltre

Vittorino da Feltre (1378–1446) stands out as one of the most innovative Renaissance figures in the field of practical education. He founded the school *Casa Giocosa* (“House of Joy”) in Mantua—an institution that combined academic learning with physical activity, play, and a warm, family-like atmosphere. In contrast to medieval schools, which were dominated by rigid discipline and inflexible curricula, *Casa Giocosa* was conceived as a joyful, open, and healthy educational environment.

Although da Feltre did not leave behind extensive written works comparable to those of Comenius or Erasmus, his influence is evident through educational practice and the reputation of his school. He emphasized character education, the harmonious development of body and mind, and respect for the child’s natural rhythms of growth. This approach positions him as a key practical forerunner of modern early childhood pedagogy.

Jan Amos Comenius

Jan Amos Comenius (1592–1670), often referred to as the “teacher of nations,” is one of the most significant figures in pedagogical thought during the later Renaissance period. His influence encompasses the concept of universal education—the idea that all children, regardless of background, have the right to education—as well as a strong focus on early childhood as a crucial stage of development.

In *The Great Didactic* (*Didactica Magna*), Comenius emphasizes the importance of a safe, clean, and well-structured environment for children, as well as the role of experience and sensory perception in the learning process

(Comenius, 1907). He believed that education should be holistic: mind, body, and moral character are formed together within an environment that fosters harmony and natural curiosity.

The contribution of Comenius serves as a bridge between Renaissance humanism and modern pedagogy, exerting a lasting influence on later thinkers such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel.

5. Conclusions

The European Renaissance represents one of the most influential periods in the history of pedagogical thought, marking a profound turning point in the way society conceptualized childhood and the process of early education. In contrast to the Middle Ages, when the child was often treated as a peripheral figure in social life, Renaissance humanists placed the child at the center of moral and intellectual reflection. For the first time, the child was described as a being endowed with unique potential, a sensitive inner world, and developmental needs that require careful attention and understanding.

This transformation was not immediate, but rather emerged through the contributions of a series of thinkers who advanced ideas that were bold for their time. Erasmus emphasized the importance of gentle education and moral development through positive example; Vives highlighted the role of play and the need to adapt educational processes to the child’s natural rhythms; da Feltre demonstrated through practice that a joyful and healthy environment fosters learning; while Comenius laid the foundations of an integrated pedagogy in which body, mind, and moral character develop together within a safe and structured environment.

The new dimensions of early childhood education shaped during the Renaissance—such as a gentle educational approach, play as an instrument of learning, the importance of the physical environment, and the idea of universal education—exerted a strong influence on educational theories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These ideas were further developed by pedagogues such as Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, forming the basis of many modern approaches that continue to be practiced in early childhood education institutions today.

In this sense, the Renaissance was not merely an era of rediscovery of classical values, but also a period in which the foundations for the future of early childhood education were firmly established. It shifted attention from control and discipline toward understanding, from mechanical instruction toward experiential learning, and from the exclusion of girls toward an—albeit still partial—demand for broader educational access. These changes reshaped how European societies perceived the child, paving the way for the development

of a pedagogical tradition that continues to exert a powerful influence in the present day.

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Prosocial competency development in primary education

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Abstract: This study examines the development of prosocial competencies in primary education through a qualitative curricular analysis of Albanian Language and Civic Education textbooks across Grades 1–5. It explores how instructional themes systematically scaffold the formation of empathy, cooperation, moral reasoning, and civic responsibility throughout early schooling. The research integrates structured textual analysis with longitudinal pedagogical observation in order to identify developmental patterns embedded within curricular design and classroom practice. Findings indicate a coherent vertical progression from foundational interpersonal awareness and rule-guided social behavior in early grades toward cooperative engagement, reflective moral judgment, and emerging civic agency in upper primary levels. The results suggest that prosocial development is not merely a natural maturational process but is actively shaped through intentional curricular sequencing and guided educational interaction. The study proposes an interpretative framework of prosocial competency development that highlights the formative role of primary education in preparing ethically responsible and socially reflective individuals within increasingly complex and digitally mediated environments.

Keywords: *prosocial competence; primary education; moral development; curriculum analysis; civic agency; social responsibility*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and context

Contemporary societies are characterized by rapid technological transformation, cultural diversification, and increasing complexity in social interaction. In such contexts, education can no longer be confined to the transmission of disciplinary knowledge; it must also cultivate the social and moral competencies that sustain coexistence, democratic participation, and responsible citizenship. Within this broader educational mandate, prosocial development assumes a central role. Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary

actions intended to benefit others without expectation of external reward, contributing to positive interpersonal relations and social reciprocity (Roche, 1995). During primary school years, prosocial competencies manifest through helping, sharing, cooperation, tolerance, solidarity, and empathy. These behaviors form the foundation for the development of moral identity and civic responsibility. Developmental research identifies empathy as a precursor to prosocial action (Hoffman, 2000; Gjini, 2001), while moral reasoning guides children’s judgments in social situations (Eisenberg, 1986). Cognitive-developmental perspectives (Piaget, 1952; Kohlberg, 1984) describe moral growth as a progression from heteronomous rule-following toward autonomous ethical reasoning. Within educational settings, classroom climate and teacher modeling significantly influence the consolidation of prosocial dispositions (De Beni, 2000). Prosocial development, therefore, is not solely a maturational outcome but is deeply shaped by structured pedagogical environments. In increasingly digitalized and socially mediated contexts, the early cultivation of empathy, responsibility, and reflective judgment becomes essential. As children engage with technologically mediated communication and pluralistic social environments, the need for structured moral formation in primary education becomes even more pressing.

1.2 Research problem and objectives

Despite extensive psychological research on empathy and moral reasoning, limited attention has been given to how prosocial competencies are systematically scaffolded within curricular structures across grade levels. Existing studies frequently rely on behavioral measurement or experimental designs, while the longitudinal progression of instructional themes embedded in textbooks remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how prosocial competencies are structurally embedded in Albanian Language and Civic Education textbooks (Grades 1–5, Albas editions) and how these themes reflect a coherent developmental progression. The objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the presence and distribution of prosocial themes in primary education textbooks (Grades 1–5);
2. To identify patterns of vertical progression across grade levels;
3. To propose an interpretative pedagogical model of structured prosocial development grounded in curricular analysis and longitudinal classroom practice.

The central research question guiding the study is:

How are prosocial competencies systematically embedded and progressively developed across primary grade levels through instructional themes?

1.3 Relevance to the conference theme

This study aligns directly with the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society” by examining how early moral and social formation contributes to responsible citizenship in technologically mediated environments. While digital transformation reshapes modes of communication and learning, the ethical foundations of empathy, cooperation, and civic responsibility remain essential for sustainable social development. By proposing a structured model of prosocial progression within primary education, the study contributes to contemporary debates on how educational systems can balance innovation with moral formation, ensuring that technological advancement is accompanied by social responsibility.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

Prosocial behavior has been extensively examined within developmental psychology, particularly in relation to empathy, altruism, and moral reasoning. Hoffman (2000) conceptualizes empathy as a multidimensional affective-cognitive response that develops alongside cognitive maturation and serves as a motivational foundation for moral action. Similarly, Eisenberg (1986) emphasizes the interaction between emotional arousal and cognitive evaluation in shaping prosocial decision-making. These perspectives highlight the internal psychological mechanisms that motivate helping and cooperative behaviors. Cognitive-developmental theories, notably those of Piaget (1952) and Kohlberg (1984), describe moral development as a structured progression from heteronomous rule-following toward autonomous ethical reasoning grounded in justice and reciprocity. Moral growth, within this framework, is neither spontaneous nor uniform; it unfolds through interaction, reflection, and guided social experience.

Within educational research, the relational climate of the classroom and teacher modeling are considered decisive in consolidating prosocial attitudes (De Beni, 2000). Educational environments provide structured opportunities for perspective-taking, cooperative engagement, and moral reflection, thereby translating developmental potential into observable social conduct. However, while psychological and educational theories provide substantial insight into the mechanisms of prosocial development, fewer studies have examined how such competencies are systematically embedded within curricular design. Curriculum theory suggests that developmental sequencing and spiral progression enable gradual conceptual deepening across grade levels. Instructional themes, when intentionally structured, may scaffold the transition from basic interpersonal awareness toward reflective moral judgment and civic agency. In contemporary educational discourse, prosocial

education is increasingly connected to global citizenship and digital citizenship frameworks. As children navigate technologically mediated communication and culturally diverse environments, competencies such as empathy, tolerance, responsibility, and ethical reasoning become essential for sustainable social interaction. This perspective reinforces the need to examine how primary education curricula structure these competencies from early schooling onward.

The present study integrates developmental theory with qualitative curricular analysis, conceptualizing prosocial progression as a structured pedagogical trajectory embedded within instructional themes across Grades 1–5. This theoretical grounding informs the research design and guides the interpretation of findings.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretative research design aimed at examining the structured development of prosocial competencies in primary education. The research integrates systematic curricular content analysis with longitudinal pedagogical observation in order to connect formal instructional frameworks with lived classroom practice. The primary data corpus consists of officially approved Albanian Language and Civic Education textbooks for Grades 1–5 used in the national primary education curriculum. Instructional themes were selected as the unit of analysis, as they represent key pedagogical structures through which social and moral learning is mediated. The analysis focused on identifying dominant prosocial dimensions—including empathy, cooperation, helping behavior, tolerance, solidarity, and civic responsibility—drawing on established theoretical perspectives in moral and prosocial development.

Each instructional theme was examined in relation to its pedagogical objective, the type of social interaction it promoted, and the level of moral reasoning it required. Coding procedures involved the identification of narrative, dialogical, and situational indicators reflecting prosocial constructs. Repeated categorization was applied to ensure analytical consistency across grade levels and to trace patterns of developmental progression. In addition to curricular analysis, the study incorporates a longitudinal pedagogical dimension grounded in extended professional teaching experience in primary education. Sustained classroom observation provided interpretative insight into how structured prosocial themes are enacted in authentic educational settings, particularly through cooperative learning, dialogical reflection, and emotionally supportive classroom environments. While this component does not constitute an experimental design, it contributes practical evidence

regarding the formative impact of intentional prosocial pedagogy. The study operates within a qualitative analytical framework and does not seek statistical generalization. Instead, methodological triangulation between curricular analysis and sustained pedagogical observation enhances interpretative validity and supports the development of a coherent conceptual model of prosocial progression. Ethical standards related to student confidentiality and responsible classroom-based research were observed throughout the study.

4. Findings

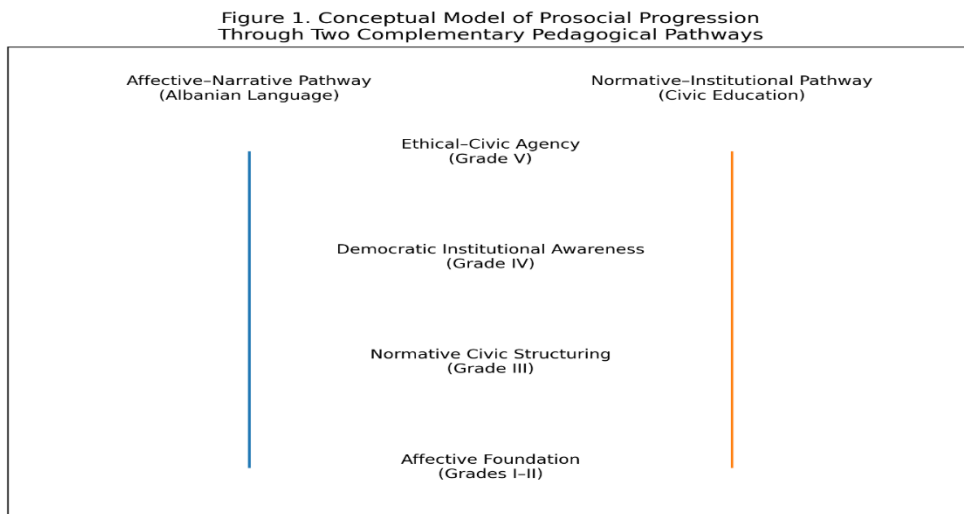
The vertical analysis of official Albanian Language and Civic Education textbooks across Grades I–V reveals a structured and developmentally coherent progression in the formation of prosocial competencies. Rather than presenting fragmented moral themes, the curriculum demonstrates intentional sequencing and increasing conceptual depth across grade levels. The findings indicate that prosocial formation unfolds through two complementary pedagogical pathways. Civic Education provides explicit normative and institutional structuring—introducing rules, rights and responsibilities, participation, and democratic principles—while Albanian Language fosters affective internalization through narrative modeling, emotional identification, and moral reflection. Across grades, this dual structuring gradually increases in complexity, culminating in ethical–civic agency.

Table 1: Progression of prosocial competencies across grades I–V

Grade	Normative–Institutional Dimension	Affective–Narrative Dimension	Developmental Level of Prosociality
I	Classroom rules, inclusion, basic social norms	Emotional recognition, friendship, care	Foundational empathy
II	Rights and responsibilities, helping behaviors	Relational empathy, structured cooperation	Relational responsibility
III	Community roles, institutional rules, collective responsibility	Collective identity, solidarity	Normative civic structuring
IV	Participation, diversity, institutional authority	Moral reflection, tolerance, identity awareness	Democratic institutional awareness
V	Democratic agency, justice principles, equality	Critical reflection, principled ethical reasoning	Ethical–civic agency

4.1 Conceptual model of prosocial progression

Figure 1 illustrates the progressive interaction of the two complementary pedagogical pathways identified in the analysis. Rather than functioning independently, these pathways operate in parallel and progressively deepen in moral, social, and institutional complexity across Grades I–V.



In Grades I–II, prosocial development is primarily affective and relational. Emotional recognition and inclusion, cultivated through narrative engagement, interact with explicit introduction of shared norms. Prosociality at this stage is scaffolded through both emotional identification and rule-based structuring.

Grade III represents a structural turning point. The curriculum shifts toward normative civic organization, introducing institutional rules, community roles, and collective responsibility. Here, prosocial engagement expands beyond interpersonal empathy toward socially regulated participation.

In Grade IV, the progression acquires an explicitly democratic dimension. Students encounter structured participation, multicultural awareness, and authority frameworks. Institutional understanding becomes integrated with reflective moral awareness.

Grade V culminates in ethical–civic agency. Themes of justice, equality, anti-discrimination, and democratic participation require principled reasoning and reflective judgment. Prosocial behavior becomes grounded in internalized ethical principles supported by both conceptual civic structuring and affective moral reflection.

Thus, Figure 1 represents a structured developmental architecture in which emotional internalization and normative civic organization converge toward democratic agency.

4.2 Grade-level developmental patterns

The grade-level analysis confirms a progressive qualitative transformation in the structure of prosocial competencies.

Grade I – Foundational Empathy

Themes focus on identity, inclusion, and classroom rules. Prosociality operates at an affective and normative-basic level, where empathy and compliance form the foundational layer of social coexistence.

Grade II – Relational Responsibility

Helping behavior, reciprocity, and shared responsibility become more explicit. Empathy evolves toward relational accountability, linking emotional awareness with emerging civic understanding.

Grade III – Normative Civic Structuring

Community roles, diversity, and institutional norms are introduced. Prosociality shifts from interpersonal interaction to structured civic normativity.

Grade IV – Democratic Institutional Awareness

Participatory processes, multicultural recognition, and institutional authority gain prominence. Tolerance becomes a reflective social value embedded within democratic frameworks.

Grade V – Ethical–Civic Agency

Justice discourse, equality principles, and principled moral reasoning dominate. Students are framed as emerging civic agents capable of reflective and ethically justified decision-making.

Across grades, the transformation is structural rather than thematic: prosociality evolves from emotional responsiveness to principled civic reasoning.

4.3 Developmental coherence

The increasing moral and institutional complexity corresponds to cognitive-developmental transitions described by Piaget (1952) and to the progression of moral reasoning identified by Kohlberg (1984). However, the findings suggest that curricular design actively scaffolds this development rather than merely reflecting natural maturation. The progression identified reflects qualitative deepening rather than quantitative repetition. Emotional awareness expands into structured responsibility; institutional understanding evolves into democratic participation; and normative compliance transforms into principled ethical reasoning. Within this framework, the interaction of the two

complementary pedagogical pathways generates a coherent developmental trajectory culminating in ethical–civic agency. The articulation of this structured interaction constitutes the primary interpretative contribution of the study.

5. Pedagogical pathways of prosocial development

Building upon the thematic analysis of Grades I–V, the findings suggest that prosocial competencies in primary education are most effectively fostered through structured pedagogical pathways that integrate emotional internalization with normative civic guidance. Rather than operating as isolated instructional interventions, prosocial themes function as progressively interconnected formative experiences that support children’s social, moral, and civic development.

In the early primary years, pedagogical emphasis is placed on emotional recognition, inclusion, and the establishment of shared classroom norms. Narrative engagement and guided reflection enable students to identify emotions, understand interpersonal differences, and internalize basic principles of fairness and respect. At this stage, prosociality is primarily affective in orientation, supported by explicit rule introduction and relational interaction. As students advance to middle primary levels, instructional themes increasingly promote cooperative engagement and shared responsibility. Prosocial behavior evolves from spontaneous empathic response toward reciprocal participation in structured social tasks. Classroom dialogue and collaborative activities create opportunities for students to experience responsibility within group contexts, reinforcing the connection between individual action and collective wellbeing.

A qualitative developmental shift becomes evident as curricular content introduces community roles, institutional norms, and organized social participation. Prosocial engagement expands beyond interpersonal relationships toward structured civic awareness, reflecting a growing understanding of how social systems regulate cooperation and collective responsibility. In the upper primary grades, pedagogical emphasis progressively incorporates democratic participation, diversity awareness, and reflective tolerance. Students are encouraged to engage in participatory processes and to analyze moral situations requiring perspective-taking and principled reasoning. At this level, prosocial competencies become increasingly integrated with emerging civic identity and social accountability. The culmination of this developmental trajectory is characterized by the formation of ethical–civic agency. Instructional themes addressing justice, equality, and responsible participation invite students to evaluate competing

values, justify moral choices, and demonstrate reflective judgment. Prosocial behavior thus evolves from emotionally guided action toward internally regulated ethical reasoning grounded in democratic principles.

Longitudinal pedagogical observation further supports this interpretative framework. Sustained implementation of emotionally supportive learning environments, cooperative learning structures, and dialogical moral reflection contributes to gradual improvements in students’ social integration, emotional regulation, and civic awareness. While not derived from experimental measurement, these observations reinforce the view that intentional alignment between curricular themes and structured classroom practice creates stable conditions for prosocial development.

In this perspective, prosocial education in primary schooling may be understood not as a sequence of discrete instructional models, but as a coherent developmental architecture in which emotional experience, social interaction, and civic understanding progressively converge.

6. Prosocial education in the digital society

The expansion of digital communication has profoundly transformed children’s modes of social interaction. Peer relationships increasingly extend beyond the physical classroom into virtual environments characterized by reduced emotional visibility, rapid exchange, and weakened normative regulation. Within such contexts, the prosocial competencies cultivated during primary education acquire significant transfer value.

Digital environments may amplify impulsivity, diminish empathic responsiveness due to the absence of immediate interpersonal cues, and increase exposure to exclusionary, discriminatory, or aggressive behaviors. As a result, competencies such as emotional regulation, perspective-taking, tolerance, and principled moral reasoning become essential not only for classroom coexistence but for responsible digital participation.

The findings of this study indicate that prosocial progression in primary education establishes a foundational ethical architecture. Through two complementary pedagogical pathways—normative–institutional structuring and affective–narrative internalization—students gradually develop the cognitive and emotional capacities necessary for ethical judgment and relational responsibility. These capacities are transferable to digitally mediated interactions, where self-regulation and internalized moral reasoning become primary safeguards in the absence of immediate adult supervision.

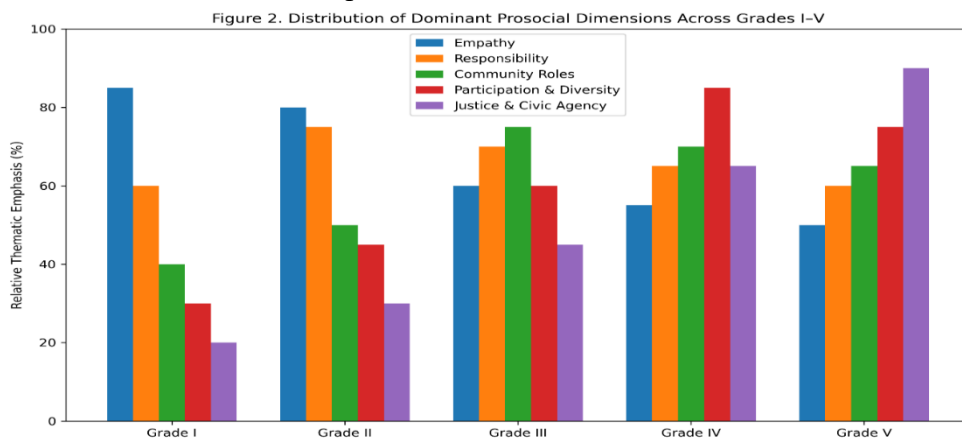
Importantly, structured prosocial education functions as a preventive rather than reactive mechanism. Instead of addressing problematic behaviors—such as online exclusion or digital aggression—after their emergence, early and

systematic prosocial scaffolding cultivates internal moral regulation from the outset. Students who have experienced progressive civic structuring and reflective dialogue are more likely to navigate digital environments with ethical awareness and social responsibility.

Thus, prosocial competencies should be conceptualized as transferable life skills extending beyond the physical classroom. In an increasingly technology-mediated society, primary education assumes a decisive formative role: not only in shaping academically competent learners, but in preparing ethically responsible digital citizens capable of reflective participation in complex social ecosystems.

7. Discussion

Figure 2 presents the empirical distribution of dominant prosocial dimensions across Grades I–V as identified through qualitative content analysis. Rather than indicating a simple linear increase, the distribution reveals a systematic shift in thematic emphasis across developmental stages. The progression operates as a spiral developmental architecture characterized by qualitative transformation rather than quantitative accumulation.



Note: Percentages represent relative thematic emphasis identified through qualitative content analysis of instructional units.

Figure 2 – Interpretation

In Grades I–II, empathy and relational responsibility display the strongest presence, reflecting the curriculum’s prioritization of emotional recognition, cooperation, and basic normative structuring. At this stage, prosociality is primarily affective and relational in orientation.

Grade III marks a structural transition. While empathy remains present, community roles and institutional norms gain prominence, indicating

movement toward organized civic structuring. The apparent redistribution of thematic emphasis reflects developmental expansion rather than regression.

In Grade IV, participation and diversity become dominant dimensions, signaling consolidation of democratic institutional awareness. Prosocial engagement becomes increasingly embedded within participatory frameworks and multicultural recognition.

In Grade V, justice principles and civic agency emerge as the most prominent dimensions. This shift reflects the culmination of the developmental trajectory toward principled ethical reasoning and democratic responsibility.

The findings of this study indicate that prosocial competency development in primary education follows a structured and pedagogically mediated trajectory characterized by increasing moral and institutional complexity. Rather than reflecting a purely maturational process, the progression observed across Grades I–V suggests the active influence of intentional curricular sequencing and guided educational interaction.

These results are consistent with developmental perspectives that emphasize the gradual transformation of empathy and moral reasoning across childhood (Hoffman, 2000; Eisenberg, 1986). Similarly, the shift from normative compliance toward principled ethical judgment identified in the upper primary grades reflects patterns described within cognitive-developmental theory (Piaget, 1952; Kohlberg, 1984). However, the present findings extend these theoretical perspectives by highlighting the structural role of curricular design in scaffolding such developmental transitions.

The analysis demonstrates that instructional themes function not merely as contextual illustrations of developmental change, but as formative mechanisms actively shaping moral awareness and civic participation. This supports educational research emphasizing the importance of classroom climate and teacher-mediated interaction in consolidating prosocial dispositions (De Beni, 2000). The integration of longitudinal pedagogical observation further strengthens this interpretation by illustrating how structured instructional approaches translate into observable social behaviors over time. Importantly, the study proposes a conceptualization of prosocial education as a developmental architecture in which affective internalization and normative civic structuring operate as complementary pedagogical pathways. This perspective contributes to existing literature by offering an interpretative framework that connects curricular sequencing with lived classroom practice, thereby bridging theoretical and pedagogical dimensions of moral development. The contemporary relevance of this framework becomes particularly evident in digitally mediated social contexts. As children increasingly engage in hybrid forms of interaction, the internalization of ethical norms and the capacity for reflective judgment emerge as critical

competencies for responsible participation. In this sense, primary education plays a foundational role in shaping both moral identity and emerging civic agency. This perspective is also consistent with resilience-oriented approaches in developmental research, which emphasize the role of early social competence and emotional regulation in fostering adaptive functioning across changing social contexts (Masten, 2001).

Nevertheless, the interpretative and qualitative nature of the study necessitates cautious generalization. While methodological triangulation enhances internal coherence, future research may further validate the proposed framework through mixed-method approaches incorporating behavioral measurement and comparative curricular analysis across educational contexts.

Taken together, the findings suggest that prosocial development in primary education is best understood as an intentionally structured pedagogical process rather than a spontaneous developmental outcome. This perspective offers practical implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and policy initiatives aimed at fostering socially responsible and ethically reflective learners.

8. Conclusions

This study explored the structured development of prosocial competencies in primary education through qualitative curricular analysis integrated with longitudinal pedagogical observation. The findings reveal a coherent developmental trajectory across Grades I–V, progressing from early emotional awareness and normative socialization toward reflective moral reasoning and emerging ethical–civic agency.

The results suggest that prosocial development in primary schooling is not solely a product of natural maturation but is significantly shaped by intentional curricular sequencing, dialogical learning processes, and sustained teacher mediation. When instructional themes are developmentally aligned, they function as formative mechanisms that foster emotional internalization, relational responsibility, institutional understanding, and democratic participation.

The study contributes to educational research by proposing an interpretative framework that conceptualizes prosocial education as a structured developmental architecture grounded in the interaction between affective experience and normative civic organization. This perspective underscores the decisive role of primary education in shaping moral identity and social resilience in increasingly complex and digitally mediated environments.

Although the qualitative design limits statistical generalization, the triangulation between curricular analysis and long-term pedagogical

experience enhances interpretative validity. Future research may further elaborate this framework through comparative and mixed-method approaches. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of systematically integrating prosocial formation within curricular design and classroom practice as a foundational condition for preparing socially responsible and ethically reflective future citizens.

This paper builds upon the author’s Master’s thesis, “*Stimulation of Prosociality in Primary Education*” (“*Stimulimi i Prosocialitetit në Ciklin Fillor*”), defended at Aleksandër Xhuvani University, Elbasan (2005), and extends its conceptual foundations through two decades of sustained pedagogical practice.

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Intergenerational care as a model for education and social development

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Abstract: In the context of contemporary demographic and social transformations, intergenerational relationships are assuming particular importance as a key factor for individual well-being and social cohesion. The weakening of traditional family structures and the increasing social isolation among older adults have created a need for models that foster meaningful interaction between generations. This paper aims to critically analyze contemporary literature on intergenerational care and education, focusing on its impact on both older adults and younger generations, particularly children. Drawing on a comparative and analytical approach, the study synthesizes theoretical frameworks and secondary empirical findings to understand how structured intergenerational interactions function as mechanisms for emotional, social, and educational development. The findings indicate that intergenerational programs consistently contribute to improving well-being, enhancing social inclusion, and strengthening a sense of purpose among older adults, closely aligning with the concept of active aging. Meanwhile, the impact on children appears more mediated and gradual, primarily reflected in the development of empathy, the reduction of age-related stereotypes, and the strengthening of social competencies. The effectiveness of intergenerational models depends significantly on the quality, continuity, and reciprocity of interactions, as well as on institutional support and program organization. Short-term and episodic interventions tend to have limited impact, whereas structured and continuous programs are more likely to produce sustainable and meaningful outcomes.

Keywords: *Intergenerational care, intergenerational education, social and emotional development, active aging, social cohesion*

1. Introduction

In the context of rapid demographic and social transformations that

characterize contemporary societies, intergenerational relationships are gaining increasing importance as a key factor for individual well-being and social cohesion. Increased life expectancy and the expansion of the older population, accompanied by changes in family structure and accelerated urbanization, have contributed to the weakening of traditional ties between generations, creating new challenges such as social isolation among older adults and limited direct contact between children and diverse social figures (WHO, 2021). Within this framework, various scientific studies emphasize the need for models that rebuild bridges of communication and interaction between generations, where intergenerational care and education emerge as a highly promising approach.

The importance of this approach lies in its reciprocal and multifunctional nature. On the one hand, for older adults, interaction with younger generations is associated with improvements in psychological well-being, a reduction in feelings of loneliness, and a strengthened sense of social inclusion and purpose in life (Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014). In this sense, intergenerational programs represent not merely a form of social activity, but a mechanism that contributes to the concept of active aging, positioning older adults as active participants in the community rather than passive recipients of care.

On the other hand, for younger generations, particularly children—interaction with older adults creates a rich context for emotional, social, and educational development. The literature suggests that direct and structured intergenerational contact fosters the development of empathy, reduces stereotypes, and promotes more positive attitudes toward older age (Allport, 1954; Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). Moreover, such interaction provides unique opportunities for experiential learning, exposing children to diverse perspectives, rhythms, and ways of understanding the world that cannot be achieved solely within peer relationships.

However, despite this bidirectional potential, contemporary literature indicates that the effectiveness of intergenerational models is not uniform and depends on how these interactions are structured, supported, and integrated into educational and social systems (Generations United, 2018; Campbell Collaboration, 2023).

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on a critical review of literature, integrating elements of thematic and comparative analysis to examine the impact of intergenerational models on the well-being of older adults and the social and emotional development of younger generations. The selection of sources was guided by clear methodological criteria, including

thematic relevance, scientific rigor, and the timeliness of publications, with a primary focus on recent empirical studies and systematic reviews, as well as on foundational theoretical contributions in the field of social development and intergenerational interaction. The analysis was conducted through a synthesizing thematic approach, which enabled the identification of key dimensions of impact, mediating mechanisms, and factors that condition the effectiveness of intergenerational programs, including the structure of interaction, duration, and institutional support.

3. Intergenerational care

Intergenerational care does not have a single unified definition in the literature; however, it is generally understood as intentional and structured interactions between individuals of different ages, aimed at achieving mutual social, emotional, and educational benefits (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). Some authors conceptualize it as a form of social education, while others view it as a strategy for promoting well-being and social inclusion.

A comparative analysis of studies indicates that intergenerational programs can take various forms, ranging from informal community-based activities to programs integrated within educational institutions. Nevertheless, a common element across all these forms is direct and sustained interaction, which creates opportunities for the exchange of experiences and the development of meaningful relationships. The literature suggests that the effectiveness of these programs depends not only on the existence of interaction, but also on how it is structured and institutionally supported (Generations United, 2018). This highlights that intergenerational care should not be regarded merely as an additional activity, but rather as a model that requires careful planning, coordination, and integration into existing educational and social systems.

3.1 Theoretical framework supporting the intergenerational model

Understanding the impact of intergenerational care is grounded in several key theories that emphasize the role of social interaction in human development. From an ecological perspective, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that individual development is influenced by interactions across different levels of the social environment, where intergenerational relationships constitute an important component of the microsystem. This implies that direct contact with older adults can have an immediate impact on children’s development.

From another standpoint, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978) emphasizes that learning occurs through interaction with others, particularly with individuals who possess greater experience. In this sense, older adults can be considered an important source of knowledge and experience, contributing to

children’s cognitive and social development. On a broader level, Erikson (1982) highlights the importance of the stage of “generativity,” during which older individuals feel the need to contribute to younger generations, making intergenerational interaction a mutually beneficial process.

Similarly, contact theory (Allport, 1954) suggests that direct interaction between different groups reduces prejudice and increases mutual understanding. Applied to intergenerational relationships, this implies that structured contact can foster respect and empathy between generations. Overall, these theories converge on the idea that structured social interaction is a key factor in emotional and social development, providing a strong theoretical foundation for the intergenerational care model.

3.2 The impact of intergenerational care on children’s emotional development.

Contemporary literature tends to present intergenerational care as a favorable context for children’s emotional development, particularly in terms of fostering empathy, sensitivity, and more positive attitudes toward older adults. In this regard, the literature emphasizes that direct intergenerational interaction should not be understood merely as the physical presence of another social figure that initiates relational processes and exposes children to experiences, rhythms, and needs different from those of their peers, but rather as a relational process built through continuous and meaningful contact.

According to the analyses of Drury, Abrams, and Swift (2017), the quality of intergenerational contact plays a decisive role in shaping attitudes and social experiences, creating conditions in which individuals perceive others beyond stereotypical categories. In a similar vein, Newman et al. (1997) argue that children’s involvement in intergenerational relationships exposes them to diverse ways of experiencing social reality, contributing to the expansion of their emotional repertoire and the development of sensitivity toward others. This implies that the benefit lies not merely in contact itself, but in the process of relationship-building, which creates opportunities to understand perspectives, rhythms, and needs that differ from those of peers.

In this context, empirical evidence suggests that interventions combining theoretical knowledge with direct intergenerational experience are among the most effective in reducing negative attitudes toward older adults. Burnes et al. (2019), through a systematic review and meta-analysis, argue that interventions integrating education about aging with structured intergenerational contact produce sustained effects in reducing ageism. Similarly, studies on intergroup contact emphasize that positive and repeated interaction creates conditions for revising stereotypes and fostering more inclusive attitudes (Drury et al., 2017). This suggests that intergenerational

interaction functions not only as a mechanism for reducing prejudice, but also as a developmental context that contributes to the gradual shaping of children’s emotional and social worldview, helping them understand others as individuals rather than as stereotypical categories.

However, studies indicate that emotional effects on children are not always consistent and should be interpreted with caution. A systematic review by Campbell Collaboration (2023) on the well-being and mental health of children and young people identified only five studies, with inconsistent results and highly variable measures across studies. Only one intervention demonstrated a clear improvement in well-being, and this was a year-long intervention, allowing sufficient time to build deeper relationships. This suggests that while literature does not deny positive effects, it indicates that such effects are not automatic. Emotional outcomes appear more likely when programs move beyond episodic engagement and instead foster continuity, closeness, and relational stability. In this sense, comparisons between short-term and long-term studies indicate that duration itself is part of the mechanism of impact.

Another important distinction in the literature concerns the fact that many studies report improvements in attitudes and social perceptions, while evidence regarding measurable indicators of psychological well-being remains more limited and less consistent (Canedo-García et al., 2017; Campbell Collaboration, 2023). This suggests that intergenerational programs are particularly effective in changing stereotypes, increasing empathy, and fostering emotional closeness, whereas their impact on clinical or standardized mental health outcomes is less direct (Gualano et al., 2018). In this regard, such programs should not be interpreted as therapeutic interventions in the traditional sense, but rather as developmental contexts that gradually contribute to children’s emotional and social education.

3.3 The impact of intergenerational care on children’s social and educational development

From a social and educational perspective, literature is relatively consistent in arguing that intergenerational interaction expands children’s opportunities for social learning. Reviews of shared-site programs, in which children and older adults share spaces and engage in joint activities, indicate that these models contribute to the development of social skills, increased individual attention, and the creation of alternative learning opportunities that go beyond traditional forms of formal education (Jarrott & Bruno, 2007; Gualano et al., 2018). In this sense, intergenerational care is not limited to social contact but functions as an interactive environment that fosters new forms of communication and

engagement, exposing children to experiences and roles they would not encounter solely through peer interactions.

From a comparative perspective, literature distinguishes between programs that place generations in mere physical co-presence and those that engage them in collaborative activities with reciprocal roles. Studies suggest that social and educational benefits are more pronounced in the latter, where interaction is built on reciprocity and active participation (Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014). This distinction highlights that it is not merely the presence of older adults that produces impact, but the quality of the interaction and the nature of the relationship. Similarly, literature on intergroup contact emphasizes that the most effective interactions are positive, personalized, and conducted under conditions of relative equality among participants (Allport, 1954; Drury et al., 2017). This logic is transferable to the intergenerational context: where relationships are reciprocal and each generation contributes actively, educational and social outcomes are more sustainable.

Another important dimension highlighted in the literature concerns how these programs shape children’s perceptions of aging. Studies suggest that through direct contact, children begin to perceive older adults as individuals with identity, experience, and social value, reducing stereotypes and fostering more positive and inclusive attitudes (Burnes et al., 2019). This is particularly important for developing civic competencies and promoting social cohesion. However, the literature also notes that despite these promising results, the lack of standardized outcome measures and methodological variability across studies remain significant challenges to fully consolidating the evidence in this field (Canedo-García et al., 2017).

3.4 The impact of intergenerational care on older adults

Compared to the evidence concerning children, the literature on the impact of intergenerational programs on older adults appears more consistent in reporting benefits. Systematic reviews and literature analyses over the past decade indicate that most studies report notable improvements in the psychological and social well-being of participating older adults, although the methodological quality of these studies often ranges from low to moderate (Canedo-García et al., 2017; Galbraith et al., 2015). Consistently, these studies highlight that regular interaction with younger generations is associated with reduced feelings of loneliness, increased social inclusion, and a strengthened sense of social role and purpose in later life (Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014; World Health Organization (WHO), 2021).

Comparative analyses of different types of intergenerational programs suggest that the benefits for older adults are more pronounced in continuous programs that are integrated into daily life, such as shared-site models or programs

involving repeated interactions. This indicates that the positive effect is not solely linked to the activity itself, but rather to the sustained rhythm of social relationships, which contributes to restoring a sense of routine, anticipation, and personal significance (Gualano et al., 2018; Canedo-García et al., 2017). In this context, literature frequently connects these outcomes to the concept of active aging, where older adults are viewed as active participants in social life rather than merely recipients of care (WHO, 2021).

3.5 Mechanisms through which the intergenerational model operates

One of the most important analytical questions in the literature on intergenerational programs concerns not only whether these programs are effective, but how they produce their impact. Contemporary literature identifies several key explanatory mechanisms. First, direct and repeated contact between generations contributes to reducing symbolic distance and weakening age-related stereotypes. This mechanism is grounded in contact theory (Allport, 1954) and supported by more recent empirical evidence, which shows that positive and structured interactions are effective in reducing ageism and improving intergenerational attitudes (Burnes et al., 2019; Canedo-García et al., 2017).

Second, intergenerational programs create spaces for the exchange of roles and meanings, fostering reciprocal rather than one-directional relationships. In this context, children benefit from individualized attention, diverse experiences, and alternative communication models, while older adults benefit from increased social connections and the opportunity to exercise what *generativity* defines as a sense of contributing to future generations (Erikson, 1963). Studies indicate that this reciprocity is a key factor associated with more positive outcomes, particularly in programs where activities are collaborative rather than merely symbolic (Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014; Gualano et al., 2018).

Third, the intensity and structure of programs emerge as mechanisms in their own right. Evidence suggests that long-term and sustained interventions produce stronger effects than sporadic activities. For example, systematic reviews indicate that programs involving repeated interactions and integration into daily routines have a more lasting impact on well-being and social attitudes (Campbell Collaboration, 2023; Gualano et al., 2018). This suggests that the intergenerational model functions more as an ongoing social process rather than as an isolated activity.

However, despite the overall positive orientation, literature is equally clear in identifying key challenges. One of these relates to the lack of methodological standardization. Studies employ different outcome measures, varying intervention durations, and often lack robust comparative designs, making it

difficult to synthesize evidence (Canedo-García et al., 2017; Gualano et al., 2018). Consequently, the field requires more studies using standardized instruments and long-term follow-up.

Another challenge concerns resources and institutional organization. Analyses of shared-site programs in the United States indicate that, although these models have attracted considerable interest from practitioners and policymakers, they face ongoing needs for systematic evaluation, sustainable funding, and interprofessional collaboration (Kaplan et al., 2020). This suggests that the success of the model depends not only on its conceptual foundation, but also on the institutional infrastructure that supports and sustains it over time.

Finally, an important limitation of the current literature is its predominant focus on contexts in developed countries and on specific institutional settings, such as elder care centers and early childhood education programs. This implies that transferring the model to contexts with more limited resources requires careful adaptation rather than mechanical application, considering cultural, institutional, and socio-economic factors (WHO, 2021).

4. Discussion

The analysis of contemporary literature on intergenerational models indicates that this approach represents more than an isolated social or educational practice; rather, it emerges as a complex mechanism that integrates developmental, social, and cultural dimensions, producing varied effects depending on the mode of implementation and the context in which it is applied. From a comparative perspective, the evidence suggests a slight asymmetry in the strength of outcomes: while benefits for older adults are reported to be more consistent and direct—particularly in terms of subjective well-being, reduction of loneliness, and increased sense of social inclusion (Kaplan & Sánchez, 2014)—the effects on children and young people appear more mediated and dependent on the quality of interaction and program structure.

This does not imply an absence of impact on younger generations; rather, it suggests that their outcomes are more gradual, linked to processes of emotional and social learning rather than immediate, measurable changes in standardized well-being indicators (Campbell Collaboration, 2023). In this regard, one of the most important findings emerging from the literature is that the mere presence of intergenerational interaction is not sufficient to produce meaningful outcomes. What proves to be decisive is the quality, continuity, and reciprocal nature of such interaction.

Studies that differentiate between episodic contact and structured programs demonstrate that only the latter—characterized by repeated encounters, clearly defined roles, and the active involvement of both parties—are able to foster meaningful relationships and generate more sustainable long-term impacts (Generations United, 2018). This aligns with the theoretical foundations of the model, where social interaction is understood as a developmental process that requires time and stability to produce genuine transformations in attitudes and behaviors (Allport, 1954).

Another key element highlighted by the analysis is the role of reciprocity as a fundamental mechanism. The most effective programs are those in which older adults and children are not positioned within an asymmetrical “caregiving” relationship, but rather within a collaborative framework in which each contributes and benefits simultaneously. In this sense, older adults are not merely sources of experience, but social actors who regain function and meaning, while children are not passive recipients but active participants in the construction of the relationship.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis of contemporary literature on intergenerational models suggests that this approach represents a promising alternative for addressing challenges related simultaneously to the well-being of older adults and the social and emotional development of younger generations. Evidence indicates that intergenerational programs consistently contribute to reducing social isolation and increasing the sense of inclusion among older adults, while for children the impact is more mediated, primarily reflected in the development of empathy, positive attitudes, and social competencies. However, these effects are not automatic; rather, they depend on the quality of interaction, program continuity, and institutional support, positioning the intergenerational model more as a structured process than as a sporadic activity.

Literature also highlights important limitations that necessitate a critical approach to this model. One of these is the methodological heterogeneity of studies, where the use of different measurement instruments, varying intervention durations, and the lack of long-term follow-up make it difficult to compare and generalize findings. This underscores the need for greater standardization in research in this field, in order to more accurately identify the dimensions in which intergenerational models are most effective. Another limitation relates to the context-dependent nature of outcomes: most studies have been conducted in countries with well-established structures of interinstitutional collaboration, implying that the transfer of these models to other contexts requires careful adaptation rather than mechanical replication.

From this perspective, the significance of the intergenerational model lies not only in its potential to generate individual benefits for both groups, but also in its capacity to contribute to the reconstruction of social ties and the promotion of intergenerational cohesion at the community level. Accordingly, the discussion should not focus solely on whether these programs work, but rather on the conditions under which they are implemented, the intensity they require, and the organizational forms through which they are most likely to produce sustainable and meaningful long-term outcomes.

In this context, it is recommended that educational and social institutions consider integrating intergenerational programs as part of their developmental strategies, with a focus on building sustainable rather than episodic models. It is essential that such programs be based on regular interaction, clearly defined roles, and the active participation of both generations in order to ensure reciprocity and meaningful impact. At the same time, there is a need for the development of more standardized outcome measurement tools, as well as for longitudinal studies that can provide more robust and comparable evidence.

For the Albanian context, a gradual approach is recommended, beginning with pilot projects developed through collaboration between educational institutions and elder care centers, accompanied by continuous evaluation and adaptation to local realities. In this way, the intergenerational model can evolve from a theoretical concept into a practical approach that contributes to strengthening social ties and promoting a more inclusive and cohesive society.

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The "Otto-Werner" syndrome: A contemporary metaphor for youth apathy in Albania

An interdisciplinary reflection on the decline of motivation, the impact of technology, and the role of education in constructing youth subjectivity

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Abstract: In this paper, "Oto-Werner syndrome" is used as a popular metaphor to describe a type of social and emotional sluggishness that seems to have taken over a portion of Albanian youth today: lack of will, lack of energy, withdrawal from responsibility, passive attitude towards life, and a deep immersion in technology and the virtual world. This article attempts to examine the social and educational context that is producing this new form of passivity, explore possible causes, and propose approaches that can help overcome this situation. The methodology used has a qualitative reflective-analytical approach, which combines theoretical and discursive analysis with thematic review of updated sources in the fields of social sciences, education, and psychology. A total of 43 sources were reviewed in the preparatory phase, 27 sources were selected for in-depth analysis, based on thematic relevance, duration (2014 – 2025), geographical and cultural representation, and academic credibility. "Oto-Werner" reflects a deep psychological, socio-educational crisis, a lack of meaning and real connection with the world, which is affecting a large part of Albanian youth. In this context, Education is not only the way to transmit knowledge, but the most essential act of resistance against apathy and the revival of hope. It is necessary for institutions, teachers, policies and the community to cooperate to build spaces where young people feel valued, included and challenged. If this happens, then the "Oto-Werner syndrome" will not be a social diagnosis of the future in Albania.

Keywords: *"Oto-Werner", youth, lack of will, lack of meaning, education*

1. Introduction

In everyday conversations, on social networks or in the city's bars, a term that is mentioned more and more often in a half-ironic and half-despondent manner

is that of "Oto-Werner syndrome". It is not a known medical term or a disease documented in psychiatric literature. Rather, it is a popular metaphor used to describe a kind of social and emotional sluggishness that seems to have taken hold of a portion of Albanian youth today: lack of will, lack of energy, withdrawal from responsibility, a passive attitude towards life, and a deep immersion in technology and the virtual world.

This “syndrome” is not defined by science, but its roots are very real and affect various areas of social and educational life. In a society where the transition has never ended and where the paths to success are often hazy, many young people find it difficult to project a meaningful future. This article attempts to examine the social and educational context that is producing this new form of passivity, explore possible causes, and propose approaches that can help overcome this situation.

Starting from an informal term to socio-pedagogical analyses, this treatment aims to open an in-depth discussion on what happens when youth lose touch with reality and with themselves, and how this connection can be recovered through education and collective attention.

2. Literature Review

Young people grow up amidst profound contradictions in Albania. On the one hand, they face high expectations for success, education, economic stability, and personal achievement; on the other, they live in a reality filled with uncertainty, lack of institutional support, and often, a lack of direction. Social expectations are often vague, overlapping, and unarticulated: “you have to do more,” “you have to be someone,” but without ever explaining how or why. This lukewarm and vague discourse is constructed by parents, schools, the media, and the community itself. This phenomenon can be seen in the context of what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman calls liquid modernity – a reality where social structures are ever-shifting, identities are temporary, and orientation in life becomes increasingly unclear (Bauman, 2000). Albanian youth are increasingly exposed to this unstable modernity, without a safety net that would provide them with personal or professional guidance.

After the 1990s, the long and painful transition has made Albania a country that exports dreams and people more than opportunities. Emigration has become the dominant model of achievement, a way out rather than a professional or cultural choice. An INSTAT report (2023) shows that around 61% of young Albanians aged 18–34 declare that they would emigrate if given the opportunity. This leaves many young people in Albania with a deep sense of helplessness and low self-esteem. They fail to build a personal narrative of

success or meaning in life in their country, which causes them to lose motivation to act.

A large part of this generation is also the product of an education that often lacked emotional depth and genuine support. In an analysis of educational policies, Haxhiymeri (2021) argues that the Albanian education system has focused more on transferring content than on building life skills. This leads to what modern pedagogy calls "educational depersonalization", where the student is not experienced as a subject, but as a box where data is stored.

Families, overwhelmed by survival, sometimes provide material care but not emotional support. Parents are either very present in a controlling way, or completely absent. As Byung-Chul Han (2017) points out, today's societies filled with hyper communication and pressure for self-improvement create self-weary individuals who no longer manage to feel either pleasure or meaning.

In this context, the internal void is not simply a passing phase, but a deep structural consequence. It does not come from the natural laziness of adolescence, but from a society that does not offer real spaces for self-development, where rules are unclear, models are distant or discredited, and where young people's time is swallowed up by networks that produce addiction but not meaning (Turkle, 2011).

2.1. Social symptoms of the “syndrome”

“Oto-Werner syndrome”, as a popular metaphor, summarizes a mental and social condition that is increasingly attributed to Albanian youth: a profound passivity, a lack of will to act, a kind of disregard for personal responsibility and a silent withdrawal from reality. This phenomenon does not have a clinical diagnosis but manifests itself in very concrete ways in everyday life.

One of the most obvious signs is physical and mental sluggishness. Many young people, although physically healthy, experience a constant fatigue, a lack of energy to participate in activities outside the usual circle of technology. In psychosociological terms, this is related to what has been described as “prolonged social apathy,” a state where the individual stops feeling the urgency to contribute or build (Seligman, 2011).

There is also a noticeable withdrawal from face-to-face social interaction, replaced by long hours spent in the virtual world. Studies by Turkle (2011) show that young people today are increasingly “connected but lonely”, immersed in digital communication but emotionally disconnected from their immediate environment. In Albania, a CRCA study (2022) shows that over 78% of young people aged 15–25 spend more than 5 hours a day on their phones, mainly on social media apps. This is not only a matter of time, but also a way to avoid facing yourself, others, and the real challenges of life.

Another symptom is the lack of ambition and personal project. While in the past, even in difficult conditions, young people aimed for concrete achievements – a profession, a social status, a form of independence – today there is a noticeable decline in motivation. Han (2015) speaks of a society of “performance fatigue,” where the individual loses willpower from the constant pressure to be more, more visible, more successful. When this pressure becomes unbearable, it does not drive action, but withdrawal.

This passive attitude also manifests itself in the form of a deep distrust of the system: education is not seen as a gateway to development, but as a futile procedure; politics is perceived as corrupt and hopeless; work is often seen as exploitation rather than an opportunity for affirmation. This collective disengagement from building the future is one of the most worrying symptoms of the “syndrome” and directly affects civic engagement. Furthermore, the phenomenon of “doing nothing” as a way of life has increased. Instead of choosing a passion, a profession, or training, a large number of young people live at the pace of “whatever comes, will come”. This passivity is sometimes covered up with sarcasm, self-irony or everyday “memes”, but it masks a deep sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, often accompanied by latent anxiety or mild forms of depression (WHO, 2023).

These symptoms are not expressions of a “biological laziness,” as it is sometimes unfairly labeled. They are reflections of a structural void, which demands to be understood not only as a problem of young people, but also as a symptom of a society that has lost the ability to produce meaning.

3. Methodology

This paper relies on a qualitative reflective-analytical approach, which combines theoretical and discursive analysis with thematic review of up-to-date sources in the fields of social sciences, education, and psychology. The aim is to interpret a contemporary phenomenon undocumented in the clinical literature, but present in Albanian social discourse and collective experience: the profound passivity of young people, metaphorically represented by what is known today as the “Oto-Werner syndrome”. The methodology used combines:

- discursive analysis of the term “Oto-Werner syndrome” as a social metaphor, which represents the passivity and demotivation of young people in the Albanian post-transition reality;
- thematic review of updated scientific and professional literature (2014–2024) on the topics of youth apathy, social exclusion, emotional education, and the impacts of technology on psychological and social development;

- interpretation of existing data from reports of national and international institutions (UNDP, INSTAT, IHP, OECD, UNICEF, etc.), as well as articles published in academic journals and research platforms in the field of education and psychology.

Sources and selection criteria

A total of 43 sources were reviewed in the preparatory phase, including: reports from international organizations (UNDP, UNICEF, OECD, WHO, etc.), data from national institutions (INSTAT, IHP, etc.), scientific articles published during 2014–2024 in indexed journals and research platforms, as well as independent studies by Albanian authors in the field of education and psychology.

27 sources were selected for in-depth analysis, out of the total, based on these criteria:

- Thematic relevance: they address passivity, motivation, youth participation, emotional education, the impacts of technology, social capital or parenting;
- Duration: only sources published in the last 10 years (2014–2024) are included, to ensure topicality and relevance to today's context;
- Geographic and cultural representation: benefit from or speak directly to Albania and/or the Western Balkans;
- Academic credibility: they are based on clear methodologies, documented analyses, and are recognized in the professional or scientific field.

This methodological approach gives the paper an interpretive character with empirical basis, creating a necessary connection between everyday discourse and the measured data of contemporary social science.

4. Findings and Discussions

The passivity of young people, as manifested in the “Oto-Werner syndrome”, is not a matter of personal nature or temperament, but the result of the interaction of several deep social, educational and cultural factors. This section examines in an interdisciplinary manner some of the main causes that feed this general apathy.

4.1. Lack of perspective and economic uncertainty

Unemployment forced emigration and lack of meritocracy remain among the most dominant factors of lack of motivation among Albanian youth. The UNDP Albania report (2022) shows that 35.6% of Albanian youth aged 15–29 are not in employment, education or training (NEET), one of the highest

percentages in Europe. This situation creates a sense of structural impossibility for progress, where individual effort is often perceived as worthless.

In this context, many young people develop what the psychological literature calls "learned helplessness", a state in which the individual, due to repeated experiences of failure or social injustice, stops believing that effort brings about change (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

4.2. Education disconnected from real life

An analysis of educational policies in Albania (Center for Educational Research, 2021) highlights that curricula in high schools and universities tend to focus on theoretical knowledge, with little focus on emotional, social, and practical competencies. This leaves young people unprepared to face real life and build meaningful personal projects. A significant number of students feel emotionally excluded from the learning process, experiencing education as a "ritual of obligation without inclusion" (Muço & Dervishi, 2020).

International studies confirm that when education does not provide space for autonomy, creativity, and identity building, it leads to what is called "academic apathy," a state of emotional and purposeful disengagement from engagement (Komaraju et al., 2020).

4.3. Technology as a substitute for reality

Social networks and digital content have significantly changed the way young people experience themselves and the world. According to the UNICEF Albania report (2023), 84% of young people aged 14–24 use their phones for more than 6 hours a day, and 60% of them admit that they feel more connected to the "online world" than to the physical environment in which they live. This prolonged exposure creates a neuropsychological change in concentration and motivation, leading to decreased patience for activities that require commitment and delayed gratification (Lembke, 2021).

A study by Hasan et al. (2022) shows that heavy social media use is associated with increased symptoms of passivity, lack of self-regulation, and feelings of emptiness. While technology offers instant connection, it also creates the illusion of activity, replacing real action with fleeting images of success and happiness.

4.4. Polarizing parenting and emotional emptiness

Contemporary parenting models, oscillating between overprotection and lack of involvement, have a strong impact on the psychological formation of young people. According to a study by Rinstra & Salihu (2019), Albanian youth often face high expectations, but a lack of stable emotional support, thus developing a fragile and insecure identity.

Parents, often mired in economic anxiety or emotionally uneducated themselves, fail to form deep and sensitive relationships with their children. This directly impacts the building of inner will, which is essential for fostering self-direction and responsibility (Ginsburg, 2016).

The feeling of unappreciated, the lack of listening, and the void of emotional care create a generation that feels lonely, even when surrounded.

4.5. Civic apathy and the decline of social inclusion

“Oto-Werner syndrome”, although humorously described in everyday jargon, marks a profound social crisis that, if neglected, risks having long-term effects on social cohesion, the emotional stability of younger generations and the capacity of society to develop itself. These consequences are not limited to isolated individuals but constitute a systemic problem that requires multifaceted intervention. One of the most obvious consequences is the loss of a sense of belonging and civic participation. Young people who do not feel valued, who do not see themselves as actors in social life, do not engage in active forms of democratic life. According to the Youth Barometer in Albania (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2022), only 8% of young people declare that they have participated in any civic activity, and 63% do not believe that their voice has an impact on society. This widespread distrust in institutions and society translates into indifference, which in critical periods can even lead to radicalization, extreme isolation, or eventual departure from the country. When a society fails to activate the potential of its youth, it puts its democratic regeneration and development at risk (OECD, 2021).

4.6. Impact on mental health

Passivity is not a neutral state: it is often a symptom of a compromised psycho-emotional state. An increasing number of young people in Albania report feelings of isolation, emptiness, and lack of meaning. The IHP (2023) report on mental health in schools shows that 42% of adolescents experience symptoms of anxiety and depression repeatedly, while only 12% have access to psychological services. Recent studies suggest that a lack of intrinsic motivation and social involvement can lead to reduced emotional neuroplasticity, which contributes to the formation of an insecure personality that is dependent on external stimuli for well-being (Fuchs & Flügge, 2020). This increases the risk of hidden forms of depression and self-destructive behaviour.

4.7. Loss of human capital and development potential

A generation that is not activated, that is not formed as a subject with will and responsibility, is a generation left in limbo – neither present in the present nor

constructive for the future. Albania, as a country with a rapidly decreasing young population, cannot afford the loss of human capital. The Eurostat report (2023) shows that Albania has one of the highest rates of educated young people leaving the country, with direct consequences for the labor market and technological and cultural development.

This loss is not only physical, but also psychological and cultural: it creates a prolonged gap in the construction of a national narrative of success, progress, and self-realization. Instead of a generation that contributes, a generation that “stands aside” is raised.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

In a reality where passivity and emptiness have become commonplace, education remains one of the few paths to real resistance to the “Oto-Werner syndrome.” But this education can no longer simply be a transmitter of knowledge: it must be inclusive, emancipatory, and oriented toward the meaning of life and self-development.

From static knowledge to dynamic awareness: The education system must move from a model of transmitting facts to a critical, participatory and emotionally intelligent model. According to OECD (2020), the most effective education systems in the 21st century are those that develop in students the skills to think, collaborate and project themselves into the future. This implies the need for teachers who are not just transmitters of information, but also builders of relationships and promoters of meaning. In Albania, positive experiences of some public schools and community centres show that when young people participate in social, artistic or innovative projects, the level of involvement and self-esteem increases significantly (Kraja & Xhepa, 2022). This shows that education has extraordinary potential as a catalyst for transformation, if supported and adapted to the real needs of the new generation.

Emotional education and the construction of subjectivity: One of the biggest gaps in formal education is the lack of attention to young people's feelings and personal experiences. Emotional education, which fosters the ability to name, understand, and manage emotions, is essential for building psychological resilience (CASEL, 2023). Young people who feel heard, accepted and empowered are more likely to develop healthy relationships with themselves and others. One model being implemented in several European countries is that of “integrated mentoring”, where teachers also become guides for students’ personal and professional lives (Salminen et al., 2019). This approach significantly increases confidence, participation, and a sense of purpose in young people, especially those who feel marginalized.

Beyond the classroom: building meaningful spaces: To break the spiral of inactivity, it is essential to create environments that foster youth engagement outside the classroom. This includes: community centres, creative labs, intercultural activities, and digital platforms for social action. Save the Children's (2021) Albania report shows that young people's participation in voluntary activities or decision-making initiatives not only makes them more active, but also helps them develop a sense of competence and maturity. Furthermore, introducing early vocational training and interdisciplinary practices in schools is a way to connect young people to reality and encourage them to build their life project in the country, not just outside it.

Limitations: The phenomenon of what has been metaphorically described as "Oto-Werner syndrome" is neither simply a popular invention nor a temporary state of laziness, but a reflection of a deep psychological, social and educational crisis that is affecting a large part of Albanian youth. Through an analysis of the literature and updated data, this article aims to uncover the structural and cultural roots of this passivity, as well as to propose a more sensitive approach to young people as subjects in formation and not as problems to be managed.

Essentially, the passivity of young people is not a lack of strength, but a lack of meaning and real connection with the world. If society does not offer them a horizon where they can build themselves authentically and usefully, then it is society that has failed in its educational mission. Education, in this context, is not only the path to transmitting knowledge, but the most essential act of resistance against apathy and the revival of hope.

It is necessary for institutions, teachers, policies and the community to collaborate to build spaces where young people feel valued, included and challenged. If this happens, then “Oto-Werner syndrome” will remain simply a joke of the past and not a social diagnosis of the future.

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Digital competences as a pillar of lifelong learning in the digital society

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Abstract: In the context of rapid digital transformation, lifelong learning has become a fundamental requirement for social inclusion, employability and active citizenship. This paper aims to examine digital competences as a core pillar of lifelong learning in the digital society, emphasizing their role in enabling individuals to adapt to continuous technological, economic and social change. The research adopts a qualitative methodological approach based on a critical review and analysis of relevant academic literature, international policy documents and strategic frameworks developed by organizations such as the European Union, UNESCO and OECD.

The findings highlight that digital competences extend beyond technical skills and encompass critical thinking, digital literacy, ethical use of technology and the capacity for continuous learning. The analysis demonstrates that insufficient digital competences contribute to digital exclusion and reinforce existing social inequalities, particularly among adults, older learners and vulnerable groups. Conversely, the integration of digital competences into lifelong learning strategies supports flexible learning pathways, enhances access to education and fosters innovation in teaching and learning practices. The paper recommends the development of inclusive educational policies, targeted training programs for adults and institutional support for digital learning environments that promote equity and adaptability. The expected contribution of this study lies in strengthening the theoretical and policy-oriented understanding of the interdependence between digital competences and lifelong learning, offering insights for educators, policymakers, and institutions seeking to shape education in a digital society.

Keywords: *lifelong learning; digital competences; digital society; adult education; educational innovation*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation represents one of the most important and comprehensive processes shaping contemporary society in all its dimensions – economic, social, cultural, and educational. Rapid developments in information and communication technology, including the internet, artificial intelligence, automation, and digital platforms, have fundamentally changed the way people live, communicate, work, and learn. These transformations do not represent only technological progress, but also a structural change in the way society and the global economy are organized.

In this context, the knowledge- and information-based economy requires individuals who are able to continuously adapt to technological developments and changes in the labor market. Traditional professions are being transformed or disappearing, while new professional roles are being created that require advanced digital competences, analytical skills, and cognitive flexibility. As a result, lifelong learning is no longer considered an individual choice, but a social and economic necessity.

Lifelong learning is closely related to individuals’ ability to continuously update their knowledge and skills, including formal, non-formal, and informal learning. In the digital society, the learning process is no longer limited to traditional educational institutions, but is developed through online platforms, virtual learning communities, open educational resources, and digital collaboration tools. This new reality requires the development of competences that go beyond technical knowledge, including critical thinking, the ability to evaluate information, digital ethics, and the ability to learn independently.

Within this framework, digital competences have become a key element for the personal and professional development of individuals, as well as for the economic and social development of countries. They represent a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable the effective, critical, and safe use of digital technology in everyday life, education, and work.

The importance of digital competences has been continuously emphasized by international organizations and institutions that play a role in shaping global educational and development policies, such as the European Union, UNESCO, and OECD. These organizations have developed strategic frameworks, policy recommendations, and competence models aimed at supporting countries in developing human capital in the digital era. Their strategic documents emphasize that digital competences are essential for sustainable economic

growth, social inclusion, and the development of functional democracies in the information age. Another important aspect is the social dimension of digital transformation. While technology creates new opportunities for education, employment, and innovation, it can also deepen existing inequalities if individuals do not have access to technology or do not possess the competences needed to use it. Digital exclusion represents a serious challenge for many social groups, particularly adults with low levels of education, older people, and socio-economically vulnerable groups. In this sense, the development of digital competences is a key factor in ensuring equality in access to education, information, and economic opportunities.

In the field of education, digital transformation has encouraged the development of new teaching and learning methods, including online learning, blended learning, the use of artificial intelligence in education, and the development of virtual learning environments. These changes require not only technological infrastructure, but also continuous professional development for teachers and educators, as well as educational policies that support pedagogical innovation. In this context, the development of digital competences is directly linked to the concept of digital citizenship. Individuals must be able to use technology in a responsible, ethical, and critical way, respecting privacy, security, and digital rights. This is particularly important in a time when information spreads rapidly and when challenges such as disinformation, cybersecurity, and personal data protection are becoming increasingly complex. From the perspective of economic development, digital competences contribute to increasing productivity, innovation, and the competitiveness of national economies. Countries that invest in the development of digital skills are more likely to adapt to technological changes and benefit from the opportunities of the digital economy.

In this context, the aim of this paper is to analyze digital competences as a fundamental pillar of lifelong learning, highlighting their role in helping individuals adapt to technological, economic, and social changes. The paper also aims to contribute to the theoretical and practical discussion on the role of education in preparing individuals for life and work in the digital society.

This study aims to provide an integrated analysis of the relationship between digital competences and lifelong learning, identifying challenges, opportunities, and development perspectives in the context of the global digital society.

2. Theoretical framework of lifelong learning and digital competences

Lifelong learning and digital competences represent two interconnected pillars of education in the digital society. Lifelong learning is understood as a

continuous, dynamic process through which individuals develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes throughout their entire lives, across formal, non-formal and informal contexts. It extends beyond traditional schooling and includes professional development, social participation and personal growth. In contemporary knowledge-based economies characterized by rapid technological change and labor market transformation, lifelong learning has become essential for employability, social inclusion and sustainable development¹¹. International organizations such as UNESCO have emphasized lifelong learning as a fundamental human right and a strategic priority for building inclusive and resilient societies¹².

In the digital era, lifelong learning is increasingly mediated by technology. Digital platforms, virtual learning environments, and open educational resources enable flexible access to education, self-paced learning and global knowledge exchange. However, these opportunities require individuals to possess adequate digital competences in order to participate effectively and critically in digital learning environments¹³.

Digital competences go beyond basic technical skills and encompass a combination of cognitive, technical, social and ethical dimensions that enable the effective, critical and responsible use of digital technologies. According to the European Digital Competence Framework (DigComp 2.2), developed by the European Commission, digital competences are structured around five core areas: information and data literacy, communication and collaboration, digital content creation, safety and problem-solving¹⁴. These dimensions include the ability to evaluate information critically, collaborate through digital tools, create and share digital content ethically, ensure cybersecurity and data protection and adapt to emerging technologies.

The development of digital competences is closely linked to lifelong learning because technological change continuously reshapes professional roles and social participation. Individuals must regularly update their skills to remain competitive and engaged in society¹⁵. Moreover, digital competences support

¹¹OECD. (2019). *OECD Skills Outlook 2019: Thriving in a Digital World*. Paris: OECD Publishing

European Commission. (2020). *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027*. Brussels: European Commission.

¹² UNESCO. (2015). *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* Paris: UNESCO.

¹³ European Commission. (2022). *DigComp 2.2: The digital competence framework for citizens*. Publications Office of the European Union

¹⁴ European Commission, 2022

¹⁵ OECD, 2019

higher-order skills such as critical thinking, creativity and self-regulated learning, which are essential for navigating complex digital environments¹⁶. At the same time, insufficient digital competences contribute to digital exclusion and reinforce socio-economic inequalities. Access to technology alone is not sufficient; individuals must also develop the knowledge and attitudes necessary to use it effectively and responsibly. Therefore, educational policies must integrate digital competences across all levels of education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for diverse population groups¹⁷.

In conclusion, lifelong learning and digital competences are mutually reinforcing concepts. Lifelong learning provides the framework for continuous skills development, while digital competences enable individuals to access, evaluate and create knowledge in the digital society. Together, they form a theoretical foundation for understanding education as a continuous, adaptive, and inclusive process in the context of global digital transformation.

3. Digital society and the transformation of education

The digital society represents a comprehensive structural transformation shaped by the rapid development and integration of information and communication technologies (ICT), artificial intelligence (AI), big data and automation. It is characterized not simply by technological advancement, but by the deep embedding of digital systems into economic production, governance, social interaction, and education¹⁸. This transformation reflects the transition toward a knowledge-based, innovation-driven and data-centered economy in which digital technologies function as key drivers of productivity, competitiveness and social participation.

One of the central characteristics of the digital society is the mass adoption of digital technologies. The widespread use of the internet, mobile devices, cloud computing, and digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped communication patterns, access to information, and professional practices. Digital connectivity reduces geographical barriers and enables real-time interaction, global collaboration and continuous access to knowledge resources. However, effective participation in such environments requires citizens to possess

¹⁶ UNESCO. (2018). *A Global Framework of Reference on Digital Literacy Skills*. Paris: UNESCO.

¹⁷ European Commission. (2020). *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027*. Brussels: European Commission

¹⁸ OECD, 2019

adequate digital competences, including information literacy, communication skills and critical evaluation abilities¹⁹.

Another defining feature is the development of artificial intelligence and data-driven systems. AI technologies increasingly influence decision-making processes across sectors, including education, healthcare, finance, and public administration. In educational contexts, AI supports adaptive learning systems, personalized feedback mechanisms, and learning analytics that enhance instructional effectiveness²⁰. Nevertheless, these advancements also raise significant ethical and regulatory concerns, particularly regarding privacy, algorithmic bias, transparency, and data protection²¹. As a result, digital literacy must encompass not only technical proficiency but also ethical awareness and critical understanding of technological systems.

Automation and digital transformation of work further characterize the digital society. Routine tasks are increasingly replaced by automated systems and robotics, while emerging professions demand advanced digital, analytical and socio-emotional competences. The labor market now values complex problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking and adaptability²². Consequently, lifelong learning becomes indispensable for professional mobility and employability, as individuals must continuously update their competences in response to technological change²³.

The globalization of information and knowledge is another key dimension. Digital networks enable the rapid circulation of research outputs, educational materials, and cultural content worldwide. Open Educational Resources (OER), online courses and virtual learning communities contribute to democratizing access to knowledge and expanding educational opportunities²⁴. However, the abundance of information also creates challenges related to misinformation, information overload and the need for critical evaluation skills, reinforcing the importance of digital literacy as a core competence²⁵.

In parallel, the digital society promotes new forms of civic engagement and digital citizenship. Through social media, e-government services, and online public forums, individuals participate in democratic processes and social debates. This transformation strengthens the need for responsible online

¹⁹ UNESCO, 2018

²⁰ OECD. (2021). *OECD Digital Education Outlook 2021*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

²¹ UNESCO, 2021

²² OECD, 2019

²³ European Commission, 2020

²⁴ UNESCO. (2019). *Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER)*. Paris: UNESCO

²⁵ European Commission, 2022

behavior, cybersecurity awareness, and respect for digital rights²⁶. At the same time, digitalization may deepen socio-economic inequalities if access to technology and digital competences remains uneven. Digital exclusion disproportionately affects older adults, low-skilled individuals and disadvantaged communities, highlighting the necessity of inclusive educational and social policies²⁷.

Within this broader societal transformation, education systems are undergoing significant restructuring. The digital era has reshaped pedagogical approaches, institutional organization and learning environments. Education increasingly takes place in digitally mediated contexts that combine formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences. Online learning environments allow learners to access educational content regardless of time and location, expanding participation and supporting lifelong learning pathways²⁸.

Blended learning models integrate face-to-face instruction with digital tools, fostering interactive, student-centered approaches that promote personalization and collaboration²⁹. Digital learning platforms, including learning management systems and virtual learning environments, enable multimedia integration, continuous assessment and data-informed teaching strategies. Additionally, the expansion of OER reduces barriers to education and promotes global knowledge sharing³⁰.

However, the success of this transformation depends largely on the development of digital competences among learners, educators and institutions. Teachers require pedagogical digital competences to design inclusive, innovative and ethically responsible learning environments, while students must develop critical, creative and self-regulated learning skills. Without strategic investment in infrastructure, professional development and inclusive policies, digital transformation may exacerbate inequalities rather than promote educational equity³¹.

In conclusion, digital society and the transformation of education are deeply interconnected processes. Technological innovation reshapes educational structures and practices, while education plays a decisive role in preparing individuals to navigate, evaluate and ethically shape digital environments. Strengthening digital competences within lifelong learning frameworks is therefore essential for fostering inclusion, sustainability and resilience in contemporary societies.

²⁶ UNESCO, 2018

²⁷ OECD, 2021

²⁸ European Commission, 2020

²⁹ OECD, 2021

³⁰ UNESCO, 2019

³¹ European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2019

4. The role of digital competences in lifelong learning

Digital competences constitute a central pillar of lifelong learning in the digital society, functioning as enabling capabilities that support continuous knowledge acquisition, adaptability and social participation. In rapidly evolving technological and labor market contexts, individuals are required not only to access information but also to critically evaluate, create and apply knowledge in diverse digital environments. From a theoretical perspective, lifelong learning is closely connected to the development of cognitive flexibility, self-regulation and problem-solving abilities, all of which are reinforced through digital competence development³².

Digital competences support flexible learning pathways by enabling access to education beyond traditional spatial and temporal constraints. Online learning environments, open digital resources and virtual communities allow individuals to combine formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences throughout their lives. Research on networked learning emphasizes that digital technologies expand opportunities for participation and knowledge exchange, fostering inclusive and distributed learning ecosystems³³. Moreover, adaptive technologies and data-driven educational tools facilitate personalized and self-paced learning, enhancing learner engagement and autonomy³⁴.

Beyond access and flexibility, digital competences foster higher-order cognitive skills that are essential for lifelong learning. The abundance of digital information requires individuals to develop critical thinking skills, including the ability to evaluate credibility, detect bias and synthesize information from multiple sources. According to Eshet-Alkalai³⁵, digital literacy encompasses cognitive, socio-emotional, and critical dimensions that extend far beyond technical proficiency. Similarly, Ng³⁶ highlights that digital competence integrates technical, cognitive, and social-emotional components necessary for meaningful participation in digital environments. These

³² Jarvis, P. (2007). *Globalisation, lifelong learning and the learning society*. London: Routledge;

Candy, P. C. (1991). *Self-direction for lifelong learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

³³ Castells, M. (2010). *The rise of the network society* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Selwyn, N. (2016). *Education and technology: Key issues and debates* (2nd ed.). London: Bloomsbury.

³⁴ Redecker, C. (2017). *European framework for the digital competence of educators (DigCompEdu)*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

³⁵ Eshet-Alkalai, Y. (2004). Digital literacy: A conceptual framework for survival skills in the digital era. *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia*, 13(1), 93–106.

³⁶ Ng, W. (2012). Can we teach digital natives digital literacy? *Computers & Education*, 59(3), 1065–1078.

competences strengthen learner autonomy by promoting self-directed learning, reflective thinking, and independent problem-solving³⁷.

Digital competences also contribute significantly to pedagogical innovation. The integration of technology in teaching practices supports interactive, collaborative, and learner-centered approaches that move beyond traditional transmission models of education. Technology-enhanced learning environments increase student motivation, facilitate communication, and encourage collaborative knowledge construction³⁸. Furthermore, digital content creation tools promote creativity and innovation by enabling learners to actively produce and share knowledge rather than passively consume information.

However, the transformative potential of digital competences depends largely on educators’ ability to integrate technology pedagogically. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework emphasizes that effective digital integration requires the intersection of technological, pedagogical, and subject-specific knowledge³⁹. Without adequate professional development and pedagogical digital competence, technology integration risks reinforcing superficial or inequitable learning practices.

In conclusion, digital competences play a transformative role in lifelong learning by enabling flexible access to education, strengthening critical thinking and learner autonomy, and fostering pedagogical innovation. Their systematic development supports not only employability and adaptability but also active citizenship and social inclusion in the digital society⁴⁰.

5. Digital competences and social inclusion

Digital competences are critical for fostering social inclusion and mitigating inequalities in the digital era. Lack of digital skills contributes to disparities in education, employment, access to public services, and social participation, reinforcing socio-economic disadvantages among vulnerable groups such as adults with low educational attainment, older adults, low-income populations and rural communities⁴¹. Individuals without adequate digital literacy are

³⁷ Candy, 1991

³⁸ Laurillard, D. (2012). *Teaching as a design science*. London: Routledge; Selwyn, 2016

³⁹ Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. *Teachers College Record*, 108(6), 1017–1054.

⁴⁰ Castells, 2010; Selwyn, 2016

⁴¹ van Dijk, J. (2020). *The digital divide*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Warschauer, M. (2003). *Technology and social inclusion: Rethinking the digital divide*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

more likely to experience exclusion from labor markets and civic processes, which can perpetuate cycles of social and economic marginalization⁴².

Conversely, the development of digital competences significantly enhances opportunities for participation in education and lifelong learning, allowing learners to access online courses, virtual learning environments and open educational resources regardless of geographical or socio-economic constraints⁴³. Digital skills enable personalized and self-paced learning, promote autonomous knowledge construction and facilitate access to global knowledge networks, thereby supporting both formal and informal learning pathways⁴⁴.

Beyond access, digital competences empower individuals to critically navigate digital information, engage in collaborative online activities and participate responsibly in civic and professional contexts. These skills enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, self-regulation and ethical digital behavior, which are fundamental for active citizenship and social integration in digitally mediated societies⁴⁵. Moreover, digital competence development supports economic inclusion by equipping individuals with the technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills demanded by contemporary labor markets, thereby increasing employability and opportunities for career progression⁴⁶.

Institutional and national strategies play a pivotal role in addressing digital divides and promoting inclusive participation. Policies that integrate digital competence training into formal education, vocational programs and community initiatives help reduce disparities, foster social cohesion and enhance equitable access to economic and educational resources⁴⁷. In addition, targeted interventions for disadvantaged populations, such as digital literacy workshops for older adults, subsidized internet access for low-income families and teacher training in digital pedagogy, are essential to ensure that the benefits of digital society are widely distributed and do not exacerbate existing inequalities⁴⁸.

Overall, digital competences function as both a tool and a pathway for social inclusion, bridging gaps in education, labor market participation and civic engagement. They enable individuals to participate actively in the digital

⁴² Helsper, E. J. (2012). A corresponding fields model for the links between social and digital exclusion. *Communication Theory*, 22(4), 403–426.

⁴³ Castells, 2010; European Commission, 2020

⁴⁴ UNESCO, 2019; OECD, 2019

⁴⁵ Selwyn, 2016; Helsper, 2012

⁴⁶ Castells, 2010; OECD, 2019

⁴⁷ European Commission, 2020; UNESCO, 2019

⁴⁸ Selwyn, 2016; van Dijk, 2020

society while reducing structural barriers, fostering equity, and promoting sustainable socio-economic development⁴⁹.

6. Educational policies for the development of digital competences

Educational policies play a central role in fostering the development of digital competences across all levels of learning, ensuring that individuals are equipped to participate effectively in the digital society. Integrating digital skills into curricula is fundamental to preparing students for the demands of contemporary life, labor markets and lifelong learning. Policies should emphasize the incorporation of digital competences in interdisciplinary programs, the continuous updating of curricula to reflect technological advancements and the alignment of learning objectives with both cognitive and practical digital skills⁵⁰. This approach ensures that learners develop not only technical abilities but also critical thinking, creativity and collaborative skills necessary for navigating complex digital environments⁵¹.

Teacher training and professional development are equally crucial. Educators act as mediators of digital learning and their competence directly affects the quality and effectiveness of technology integration in educational settings. Policies should support continuous professional development programs, focusing on pedagogical digital competences, innovative teaching strategies and the ethical use of digital technologies⁵². Institutional support, including access to resources, mentoring and collaborative professional communities, is essential to enable teachers to implement effective and inclusive digital pedagogy⁵³.

Adult education and professional reskilling initiatives form another critical component of digital competence policies. Lifelong learning programs targeting adults should provide flexible, modular and accessible training opportunities that address both basic and advanced digital skills, aligning them with labor market needs⁵⁴. These programs enhance employability, support career transitions, and reduce the risk of digital exclusion among

⁴⁹ Helsper, 2012; European Commission, 2020; UNESCO, 2019

⁵⁰ Redecker, 2017; European Commission, 2020

⁵¹ Selwyn, 2016

⁵² Koehler & Mishra, 2009;

UNESCO. (2021). *Digital skills for teachers: Policy and practice recommendations*. Paris: UNESCO.

⁵³ Ertmer, P. A., & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, A. T. (2010). Teacher technology change: How knowledge, confidence, beliefs, and culture intersect. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 42(3), 255–284.

⁵⁴ OECD, 2019; van Dijk, 2020

disadvantaged populations. Furthermore, integrating open educational resources and online learning platforms in adult education expands access and supports self-directed, continuous learning, contributing to social inclusion and economic resilience⁵⁵.

Overall, effective educational policies for digital competences must adopt a holistic approach that combines curriculum reform, teacher development and adult learning initiatives. By doing so, they not only improve the quality of education but also foster equity, social inclusion and lifelong learning, ensuring that citizens are fully prepared to engage responsibly and creatively in the digital society⁵⁶.

7.Challenges and perspectives in the development of digital competences

The development of digital competences faces multiple challenges that can hinder equitable access to education and the effective integration of technology into learning environments. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of adequate digital infrastructure, including reliable internet connectivity, hardware and access to learning management systems, which disproportionately affects learners in rural or economically disadvantaged areas⁵⁷. Socio-economic disparities further exacerbate digital exclusion, as learners from low-income households often have limited access to devices, software and digital support⁵⁸.

Another critical challenge is the widespread lack of basic digital skills among students, educators and adult learners. Without foundational competences, individuals struggle to participate effectively in online learning, engage with digital resources, or develop higher-order cognitive and collaborative skills⁵⁹. Additionally, resistance to technological change among educators, institutions, or policymakers can slow the adoption of innovative teaching methods and the integration of digital tools in curricula⁶⁰. These factors collectively create barriers to inclusive, flexible and lifelong learning in the digital era.

Despite these challenges, there are promising perspectives for advancing digital competences. Strategic investments in educational technology, including digital infrastructure, software platforms and adaptive learning tools, can provide learners with equitable access to high-quality learning

⁵⁵ Castells, 2010; UNESCO, 2019

⁵⁶ European Commission, 2020; Redecker, 2017; Selwyn, 2016

⁵⁷ van Dijk, 2020; OECD, 2019

⁵⁸ Selwyn, 2016

⁵⁹ Redecker, 2017

⁶⁰ Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010

opportunities⁶¹. Inter-institutional collaboration between schools, universities, government agencies and private sector actors can foster knowledge sharing, professional development, and the creation of innovative digital pedagogies⁶². Moreover, the development of advanced digital learning platforms and open educational resources (OER) supports personalized and self-directed learning, enabling learners to progress at their own pace and engage with global knowledge networks⁶³. Policies and programs that promote lifelong learning, continuous professional development, and digital citizenship are essential for equipping individuals with the competences necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and technology-driven society⁶⁴.

In conclusion, while significant challenges exist in the development of digital competences, ranging from infrastructure deficits and socio-economic inequalities to skills gaps and resistance to change, concerted investments, collaborative initiatives and supportive policies provide a pathway to inclusive, sustainable and transformative digital education. Addressing these challenges is critical to ensuring that all learners can fully participate in and benefit from the opportunities offered by the digital society.

8. Conclusions

Digital competences constitute a fundamental component of lifelong learning in the digital society. They are essential not only for individual development but also for fostering inclusive, equitable and innovative educational systems. These competences enable social inclusion by providing learners with access to information, educational resources and digital services, thereby reducing socio-economic disparities and mitigating digital exclusion.

From an economic perspective, digital competences enhance employability and workforce adaptability by equipping individuals with the skills necessary to navigate a rapidly changing labor market, solve complex problems and engage in creative and innovative tasks. They also promote active citizenship, allowing individuals to participate in civic life, engage with digital platforms responsibly and exercise their rights in online environments.

Furthermore, digital competences drive pedagogical innovation by enabling educators to implement learner-centered, interactive and collaborative teaching approaches. The integration of technology in education supports personalized learning, digital collaboration and the creation of new

⁶¹ European Commission, 2020

⁶² UNESCO, 2021

⁶³ Castells, 2010; UNESCO, 2019

⁶⁴ OECD, 2019; Redecker, 2017

knowledge, thereby improving both the quality and inclusivity of learning experiences.

In conclusion, the systematic development of digital competences is critical for building a digital society that is socially inclusive, economically dynamic, civically engaged and educationally innovative. Policies, infrastructure investments, professional development and lifelong learning strategies must converge to ensure that all individuals can fully benefit from the opportunities offered by digital technologies.

9.Recommendations:

- a) Foster a digital learning culture from early education: Develop digital literacy and critical thinking skills from early schooling, encouraging creativity, collaboration and responsible use of technology throughout life.
- b) Integrate lifelong learning with technology: Design flexible learning pathways that combine formal, non-formal and informal education, enabling individuals to continuously update their digital competences in response to technological and labor market changes.
- c) Invest in digital infrastructure and access: Ensure equitable access to digital tools, high-speed internet and learning platforms, particularly for marginalized and underserved communities, to reduce digital exclusion and promote social inclusion.
- d) Support teacher training and pedagogical innovation: Provide continuous professional development for educators focused on both technical skills and pedagogical strategies that leverage digital tools to enhance engagement, creativity and collaborative learning.

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Digital texts versus traditional materials, the impact on learning outcomes

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of digital texts compared to traditional printed materials on learning outcomes, based on a review of recent literature. The rapid integration of technology in education has transformed teaching and learning processes, raising important questions regarding the effectiveness of different instructional media. Findings indicate that traditional materials better support deep comprehension, critical thinking, and long-term memory, whereas digital texts enhance engagement, motivation, and access to information. However, the effectiveness of digital texts largely depends on instructional design, the level of digital competencies, and the strategies employed by teachers. The study emphasizes that neither format is inherently superior; rather, a balanced and integrated approach combining both provides a more effective learning environment. In conclusion, the article offers implications for teaching practice, curriculum development, and future research, highlighting the importance of professional training, technological infrastructure, and the purposeful use of digital tools.

Keywords: *digital texts; traditional materials; learning outcomes; educational technology; student engagement; curriculum development.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, rapid technological developments have significantly transformed the ways knowledge is produced, distributed, and acquired. Education, as one of the sectors most sensitive to social and technological change, has faced the challenge of integrating digital technologies into the learning process. In this context, the use of digital texts has increased considerably, being regarded as a modern alternative to traditional printed materials. This has generated extensive academic debate regarding their impact on learning outcomes and the development of students' competencies.

The transition from traditional to digital texts does not represent merely a technological shift, but a transformation in the nature of learning itself. Digital texts provide new opportunities for interaction, personalization, and immediate access to information, supporting a more active and collaborative approach to learning (Sung et al., 2016). At the same time, they present significant challenges, such as distraction, cognitive overload, and the need for advanced digital competencies (OECD, 2021). On the other hand, traditional materials continue to be considered more suitable for deep concentration and analytical processing of information, particularly in academic contexts (Delgado et al., 2018; Mangen et al., 2019).

Contemporary literature shows that there is no full consensus regarding the superiority of one format over the other. Some studies highlight the advantages of reading in printed format for deep comprehension and long-term memory (Singer & Alexander, 2017), while others emphasize the potential of technology to increase motivation and support diverse learning styles (Mayer, 2014). This diversity of findings suggests that the impact of the medium is not isolated, but closely linked to factors such as instructional design, individual learner characteristics, and the context of use.

Within the framework of competency-based educational reforms, such as those implemented in Albania after 2014, the integration of technology and digital materials has become a strategic priority. The National Curriculum Framework emphasizes the importance of developing digital competencies and lifelong learning, requiring students to become active and critical users of information. In this context, analyzing the impact of digital texts compared to traditional materials is of particular importance for teaching practice and educational policy development.

The aim of this article is to critically analyze recent literature on the impact of digital texts versus traditional materials on learning outcomes. The study seeks to identify the advantages and limitations of each approach, examine the factors influencing their effectiveness, and provide recommendations for a more balanced and effective use in educational practice.

2. Literature Review

Digital transformation in education has led to profound changes in the ways students access, process, and construct knowledge, making the use of digital texts an increasingly important component of contemporary teaching practices (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). In this context, the debate regarding the effectiveness of digital texts compared to traditional printed materials has intensified, leading to a substantial number of empirical studies and analyses aimed at evaluating their impact on learning outcomes.

A significant body of literature suggests that digital texts offer important advantages in terms of accessibility, flexibility, and interactivity. According to Sung, Chang, and Liu (2016), the use of digital technologies in teaching significantly increases student engagement and promotes active learning through multimedia interaction. Similarly, Zheng et al. (2016), in a comprehensive meta-analysis, highlight that digital texts have a moderate positive effect on academic achievement, particularly when accompanied by structured pedagogical strategies. These findings are further supported by Redecker (2017), who argues that digital competencies are essential for lifelong learning and for preparing students for an information-based society. However, the literature is not unanimous regarding the advantages of digital texts. A significant line of research suggests that screen reading may negatively affect text comprehension and deep processing of information. Delgado et al. (2018), in a meta-analysis involving more than 50 studies, found that reading from printed material is more effective for comprehension than digital reading, particularly in tasks requiring high concentration and deep analysis. Similarly, Mangen, Walgermo, and Brønnick (2019) argue that the physical and sensory aspects of reading on paper contribute to better understanding, influencing how information is processed and retained.

Singer and Alexander (2017) provide an important perspective by examining students' preferences and performance across different reading formats. They found that although students often prefer digital reading due to convenience and speed, their comprehension performance is higher when using printed materials. This phenomenon is related to what some researchers describe as the “illusion of competence” in digital environments, where readers tend to overestimate their level of understanding (Ackerman & Goldsmith, 2011).

On the other hand, some studies suggest that differences between the two formats are not always significant and depend on various mediating factors. Clinton (2019), in a systematic review, concludes that differences between digital and traditional reading are relatively small and often influenced by context, material design, and user experience. In this regard, Hattie (2017) emphasizes that technology itself does not guarantee improved learning outcomes; it must be effectively integrated into pedagogical strategies to have a positive impact.

A key factor highlighted in the literature is the role of digital text design. Texts that include interactive elements, multimedia, and clear navigation structures are more likely to support effective learning (Mayer, 2014). However, excessive digital features may cause distraction and cognitive overload, thereby reducing students' performance (Sweller, 2011). This suggests that a balance between interactivity and simplicity is essential in the design of digital learning materials.

Furthermore, students’ and teachers’ digital competencies play a crucial role in the effectiveness of digital texts. According to OECD (2021), students with higher levels of digital skills benefit more from the use of technology in learning, while a lack of such skills may limit benefits and increase educational inequalities. This is supported by studies emphasizing the importance of teacher training for effective technology integration in classrooms (Voogt et al., 2013).

Overall, the literature suggests that there is no single answer regarding the superiority of digital or traditional texts. Instead, their effectiveness depends on a combination of factors, including learning objectives, student characteristics, material design, and pedagogical context. A hybrid approach that combines the advantages of both formats appears to be the most appropriate for supporting the development of students’ competencies in an increasingly complex and digital educational environment (UNESCO, 2020).

3. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review, aiming to analyze the impact of digital texts compared to traditional materials on learning outcomes. This method was selected due to its ability to critically and systematically synthesize findings from existing studies and to identify key trends in this research field.

The literature review process was conducted in several interrelated stages. In the first stage, scientific sources were searched in international databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, using keywords such as: *digital textbooks*, *printed materials*, *learning outcomes*, *reading comprehension*, and *digital learning*. The selection of studies was limited to publications from the period 2010–2024 in order to ensure the relevance and currency of the data.

In the second stage, inclusion criteria were applied to filter the literature. Studies were included if they: (a) directly addressed the comparison between digital and traditional texts; (b) focused on learning outcomes (such as comprehension, academic performance, and motivation); (c) were published in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Studies without an empirical basis or those not directly related to the educational context were excluded.

In total, approximately 25–35 scientific studies were analyzed, including empirical articles, reviews, and international reports from organizations such as OECD and UNESCO. The data were organized and analyzed thematically, identifying key categories such as:

- (1) impact on reading comprehension,

- (2) impact on student engagement and motivation,
- (3) differences between digital and traditional formats,
- (4) mediating factors such as pedagogical design and digital competencies.

The analysis was based on an interpretative approach, comparing findings across studies and identifying similarities, differences, and contradictions among them. This approach enabled the construction of a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of digital and traditional texts across different educational contexts.

To enhance the reliability of the study, source triangulation was employed by including studies with different methodologies (experimental, correlational, and analytical). However, the limitations of this study are related to the secondary nature of the data and the dependence on the quality of existing research.

Overall, this methodology enables a comprehensive and balanced analysis of the literature, providing a solid foundation for the discussion and conclusions of the study.

4. Data analysis and discussion

The data analysis in this study is based on a thematic and comparative approach to the selected literature, aiming to identify the main trends regarding the impact of digital texts and traditional materials on learning outcomes. As the study relies on a literature review, the data were analyzed qualitatively through the interpretation of findings from empirical studies and reviews, integrating them into a structured and critical discussion.

One of the most significant dimensions emerging from the analysis is reading comprehension. Studies indicate that printed materials have an advantage in deep information processing and long-term comprehension (Delgado et al., 2018; Mangen et al., 2019). This advantage is related to the linear nature of reading on paper and the reduced distractions characteristic of digital environments. In this sense, the medium used directly influences cognitive processes in learning.

On the other hand, digital texts show a strong impact on increasing student engagement and motivation. Multimedia elements, interactivity, and personalization options make the learning process more dynamic and appealing (Sung et al., 2016). This is particularly important in contexts where students seek more active forms of learning.

To synthesize the main findings of the literature, the following table is presented:

Table 1: Comparison of Key Findings from Literature

Author	Year	Study Focus	Key Findings
Delgado et al.	2018	Digital vs. print reading	Print more effective for deep comprehension
Mangen et al.	2019	Cognitive reading processes	Advantage for printed texts
Singer & Alexander	2017	Comprehension and preferences	Better performance with traditional materials
Sung et al.	2016	Digital learning	Increases motivation and engagement
Clinton	2019	Comparative meta-analysis	Small differences, context-dependent
OECD	2021	Digital competencies	Strong impact of digital skills on outcomes
Mayer	2014	Multimedia learning	Good design improves effectiveness

As shown in the table, results are not unidirectional. While some studies emphasize the advantages of traditional materials for deep comprehension, others highlight the positive role of technology in increasing motivation and access to information. This suggests that the effectiveness of the medium is not absolute but depends on various mediating factors.

One of the most important factors identified in the analysis is the pedagogical design of digital materials. According to Mayer (2014), digital texts that follow multimedia learning principles enhance comprehension and knowledge acquisition. However, when materials are overloaded with unnecessary elements, they may cause cognitive overload and reduce performance (Sweller, 2011). This indicates that design quality is more important than the medium itself.

Another important aspect is the role of students’ digital competencies. Students with higher levels of digital skills benefit more from digital texts, while those with limited skills may encounter difficulties (OECD, 2021). This highlights the need to integrate the development of digital competencies into the learning process.

Furthermore, the literature identifies the phenomenon of the “illusion of comprehension,” where students tend to overestimate their understanding

when reading on screens (Singer & Alexander, 2017). This phenomenon may negatively affect actual performance and requires the use of self-assessment strategies.

In conclusion, the analysis and discussion indicate that neither format is inherently superior. Rather, a hybrid approach that combines the advantages of digital texts and traditional materials is more effective for developing student competencies and improving learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2020). This approach better aligns with the demands of contemporary education and the challenges of a digital society.

5. Discussion

The results of the literature analysis indicate that the impact of digital texts compared to traditional materials is complex and dependent on various pedagogical, cognitive, and technological factors. Overall, the literature suggests that printed texts continue to offer significant advantages in deep comprehension and information processing, whereas digital texts contribute more to increasing motivation and access to learning.

One of the most consistent findings in empirical studies is the relative superiority of reading in print format in terms of deep understanding. The meta-analysis by Pablo Delgado et al. (2018) shows that students who read in a physical format perform better in tasks requiring analysis and critical reflection, particularly when dealing with longer texts. This is further supported by the studies of Anne Mangen et al. (2019), which emphasize the role of the physical reading experience in reinforcing cognitive processes. In this sense, traditional material is not merely a medium but an element that directly influences how information is processed.

On the other hand, digital texts offer clear advantages in terms of interaction and student engagement. According to Yao-Ting Sung et al. (2016), the use of technology in learning significantly increases student motivation and active participation. This is related to the multimodal nature of digital texts, which incorporate videos, animations, and interactive elements that facilitate understanding, especially for students with diverse learning styles. In this context, technology does not replace traditional text but complements it by creating a more dynamic learning environment.

However, the literature emphasizes that the effectiveness of digital texts is not automatically guaranteed. Richard Mayer (2014) argues that the use of multimedia elements can be effective only when grounded in clear pedagogical and cognitive principles. Otherwise, an overload of visual and interactive information may hinder learning by distracting students and reducing concentration. This is also supported by OECD reports (2021), which

indicate that the use of technology without well-defined pedagogical strategies does not necessarily improve learning outcomes.

Another important dimension emerging from the discussion is the role of students’ and teachers’ digital competencies. In an environment where technology is increasingly present, the ability to manage information, evaluate sources, and critically use digital tools becomes essential. According to OECD (2021), students with higher levels of digital competence are better able to benefit from digital texts, whereas those with lower levels may face additional challenges. The discussion of these findings suggests that the debate should not focus on choosing between digital and traditional texts, but rather on how they can be effectively integrated. Studies by Lauren Singer and Patricia Alexander (2017) indicate that a balanced approach, combining both formats, is more effective for developing different student competencies. For instance, printed texts may be used for analytical reading and reflection, while digital texts may support research, collaboration, and interactive exploration.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings have important implications for teaching practice and curriculum development. Teachers should play an active role in selecting and using materials, considering not only the content but also how the medium influences learning. This requires continuous professional development and the ability to integrate technology in a purposeful and effective manner.

In conclusion, the literature discussion demonstrates that digital texts and traditional materials should not be viewed as competing alternatives, but as complementary tools. An integrated approach, grounded in pedagogical principles and supported by the development of digital competencies, offers the greatest potential for improving learning outcomes and preparing students for the challenges of a digital society.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The analysis and discussion of the literature on the use of digital texts and traditional materials in the learning process indicate that neither is inherently superior in absolute terms. Rather, their effectiveness depends on the context of use, learning objectives, student characteristics, and the way they are integrated into pedagogical practice. Research findings suggest that printed texts continue to be more effective for deep information processing and the development of analytical skills (Delgado et al., 2018; Mangen et al., 2019), while digital texts significantly contribute to increased motivation, accessibility, and interaction in the learning process (Sung et al., 2016).

An important conclusion is that the impact of technology on learning outcomes is not direct, but mediated by factors such as pedagogical design,

digital competencies, and the role of the teacher in the instructional process. As Mayer (2014) emphasizes, the use of multimedia tools can be effective only when grounded in sound learning principles, whereas their uncontrolled use may lead to cognitive overload. Similarly, OECD reports (2021) indicate that technology yields benefits only when used in a purposeful and structured manner. Within this framework, the findings of this study support an integrated approach to the use of instructional materials, where digital and traditional texts are not treated as competing alternatives but as complementary tools that contribute to the development of diverse student competencies. A balanced combination of these materials can provide a richer and more effective learning environment, addressing both the cognitive and motivational needs of learners.

Based on these conclusions, several important recommendations for educational practice and policy can be proposed:

First, it is essential that teachers receive continuous training in the effective use of technology in teaching. Such training should focus not only on technical aspects but also on the pedagogical integration of digital tools, in alignment with the principles of active and competency-based learning.

Second, curricula and textbooks should be designed to support the combined use of digital and traditional materials. This includes the development of hybrid textbooks and multimedia resources that complement each other and promote diverse forms of learning.

Third, educational institutions should invest in improving technological infrastructure and ensuring equal access for all students. Inequalities in access to technology may negatively affect learning outcomes and deepen educational disparities.

Fourth, the development of students' digital competencies should be promoted, enabling them to use technology in a critical, informed, and responsible manner. This includes the ability to evaluate information sources, manage time effectively, and avoid distractions in digital environments.

Finally, future research is recommended to focus on empirical studies within the Albanian context, in order to more concretely analyze the impact of digital texts on student performance. This would contribute to the development of more informed policies tailored to local realities.

In conclusion, the use of digital texts in education represents a significant opportunity for innovation and the improvement of the learning process, but only when accompanied by sound pedagogical strategies, continuous professional development for teachers, and sustainable institutional support. A balanced and integrated approach remains the most effective pathway to ensuring quality and equity in education in the digital age.

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Analysis of the implementation of ABA, TEACCH, and PECS intervention methods for children with autism spectrum disorder in Albania: frequency, challenges, and institutional support.

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Abstract: This study examines the use of intervention methods in support of children with autism spectrum disorders in the pre-university education system in Albania. The most contemporary methods are ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), TEACCH (Teacher's Guide to Daily Structure) and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System).

The aim of the study is to identify the most frequently used method in practice, analyze the main barriers to the implementation of these approaches, and assess whether institutional conditions enable support teachers to use them effectively.

A mixed-methods research approach was employed, including a review of scientific literature and institutional reports, as well as a structured questionnaire administered to support teachers in pre-university educational institutions. The questionnaire focuses on practical experience in the use of ABA, TEACCH, and PECS methods, challenges encountered, training received, and institutional support.

The results indicate that ABA is the most widely used method, often applied in simplified forms, while PECS is mainly used to support basic communication. TEACCH appears to be less well known and less frequently implemented. The main obstacles identified include a lack or limited availability of didactic materials, the absence of resource classrooms, insufficient in-depth training, and the lack of clear institutional guidelines.

The study recommends enriching schools with appropriate didactic materials, establishing resource classrooms, strengthening the professional training of support teachers with a focus on practical work with these children, providing free training for parents, and developing supportive educational policies.

Keywords: *Autism, ABA, TEACCH, PECS, support teachers, inclusive education*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the demand for specialized educational and therapeutic services for the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has increased. Globally, the number of children diagnosed with this disorder is rising, bringing attention to the use of various intervention methods. Techniques such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children), and PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) aim to improve social functioning, communication, and adaptive skills in children with autism.

In Albania, efforts to promote inclusive education for children with autism spectrum disorder in the pre-university education system are ongoing; however, issues remain to be improved, such as institutional support and the training of assistant teachers.

The pre-university education system has made positive steps in increasing the number of assistant teachers and improving the student–teacher ratio, as reflected in recent data. Nevertheless, challenges persist, particularly regarding the clarity of guidelines for the use of specific intervention methods for children with autism.

The importance of this study lies not only in emphasizing the use of ABA, TEACCH, and PECS methods in treating children with autism but also in analyzing the current situation—how familiar assistant teachers are with these methods, how often they use them, and the level of institutional support available. The study monitors implementation effectiveness, frequency of use, practical challenges, and the type of institutional support provided to professionals and families.

1.1 Research Problem and Objectives

Although internationally recognized methods for treating children with autism exist, in the Albanian context it remains unclear whether these techniques are used systematically and how they are supported by pre-university educational institutions. Therefore, this study aims to:

1. Assess the knowledge and use of ABA, TEACCH, and PECS methods by professionals working with children with autism.
2. Analyze the frequency of use and training received for each method.
3. Identify the main challenges in the practical implementation of these methods.

4. Evaluate perceptions of institutional support and the need for further training, including that of parents.
5. Suggest concrete measures for improving and implementing contemporary intervention methods in the education and treatment of children with autism.

1.2 Relevance to the Conference Theme

This study is closely related to the conference theme *“Shaping the Future: Education and Innovation in a Digital Society”*, as it highlights the need for innovative and future-oriented approaches in the treatment and integration of children with autism. By evaluating intervention methods and their implementation, this paper contributes to contemporary debates on digitalization and innovation in education, emphasizing the importance of advanced training, clear institutional guidelines, and the integration of best practices in educational and therapeutic systems.

2. Literature Review

Autism Spectrum Disorder represents a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by difficulties in social communication, interaction, and restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In recent decades, scientific literature has emphasized the importance of early and structured interventions, highlighting various psycho-educational methods such as ABA, TEACCH, and PECS as among the most widely used globally.

2.1 Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)

ABA is based on principles of behavior theory and operant learning, aiming to systematically modify behavior through positive reinforcement and functional behavior analysis. In autism treatment, numerous studies show that ABA is effective in increasing desirable behaviors and teaching new skills (Wong et al., 2015).

Studies have reported outcomes across eight categories: cognitive, language, social/communication, problem behavior, adaptive behavior, emotional outcomes, autism symptoms, and quality of life. Improvements were observed in seven out of eight outcome measures (Gitimoghaddam et al., 2022). Classic studies have demonstrated that intensive ABA interventions can significantly improve cognitive, language, and social functioning in children with autism (Lovaas, 1987). More recent meta-analyses confirm its effectiveness, especially when implemented intensively by trained professionals (Makrygianni & Reed, 2010).

2.2 TEACCH

TEACCH represents a developmental and educational model that emphasizes environmental structuring, the use of visual supports, and adapting teaching according to the individual profiles of children with autism (Schopler et al., 1995). Unlike ABA, TEACCH does not focus exclusively on behavior modification but aims to increase independence and daily functioning.

Studies suggest that TEACCH contributes positively to reducing problematic behaviors and improving adaptive skills, particularly in educational settings (Virues-Ortega et al., 2013). The use of visual cues, prompts, and schedules has been shown to help maintain attention and present information in an easily interpretable format (Kimball et al., 2004). Such systems can also be effective at home. Overall, TEACCH has demonstrated positive value in the education of children with autism (Simpson, 2005).

2.3 PECS

This approach emphasizes a high level of daily structure and combines cognitive strategies with behavior modification, along with direct teaching of specific skills. PECS is mainly used for children with autism who have severe language and communication deficits.

This program uses pictures to help children initiate and maintain functional communication. Children with communication impairments—such as autism or global developmental delay—face significant challenges affecting emotional and behavioral development. PECS is an augmentative and alternative communication system designed to improve these abilities (Wannapaschaiyong et al., 2025).

It is based on the functional exchange of pictures to initiate communication (Bondy & Frost, 1994). Empirical studies show that PECS is effective in increasing functional communication and reducing frustration associated with lack of verbal language (Flippin et al., 2010).

2.4 Comparison of Methods and Gaps in Literature

Although ABA, TEACCH, and PECS represent different theoretical and practical approaches, literature suggests that their effectiveness largely depends on contextual factors such as professional training, institutional support, and family involvement (Odom et al., 2010).

A key limitation in existing literature is the lack of comparative studies analyzing frequency of use, implementation challenges, and institutional support within a single context.

In Albania, scientific literature on interventions for children with autism remains limited, lacking structured data on current practices, professional

standards, and support policies. This gap justifies the need for the present study, which aims to provide empirical evidence on the actual use of ABA, TEACCH, and PECS, as well as institutional challenges affecting their implementation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Methodological Approach

This study uses a quantitative descriptive–analytical method, selected for its ability to directly address research objectives and questions. The quantitative approach allows objective measurement of the frequency of use of ABA, TEACCH, and PECS, as well as statistical analysis of relationships between key variables such as training level, institutional support, and perceived effectiveness.

The research model is descriptive and correlational. The study is cross-sectional, with data collected at a single point in time, reflecting the current state of method usage in Albania’s pre-university education system.

3.2 Participants and Sample

The study population consists of 75 assistant teachers working with children with autism in pre-university education in Albania. A purposive sampling method was used to include individuals with direct experience in implementing ABA, TEACCH, and PECS.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection

The main instrument was a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions, divided into seven sections covering:

- Demographic and professional data
- Knowledge and training level
- Frequency of method use
- Perceived effectiveness
- Implementation challenges
- Institutional support
- Infrastructure and teaching materials

Questions were mainly based on a 5-point Likert scale and dichotomous formats. Data were collected through an online survey ensuring voluntariness and anonymity.

3.4 Variables

- Independent variables: training level, knowledge of methods, institutional support, years of experience, education level

- Dependent variables: frequency of use and perceived effectiveness
- Control variables: workplace, availability of materials, presence of resource classrooms

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and data were used solely for research purposes.

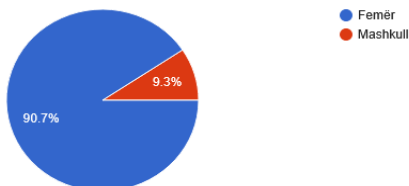
4. Results and Discussion (Summary)

Gender of Participants

Out of 75 participants, 90.7% are female and 9.3% are male. This result indicates a strong dominance of females in the role of assistant teachers in pre-university education, reflecting the typical gender structure of this profession.

1.1 Gjinia

75 responses

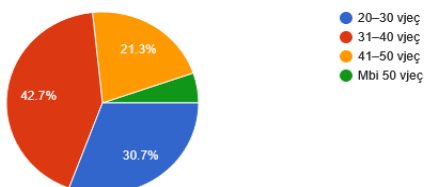


Age of Participants

The largest group of participants falls within the 31–40 age range (42.7%), followed by the 20–30 age group (30.7%) and the 41–50 age group (21.3%). A very small percentage of participants are over 50 years old.

1.2 Moshë

75 responses



Years of Experience as Assistant Teachers

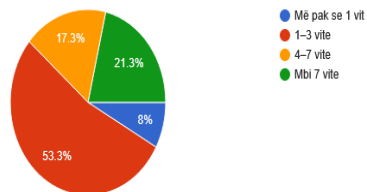
Out of 75 participants, the majority (53.3%) have 1–3 years of work experience

as assistant teachers. 21.3% have more than 7 years of experience, 17.3% have 4–7 years, while only 8% have less than 1 year of experience. These data indicate that the sample is dominated by professionals with moderate experience, suggesting practical familiarity with the field, but at the same time highlighting the need for continuous training to further develop competencies.

Institution of Employment

1.3 Vitet e përvojës si mësues/e ndihmës

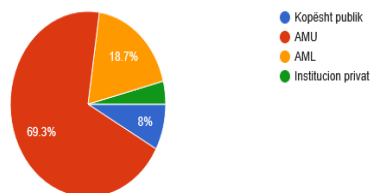
75 responses



The majority of participants (69.3%) work in lower secondary education (AMU). 18.7% work in upper secondary education (AML), 8% in public kindergartens, while a very small percentage work in private institutions.

1.4 Institucioni ku punoni:

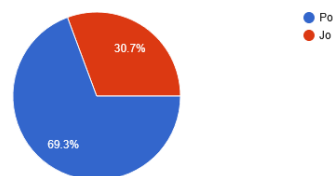
75 responses



This indicates that support for children with autism spectrum disorder is more concentrated in the 9-year education cycle, reflecting the need for structured interventions at this educational level. Based on the questionnaire results, the majority of assistant teachers are familiar with the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) method.

2.1 A jeni i/e njohur me metodën ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis)?

75 responses

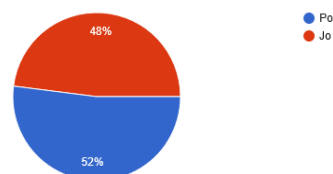


Familiarity with ABA, TEACCH, and PECS Methods

Regarding familiarity with the methods, 69.3% of respondents answered “Yes,” indicating that they have knowledge of or are familiar with the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) method. Meanwhile, 30.7% responded “No,” suggesting that a considerable proportion of assistant teachers are not familiar with ABA.

2.2 A jeni i/e njohur me metodën TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Aut and related Communication Handicapped Children)?

75 responses



In relation to the TEACCH method, 52% of respondents answered “Yes,” showing that more than half have knowledge of

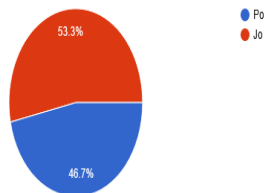
or are familiar with this approach. However, 48% responded “No,” indicating that nearly half of assistant teachers are not familiar with TEACCH.

Concerning the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), 46.7% of respondents answered “Yes,” indicating that less than half are familiar with

this communication method. In contrast, 53.2% answered “No,” showing that the majority of assistant teachers are not familiar with PECS.

2.3 A jeni i/e njohur me metodën PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System)?

75 responses

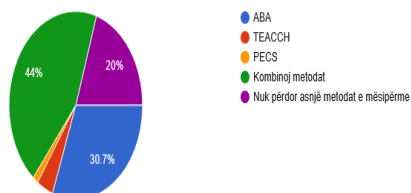


[Copy chart](#)

Based on the analysis of data regarding the most frequently used intervention method, 30.7% of participants reported that they most often use Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Meanwhile, 44% of respondents stated that they use a combination of intervention methods, integrating elements from different therapeutic approaches. About 20% reported that they do not use any of the methods listed in the questionnaire.

2.4 Cilën metodë ndërhyrje përdorni më shpesh?

75 responses



[Copy chart](#)

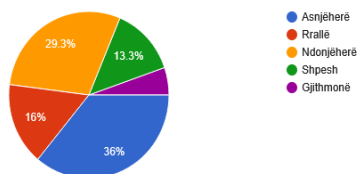
reported using other methods such as TEACCH and PECS, although at lower percentages compared to ABA and the combined use of methods.

Most Frequently Used Methods

The remaining participants

3.3 Sa shpesh përdorni metodën PECS?

75 responses



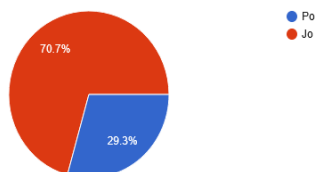
Asnjëherë
Rrallë
Ndonjëherë
Shpesh
Gjithmonë

Frequency of Use of Intervention Techniques

Among the three techniques, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is used most frequently (33.5%), followed by TEACCH (17.3%) and PECS (13.3%). On the other hand, a considerable percentage of respondents reported *never* using certain techniques: PECS (36%), TEACCH (33.3%), and ABA (24%).

4.1 A keni marrë trajnim për metodën ABA?

75 responses



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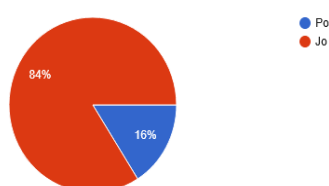
Participation in Training

Regarding training, the vast majority of assistant teachers have not received training in ABA (70.7%), TEACCH (84%), or PECS (84%).

Despite this, most assistant teachers—around 66%—believe that such training is *very necessary*. Another 29.3% consider it *necessary*, while only a very small percentage think it is of little or no importance. This indicates a high level of awareness regarding the importance of training, including training for parents in the use of intervention methods.

4.2 A keni marrë trajnim për metodën TEACCH?

75 responses

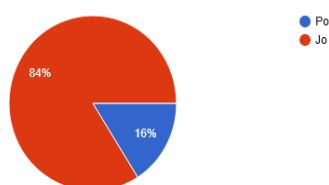


Barriers to Implementation

The data show that the main obstacle in implementing intervention methods is the lack of teaching materials (40%). This is followed by the lack of resource classrooms (17.3%) and the lack of practical training (25.3%).

4.3 A keni marrë trajnim për metodën PECS?

75 responses



A smaller proportion of respondents also mentioned other barriers, such as large class sizes, lack of institutional support, and limited collaboration with parents.

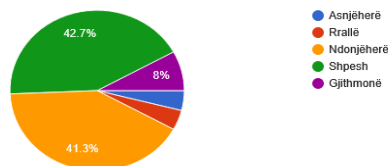
Perceptions on the Importance of Training

The vast majority of assistant teachers, around 66%, believe that these trainings are *very necessary*. Another 29.3% consider them *necessary*, while only a very small percentage think they are of little or no importance. This indicates a high level of awareness regarding the importance of training, including training for parents in the use of intervention methods.

Barriers to the Implementation of Intervention Methods

The data show that the main obstacle in implementing intervention methods is the lack of teaching materials (40%). This is followed by the lack of practical training (25.3%) and the absence of resource classrooms (17.3%). A smaller proportion of respondents also mentioned other barriers, such as large class sizes, lack of institutional support, and limited collaboration with parents.

6.1 Sa shpesh merrni mbështetje nga institucioni ku punoni?
 75 responses



Institutional Support (Graph 6.1)

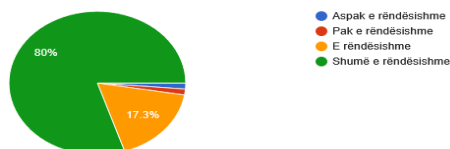
Graph 6.1 presents how often teachers receive support from the institution where they work. Out of 75 responses, 42.7% of respondents report that they *often* receive support, while 41.3% receive it *sometimes*. A smaller proportion, around 8%, state that they *always* receive support, whereas very small percentages report that support is provided *rarely* or *never*.

These results indicate that although institutional support exists, it is not consistent for all teachers.

Clarity of Institutional Guidelines (Graph 6.2)

Graph 6.2 shows whether clear institutional guidelines exist for the use of intervention methods. The majority of respondents (57.3%) stated that they are *not sure* whether such guidelines exist. Meanwhile, 29.3% believe that there are no clear guidelines, and only 13.3% confirm that they do exist. This suggests a lack of information or transparency within educational institutions regarding guidelines for the use of intervention methods.

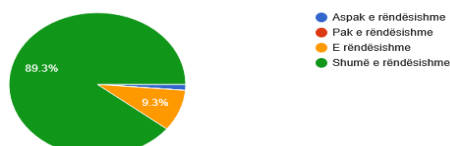
6.3 Sa e rëndësishme mendoni se është krijimi i klasave burimore (për institucionet arsimore që nuk kanë)?
 75 responses



Importance of Establishing Resource Classrooms

This graph presents participants' opinions on the importance of establishing resource classrooms in educational institutions that currently lack them. The data show that 80% of respondents consider this *very important*, while 17.3% rate it as *important*. Only a

6.4 Sa e rëndësishme mendoni se është pasurimi i i klasave burimore me mjete didaktike (për institucionet arsimore që kanë)?
 75 responses



very small percentage view it as of little or no importance. This indicates strong support for the creation of resource classrooms.

Importance of Equipping Resource Classrooms (Graph 6.4)

Graph 6.4 presents opinions on the importance of equipping resource classrooms with teaching materials in institutions that already have them. The results show that 89.3% of respondents consider this process *very important*, while 9.3% rate it as *important*. Only a very small proportion believe it has little or no importance. This demonstrates that teaching materials are essential for the effective functioning of resource classrooms.

Based on your experience, what concrete measures or actions would help in the more effective implementation of contemporary intervention methods (ABA, TEACCH, PECS) for children with autism spectrum disorder?

The analysis of responses indicates a generally positive attitude toward contemporary methods such as ABA, TEACCH, and PECS, which are considered effective approaches for treating children with autism spectrum disorder in Albania. Many respondents state that “ABA is a very good method” and that “the most effective measures are structured interventions such as ABA.” Some participants emphasize that “all three methods are very effective” and that “they should be integrated together.”

A recurring theme is the need for professional training. Many teachers admit that they “do not know the methods” or “have not received any training,” while others highlight the necessity of “continuous training,” “practical rather than only theoretical training,” and “certified professional training with ongoing supervision.” This reflects a clear gap between the need for implementation and current professional preparation.

Another important aspect is the establishment and strengthening of resource classrooms. Participants frequently mention the “creation of resource classrooms,” that “schools should have resource classrooms equipped with the necessary teaching materials,” and concerns such as “we have to provide teaching materials with our own income.” This indicates a lack of material and financial support from institutions. At the same time, the importance of a “suitable environment and teaching materials” is emphasized, along with the use of “visual aids and a clear routine” to help children understand and stay focused.

Individualization of intervention is highlighted as a key element. Participants refer to a “structured work plan,” “development of a detailed individualized plan,” “goal setting,” and “adapting interventions to the child’s needs.” The

importance of monitoring and “periodic evaluation and individual adjustment of intervention plans” is also emphasized.

Another essential dimension is collaboration with families. Some respondents clearly mention “continuous cooperation with parents,” “free training for teachers and parents,” and the need for intervention “not to be limited only to school hours but to extend beyond.” This reflects awareness of the importance of continuity of support in the home environment.

Overall, the responses demonstrate a strong willingness to implement contemporary methods, but also highlight concrete challenges related to the lack of systematic training, absence of standardized materials, and limited institutional support. As one respondent stated: “Effective implementation requires: training, individualization, structure, collaboration, monitoring, and empathy.”

5. Conclusion and Study Limitations

5.1 Conclusions

This article provides a clear overview of the professional profile and knowledge level of assistant teachers regarding the use of contemporary methods such as ABA, TEACCH, and PECS in the treatment of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Albania. The findings show that the profession of assistant teacher is dominated by females and by a relatively young and professionally active age group (31–40 years), with predominantly 1–3 years of work experience. This suggests a workforce with moderate practical experience but a continuous need for further development of competencies.

In terms of knowledge, the results show that most participants are familiar with ABA, while the level of familiarity with TEACCH and especially PECS is lower. However, the proportion of teachers who have received specific training in these methods is very limited. This indicates a clear gap between theoretical knowledge and structured professional training. Although a considerable proportion report using ABA or a combination of methods, a notable percentage state that they do not use any of them, highlighting the need for standardization of intervention practices.

Qualitative responses reflect a very positive attitude toward these methods. Many participants emphasize that “ABA is a very good method” and that “the most effective measures are structured interventions such as ABA,” while others underline that “all three methods should be combined.” The emphasis is consistently placed on “continuous training,” “certified professional training and ongoing supervision,” as well as the need for “the establishment of resource classrooms” and their provision with teaching materials, also highlighting a lack of institutional support in some cases.

The implications of the study are significant for educational policy and professional development in inclusive education. The results suggest the need for structured training programs, sustainable funding for resource classrooms, standardization of teaching materials, and stronger school–family collaboration. Furthermore, early intervention and individualized planning emerge as key elements for improving the effectiveness of support for children with autism spectrum disorder.

5.2 Study Limitations

The study is based on self-reporting, which may affect the objectivity of the responses. The sample is limited to 75 participants and mainly represents public pre-university education, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. In addition, the lack of direct observation of practices in the field represents a methodological limitation.

5.3 Directions for Future Research

Future studies may focus on:

- Comparative analysis between public and private institutions.
- The impact of certified training on intervention quality.
- Inclusion of perspectives from parents and other multidisciplinary specialists.

In conclusion, the study highlights a high level of professional willingness to implement contemporary methods, while simultaneously emphasizing the urgent need for systematic support, structured training, and institutional investment to ensure high-quality and sustainable intervention in inclusive education.

5.4 Recommendations

1. Training and Professional Development

- Continuous, practical, and certified training for teachers, assistant teachers, psychologists, and therapists.
- Professional supervision and monitoring of proper implementation of methods.
- Free or institution-funded training programs.
- Increased awareness of contemporary methodologies among educational staff.

2. Establishment and Strengthening of Resource Classrooms

- Opening more resource classrooms in schools.
- Equipping them with standardized teaching and therapeutic materials.
- Creating structured, safe, and child-friendly environments adapted to learners' needs.

3. Individualization and Intervention Planning

- Development of detailed Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) based on thorough assessment.
- Adapting interventions to the child’s cognitive, linguistic, and social level.
- Regular evaluation and monitoring of progress.
- Early intervention starting at ages 2–4.

4. Integration of Methods

- Combining ABA, TEACCH, and PECS into an integrated intervention plan.
- Use of visual structuring, clear routines, and alternative communication tools.
- Flexible adaptation according to diagnosis and individual needs.

5. Parental Involvement and Inter-Institutional Cooperation

- Practical training for parents on implementing methods at home.
- Continuous collaboration between teachers, parents, and psychologists.
- Regular counseling for families.
- Institutional and financial support for inclusive access.

6. Institutional and Financial Support

- Increased budget for special education.
- Provision of standardized materials.
- Supportive policies for professional development and infrastructure.

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Exploring educators’ perspectives on dramatic play in early childhood education

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the perceptions of educators according to the benefits of dramatic play on children’s education. Considering the importance of innovative approaches in education, dramatic play is considered a form of active learning that supports the emotional, social, and cognitive development of children. This study is based on qualitative methodology and uses an online questionnaire with early childhood educators. The data collected are analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying the perspective of educators on implementing dramatic play in their professional experience. The results suggest that dramatic play contributes positively to children's emotions, the development of social interactivity, and imaginative thinking in children. However, there are a few challenges, including class management and lack of materials. This article aims to offer a contribution in understanding innovative practices in early education, highlighting the potential of dramatic play as a supporting approach to children's general development.

Keywords: *Dramatic play, early childhood education, active learning, social-emotional development, teacher perceptions*

1. Introduction

Early childhood education is considered one of the most important periods in human development because the foundations of cognitive, emotional, and social development are formed during this phase. Research has shown that educational experiences in the first years of life have a direct impact on the way children develop learning abilities, social interaction, and emotional self-regulation (Bodrova & Leong, 2015; OECD, 2017). In this context, pedagogical approaches that support learning through play and active engagement are considered especially important in early childhood education.

One of the most important forms of play in early childhood is dramatic play, which includes role-play the imitation of everyday life situations, and the creation of imaginative scenarios by children. Dramatic play offers children the opportunity to explore social roles, to express emotions, and to develop communication and collaboration skills. According to Vygotsky, symbolic and dramatic play creates a space where children can develop abstract thinking and social abilities through interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). In a very similar way, other studies have also shown that through dramatic play children develop imagination, empathy, and the ability to understand others' perspectives (Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006).

In recent years, even in the Albanian context, there has been increasing interest seen for integrating active and creative methods in early childhood education. Curriculum documents and studies on child development highlight the importance of creating educational environment settings that encourage play, exploration, and creativity (Ministry of Education, Sport, and Youth, 2018). However, the ways in which educators understand and use dramatic play in everyday educational practice are still an area that requires further exploration and reflection.

This study aims to explore educators' perspectives on the use of dramatic play in early childhood education. Using a qualitative approach, this study analyzes educators' experiences and reflections regarding how dramatic play contributes to the emotional and social development of children and the challenges that arise while implementing this approach in educational practice. Through this exploration, this study aims to contribute to a better understanding of dramatic play in early childhood education and to encourage reflection on innovative practices in early childhood education.

2. Literature review

Play is one of the key mechanisms through which children explore the world and develop an understanding of their social and emotional experiences. In early childhood education research, play is considered not only a recreational activity but also a key process for the cognitive, social, and emotional development of children (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). Researchers have explained that through play children develop communication, collaboration, imagination, and problem-solving skills (Singer, Golinkoff, & Hirsh-Pasek, 2006). From this perspective, an important form of play that has attracted increasing research interest is dramatic play. Dramatic play includes activities where children take different roles, imitate situations of everyday life, and create imaginative scenarios through interactions with peers. According to Smilansky (1968), dramatic play represents an important stage of symbolic

development, where children use objects, language, and interactions to represent different realities to explore social relationships.

The sociocultural perspective of development, represented by Vygotsky (1978), offers one of the most important frameworks for understanding the role of dramatic play in early childhood education. According to this approach, play creates a space where children can act beyond their actual abilities, gradually developing new competencies through social interaction. Vygotsky emphasizes that through symbolic play children participate in activities that require self-control, negotiation, and interaction, contributing to the development of higher psychological functions. Similarly, Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1962) emphasizes the importance of symbolic play in the development of thinking processes in children. According to Piaget, symbolic play offers children a way of processing their experiences and building new cognitive schemas through imagination and creative exploration. From this perspective, dramatic play is not only an entertainment activity but also an important setting to develop thinking and understanding.

Through role-play and imaginative situations, children learn to express emotions, understand others' perspectives, and develop empathy (Goldstein & Winner, 2012). At the same time, interaction through dramatic play enhances the development of communication and social skills, which are essential for social integration and for success in the learning process (Berk & Meyers, 2013). Despite the known importance of dramatic play, the way in which it is integrated into daily practice depends on educators' perceptions and professional experience. Researchers emphasize that the role of the educator is crucial in creating an environment that supports dramatic play and facilitates activities that support imagination and social interaction (Fleer, 2013). For this reason, exploring educators' perspectives on the use of dramatic play can offer a deeper understanding of how this form of play is used in early childhood education.

3. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design that aims to analyze the perceptions and experiences of educators regarding the use of dramatic play in early childhood education. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate for studies that aim to understand the way professionals in the field interpret and experience pedagogical practices in specific educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study focuses on identifying perceptions, experiences, and challenges that educators face while implementing dramatic play activities in everyday educational practice in early childhood education.

3.1 Participants

Participants in this study are 19 educators who work in early childhood education institutions. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, including professionals who have experience working with young children and that are involved in educative activities that are connected with play and children's creative development. The participants represent educators with different levels of professional experience in early education, providing a range of experiences and reflections on the use of dramatic play in daily pedagogical practice. The number of participants is considered appropriate for exploratory studies with a qualitative approach, as it allows the identification of different professional experiences that align with the theme of this study.

3.2 Instruments and data collections

Data were collected through an online questionnaire. The instrument consisted of eight questions, including a combination of open-ended questions. Closed questions aim to collect basic information for the professional experience of educators and the frequency of using dramatic play in the classroom, while open questions are focused on exploring perceptions and their experiences related to the role of dramatic play in children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. The questionnaire is shared online, and participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily. The use of open-ended questions offers participants the opportunity to freely express their opinions and professional experiences, providing rich data for analysis.

3.3 Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis, a method widely used in qualitative research for identifying and interpreting repeated patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of analysis included several phases, starting from reading participants' responses and identifying key ideas and grouping them into themes that are related to educators' perceptions regarding dramatic play in early childhood development. This analytic approach allows the identification of key dimensions related to the use of dramatic play in early childhood education, showing pedagogical benefits and challenges that arise while implementing this educational practice.

3.4 Ethical consideration

During this study, all ethical standards of scientific research were followed. Participation in this study was voluntary, and all participants have been informed of the purpose of the study and that the data will be used only for academic purposes. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the

questionnaire did not include any information that can be used to identify the participants, and all responses were treated anonymously.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of data collected from an online questionnaire with 19 early childhood educators highlighted some key themes related to their perceptions of the role of dramatic play in early childhood education. Through thematic analysis, five key dimensions are identified: the use of dramatic play in pedagogical practices, the impact of dramatic play on children’s emotional development, the development of social interaction, the stimulation of imagination and creativity, and challenges that are related to implementation of this educational practice.

Theme	Description
Use of dramatic play in pedagogical practice	Educators’ perspectives on how often and in what ways dramatic play is used in everyday classroom activities.
Emotional development	Perceptions of educators regarding the role of dramatic play in helping children’s express emotions and develop self-confidence.
Social interaction	The role of dramatic play in encouraging cooperation, communication, and interaction among children.
Imagination and creativity	Educators’ observations about how dramatic play stimulates children's imagination and creative thinking.
Implementation challenges	Difficulties educators face when organizing dramatic play activities, such as lack of space, materials, or large group sizes, are common.

4.1 The use of dramatic play in pedagogical practice

The results show that dramatic play is used on different levels in daily pedagogical practice. Most educators (12 of them) reported using this form of play sometimes, while a smaller number (4) reported that they use it very often. Two educators reported using it very rarely, and only one of them reported that they never use it. Regarding professional experience, a considerable number of participants have extensive experience in early childhood education, with 8 educators reporting that they have more than 10 years of experience, while other participants represent different levels of

professional experience. This suggests that perceptions of dramatic play are formed in the context of different pedagogical experiences. Many educators define dramatic play as an activity where children take on different roles and imitate different situations from everyday life, using their imagination and interaction with peers. As one educator explained, *"Dramatic play allows children to take different roles and recreate everyday situations through imagination and interaction with peers."* (Participant 5)

4.2 The impact of dramatic play on children's emotional development

One of the most important themes in educators' responses is related to the impact of dramatic play on children's emotional development. Participants emphasized that through role play and imaginative situations, children can express their feelings and emotions, work on their personal experiences, and develop self-esteem. One educator noted that *"through dramatic play, children feel free to express emotions that they usually do not show during other classroom activities"* (Participant 3). Most participants responded that dramatic play helps children manage their emotions and express feelings that in other situations would be difficult for them to articulate. This result matches other studies that highlight the role of symbolic play in emotional development and in the development of empathy in children (Goldstein & Winner, 2012).

4.3 Dramatic play and social interaction

Another important theme identified in educators' responses is the impact of dramatic play on the development of social interaction. Educators highlight that through dramatic activities, children collaborate, share roles, and learn to respect the rules of the activity. In this process, children develop important social skills such as communication, negotiation, and collaboration. As one participant stated, *"During dramatic play, children communicate more with each other and learn how to cooperate and share roles"* (Participant 7). Through dramatic play, children learn to understand each other's perspectives and to build stronger relationships with peers. These findings align with literature that considers dramatic play an important tool for social development and the development of interpersonal competencies in children (Berk & Meyers, 2013).

4.4 Imaginative development and creativity

Most educators highlighted the role of dramatic play in stimulating children's imagination and creativity. Through the creation of roles and imaginative scenarios, children develop creative thinking and explore different social situations. According to one educator, *"dramatic play helps children create their own stories and use their imagination to explore different situations"*

(Participant 10). This process contributes to the development of symbolic thinking and expanding learning experiences through play. The results support the theoretical perspective of Vygotsky (1978), according to which symbolic and dramatic play create a space where children can develop new skills through imagination.

4.5 Challenges of implementing dramatic play

Despite the fact that educators know the importance of dramatic play for children's development, some of them identify challenges that are connected with the implementation of this practice in everyday educational practice. One of the most mentioned challenges is the large number of children in groups, the absence of didactic materials, and limited space to organize dramatic activities. One participant highlighted that "*it is sometimes difficult to organize dramatic play because the group is large and there is limited space for such activities*" (Participant 4). Some educators also mention challenges in managing noise and organizing roles through play. These challenges show that despite knowing and accepting the pedagogical benefits of dramatic play, there is a need for more institutional support and to create suitable conditions that allow a more effective integration of this approach in early childhood education.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore educators' perceptions of the use of dramatic play in early childhood education. Based on the responses of 19 educators who participated in this study, the results show that dramatic play is perceived as an important pedagogical activity that contributes to the emotional, social, and cognitive development of children. Educators emphasized that through role play and imaginative situations, children have the opportunity to express emotions, develop imagination, and build stronger social interactions with peers. The findings of this study suggest that dramatic play is an important tool for creating an active learning environment. Through dramatic activities, children develop communication skills as well as collaboration and empathy, which are essential for their social and emotional development. These results support theoretical perspectives that emphasize the importance of dramatic play in children's development and in building social and cognitive competencies. However, this study highlights some challenges related to the implementation of dramatic play in everyday pedagogical practices. Some educators mentioned limitations related to organizing dramatic activities, the number of children, and the absence of appropriate didactic materials. These findings suggest the need for more institutional support and to create more

suitable conditions for integrating these creative activities in early childhood education. This study has some limitations as well; one of them is the small number of participants, and an online questionnaire may limit the generalization of the data. To conclude, this study contributes to a better understanding of the role dramatic play has in early childhood and highlights the importance of using creative approaches in the pedagogical process. The wider integration of dramatic activities in educational practices can support children’s overall development and create richer and more inclusive learning environments.

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Digital didactics of literature: using technological methods for the interpretation of selected texts

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Abstract: This paper examines the integration of modern technological methods as a tool for transforming the teaching of literature, while simultaneously analyzing the delicate balance between innovation and the aesthetic essence of the text. In an educational environment that is rapidly digitalizing, the central question arises: To what extent does technology enhance true literary understanding, and where does the risk of simplifying the artistic message through visual tools begin?

Through an applicative methodology, the work presents three instructional models based on selected texts, utilizing strategies such as Digital Storytelling and interactive mapping. However, beyond the advantages of increasing engagement, this study also critically analyzes the efficiency of these methods. Questions are raised regarding the possibility of distraction, the risk of transforming deep analysis into a mechanical process, and the loss of intimacy between the reader and the physical book.

The results suggest that technology should serve only as a mediating bridge (scaffolding) and not as an end in itself. The conclusions of the paper emphasize that the success of digital didactics depends on the teacher's ability to prevent the technological tool from eclipsing the artistic and philosophical values of the work. The paper offers a framework where technology and tradition coexist without compromising the quality of literary interpretation.

Keywords: *Digital didactics, literature, technological efficiency, critical analysis, teaching methodology.*

1. Introduction: The New Paradigm of Reading in the Digital Age

The digital transformation of education is no longer an optional choice or a passing trend; it has become a cognitive necessity to respond to the needs of "Digital Natives," as Marc Prensky (2001) calls them. In a world where information is fragmented and visual, literature — a discipline that requires

deep reflection, patience, and linear analysis — finds itself in front of an existential challenge. How can Information and Communication Technology (ICT) be integrated without trivializing the literary text?

According to Eleni Karamitri (2008), teaching literature in school is a hybrid process: it is as much a science (in terms of theory and history) as it is an art (in terms of experience). This duality requires a methodological journey that is not satisfied with the simple explanation of stylistic figures but aims for the "catharsis" of the student. Digital didactics comes as a response to this need, offering tools that help deconstruct the poetic image through multiple sensory channels. This paper aims to argue that technology is not the enemy of the book, but a "magnifying glass" that helps the student see details that might remain invisible in traditional reading.

2. Theoretical Framework: Poetic Image and the Psychology of Visualization

At the center of literary analysis lies the poetic image. Ezra Pound (1913) defined it as an "intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." For today's student, this complex is often difficult to grasp through the linguistic route alone, due to the decline in the ability to imagine abstractly without visual references.

2.1 Dual Coding Theory

The main theoretical support for digital didactics comes from Allan Paivio (1971). According to him, the human cognitive system processes information through two separate channels: verbal (text, spoken word) and non-verbal (images, sounds). When the literature teacher accompanies the written verse with a suggestive image or a musical background that matches the rhythm of the verse, the student's brain creates stronger neural connections. This increases not only memorization but also deep understanding.

2.2 The Risks of the Ready-Made Image

However, as Isufaj (2015) emphasizes, there is a risk: the "suffocation" of the imagination. If the student is given a very specific image, they may stop creating their own mental image. Therefore, the digital didactics of literature should not offer static "illustrations," but visual "stimuli" that encourage critical analysis. The image should serve as a starting point (scaffolding) to build the meaning of the text, and not as a substitute for it.

3. Genuine Strategies of Digital Didactics

To move from the simple use of devices to a constructivist learning environment, strategies must be applied that place the student in the role of researcher and creator.

3.1 WebQuests: Interactive Research

Instead of the teacher lecturing on the author's biography, students engage in "WebQuests." They are guided through a series of online links (such as digital archives, virtual museums, or libraries like *The Alphabet Superhighway*) to discover the historical context of the work. This method promotes critical thinking and the ability to filter information on the internet.

3.2 Digital Storytelling

This is one of the most powerful ICT methods in literature. Students are not satisfied with just writing an essay; they create a short video where they intertwine their narration with images, music, and text. For example, recreating a monologue of Hamlet in a modern setting through videos forces the student to understand the character's psychology on a much more intimate level.

3.3 Virtual Classrooms and the Globalization of Literature

The use of video conferencing allows for the breaking of classroom walls. The example of the Owen school in Nashville shows how students can discuss a text with students from another country or even with living authors, giving literature a social and global dimension that fosters the desire for reading.

4. Applicative Analysis: Models of Text Interpretation

In this section, we will analyze how digital tools can be applied to specific authors of Albanian and world literature.

4.1 Ismail Kadare: Visualizing Mythical Geography

Kadare's work, filled with legends, chronicles, and symbols like "the bridge" or "the castle," benefits immensely from Interactive Mapping.

Method: Students use tools like Google Earth or interactive map platforms to create a "fiction map."

Result: By placing interactive points on a virtual map of northern Albania (for "Who Brought Doruntine") or Gjirokastra (for "Chronicle in Stone"), students connect real architectural elements with Kadarean metaphors. They can integrate archival photographs of the cities or castles and compare them with descriptions in the text, understanding how Kadare transforms history into myth.

4.2 Lasgush Poradeci: Synesthesia Realized through Multimedia

Lasgush's poetry is "the music of verses." Traditional methods often fail to convey the vibration of light over the lake or synesthesia (the blending of senses).

Method: Using an audio library with nature sounds (lake waves, rustling leaves) accompanied by a color gradation on the screen that changes according to the rhythm of the poem "Mëngjes" (Morning).

Result: The student does not simply read the verse; they "feel" it. Multimedia serves to synchronize three codes: the linguistic code (text), the sound code (metrics and music), and the visual code (light and color). This method turns the literature class into an artistic performance that remains long in the emotional memory.

4.3 Migjeni: The Aesthetics of Contrast in Digital Editing

In Migjeni, misery is not just a theme, but an entire aesthetic. To understand "Vargjet e Lira" (Free Verses), students can use image editing techniques.

Method: Taking photographs of the time and applying Chiaroscuro filters (light-shadow) or converting them into the style of expressionist painting.

Result: By modifying an image themselves to make it look "Migjenian", the student understands the concept of artistic deformation as a tool to express social pain. They begin to see similarities between Van Gogh's brushstroke and the verse "our crushed souls."

4.4 Zef Zorba and Azem Shkreli: Melody and Color Symbolism

Zef Zorba: His poetry, especially "Viola Cadence", requires the integration of classical music. Technology allows for the analysis of musical rhythm parallel to the poetic one, showing how Zorba's autumn is not just a season, but an orchestrated state of mind.

Azem Shkreli: In "The Apple Bank" (Bregu i mollës), students can create Infographics where they analyze the use of colors (the red of the apple vs. the yellow of drying). This helps in deconstructing existential pessimism through visual codes that remain easily analyzable.

4.5 Le Clézio and "Word Clouds" Analysis

To analyze the texts of contemporary authors like Le Clézio, word frequency algorithms can be used.

Method: Entering the text of the story "Letter to my Father" into a Word Cloud generator.

Result: Words like *algae*, *mirror*, *star*, *solitude* appear in larger sizes based on their repetition. This helps students immediately identify the emotional

pillars of the work and the character's spiritual isolation, using technology as a tool for quantitative analysis that leads to qualitative analysis.

5. Psycholinguistics of Digital Reading: New Challenges

An aspect often overlooked in the didactics of literature is how the brain changes during screen reading. According to Maryanne Wolf (2018), digital reading favors rapid "scanning" of information rather than the "Deep Reading" that literature requires.

5.1 From Scanning to Reflection

Today's student has a tendency to read in an "F-shape" (looking at the title, the first lines, and then scanning the left side). This is a risk for poetry and meditative prose. Digital didactics must intervene here by creating artificial "obstacles" that force the student to stop. For example, hiding the last verses of a poem until the student has completed an analytical task on the first verses.

5.2 Hypertextuality as an Opportunity

Unlike the physical book which is linear, digital text allows for Hypertextuality. A poem can have links that lead to the explanation of a mentioned myth, to a painting that inspired the author, or to a critical interpretation. This creates a web of meanings that enriches the student's experience without forcing them to break away from the reading environment.

Challenge (Threat)	Didactic Consequence	Source/Reference
Financial Cost	Continuous need for hardware and software updates.	Varosanec (2014)
Distraction	The student focuses on the beauty of the digital tool and forgets the content.	Brown (1997)

Challenge (Threat)	Didactic Consequence	Source/Reference
Loss of Deep Reading	The risk of replacing the physical book with short screen fragments.	Isufaj (2015)
Mechanization (Copy-Paste)	Original analysis risks being replaced by ready-made information.	Roblyer (1997)
Social Isolation	Excessive use of devices can damage classroom discussion.	Isufaj (2015)

6. Critical Analysis: Efficiency and the "Oops" Effect

Despite the enthusiasm for digitalization, this process carries challenges that should not be neglected. In pedagogical literature, this is known as the "Oops Effect" (Roblyer, 1997), where technology fails or turns into an obstacle.

6.1 Table: Challenges and Consequences in Literature Teaching

6.2 Overcoming Challenges: The Role of the Teacher

To avoid these problems, the teacher must play the role of a digital curator. Technology should not be the goal, but the tool. The lesson should not end with a beautiful video, but with a critical discussion: "Why does this music suit this verse?" or "How does the meaning of the poem change if we change the accompanying image?". The teacher must ensure that the digital tool does not become a "wall" between the student and the text, but a window.

7. Assessment Model: Rubric for Digital Projects in Literature

To measure the effectiveness of these methods, it is important that the evaluation is not just subjective. Below is an assessment rubric for a Digital Storytelling project (e.g., a video-essay on Migjeni or Kadare).

Table: Assessment Rubric (Points: 1-4 per category)

Category	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Sufficient (2)	Poor (1)
Literary Analysis	Deep deconstruction of symbols and message.	Clear understanding, but little symbolic analysis.	Superficial description of the subject.	Misunderstanding of the original text.
Media Integration	Images/sounds uniquely reinforce the emotion of the verse.	Media are appropriate, but sometimes predictable.	Media are merely illustrative, no organic link.	Media are random and distract attention.
Creativity	High originality; innovative use of digital techniques.	Original elements present, but based on existing models.	Little originality; strict following of instructions.	Simple copying of materials found online.
Technical Quality	Clear audio/video; smooth and professional editing.	Good quality, with minor errors in transitions.	Technical errors that hinder understanding.	Very poor quality; tool becomes an obstacle.

Category	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Sufficient (2)	Poor (1)
Group Work	Perfect collaboration ; equal contribution from all.	Good group work, clear division of tasks.	Some members worked more than others.	Total lack of collaboration.

8. Discussion: Towards a Sustainable Didactic

The question that remains after this analysis is: Will the book survive? Digital didactics does not aim to kill the book, but to make it relevant in a new environment. We must move from "teaching literature" to "education through literature" in hybrid environments.

Using social networks like Instagram or TikTok to create "BookTrailers" might seem like sacrilege to purists, but it is an excellent tool to encourage reading in teenagers. When a student has to summarize "Lulja e Kujtimit" (The Flower of Remembrance) in a 60-second video, they must do a colossal synthesizing job, choosing only the essence. This is a high-level cognitive exercise (Synthesis in Bloom's Taxonomy).

9. Conclusions

This paper proved that the success of digital didactics does not depend on the "glitter" of technology, but on the teacher's ability to use it as a bridge to the literary essence. Research results and model analyses suggest that:

1. **Technology increases cognitive and emotional engagement**, but requires critical guidance to avoid superficiality. Without the teacher's guiding role, the digital tool remains merely a toy.
2. **Multimedia models** (as with Poradeci, Zorba, or Kadare) offer a synesthetic experience that simple text often does not reach in today's student, allowing the student to "experience" literature with all senses.
3. **Innovation and tradition must coexist**. The best didactics is that which uses the most modern tools to convey the oldest human values. The book remains the source of light, while technology is the lens that focuses that light for a generation that seeks meaning through the screen.

Ultimately, the mission of the literature teacher in the 21st century is to show that behind every pixel hides a human feeling, and behind every algorithm hides a story waiting to be discovered.

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Literature as Ethical Training in the Digital Age: Toward Embodied Empathy

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Abstract: In digital societies shaped by acceleration, algorithmic mediation, and hyperdistraction, education faces the challenge of preserving ethical awareness, emotional depth, and human-centred understanding. This paper investigates literary education as a form of ethical training that develops not only emotional intelligence but also embodied empathy among university students. Drawing on work in narrative ethics, embodied narratology, deep reading studies, and educational philosophy, it argues that literature offers a rare space of stillness, reflection, and affective co-presence in a culture increasingly dominated by speed and surface processing.

In this context, literature functions as ethical training not only by fostering understanding of other minds, but by reactivating deep attention, embodied resonance, and reflective stillness, enabling empathy to become ethically attentive and resistant to the flattening pressures of digitally mediated culture. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative pedagogical case-study approach based on literature and cultural studies courses in which students engaged with narratives of vulnerability, identity, and bodily difference through close reading, reflective writing, and seminar discussion.

The analysis shows that literary reading fosters emotional complexity, perspective-taking, and embodied forms of imaginative participation that counteract the reduction of experience characteristic of digital environments.

The paper concludes that literature remains an innovative educational practice precisely because it resists the logic of efficiency, training what may be described as the *ethical sensorium* through deep attention, moral imagination, and embodied encounter.

Keywords: *literary education; embodied empathy; deep reading; emotional intelligence; digital culture; narrative ethics; ethical pedagogy*

1. Introduction

To teach literature in the digital age is to teach against a current. Students arrive in the classroom shaped by a culture of interruption (Carr, 2010; Turkle, 2015; Wolf, 2018): a culture of scrolling, of notification logic, of rapid shifts in attention, of surfaces endlessly touched but rarely inhabited. Information is available everywhere, yet interiority is increasingly fragile. Memory, once cultivated through duration, rereading, and reflection, is often outsourced to the searchable, the retrievable, and the instantly accessible (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). The result is not merely distraction, but a deeper transformation in the conditions of thought itself. What is at risk is not only concentration, but the slow ethical attention through which another life may be encountered in its complexity.

Contemporary digital culture privileges speed, reaction, simultaneity, and algorithmic filtration. In such environments, reading is easily reduced to extraction, scanning, or quick emotional recognition so much so that the sustained forms of attention required by literary experience become more difficult to maintain. Maryanne Wolf’s work on the reading brain is especially relevant here, as it shows that deep reading is not an automatic skill, but a learned cognitive achievement – one that supports inference, critical judgment, and empathy (Wolf, 2018). When reading habits are increasingly shaped by digital acceleration, the neural circuits associated with patience, interpretation, and reflection risk weakening. Closely related to this is what has been described as the “Google effect”, i.e. the replacement of internalized knowledge with the assumption of permanent external access (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). One remembers where to find information rather than dwelling with it long enough for it to become part of one’s interpretive and ethical resources.

This condition is intensified by what recent discussions call hyperdistraction: a mode of being organised around constant focus-switching, low tolerance for boredom, and difficulty sustaining immersion (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). It also resonates with the erosion of what Newport (2016) terms “deep work,” or the capacity for sustained, uninterrupted cognitive engagement. Recent empirical research further confirms that digital distraction is not incidental but structurally embedded in contemporary learning environments, affecting attention, performance, and cognitive engagement (Martin et al., 2025). Yet boredom, pause, and mental stillness are not empty states; they are often the precondition for thought, imagination, and ethical hesitation. Literature belongs precisely to this endangered ecology of slowness (Turkle, 2015; Wolf, 2018). It asks the reader not to consume, but to remain; not to react immediately, but to dwell in uncertainty, ambiguity, and affective nuance. In

this sense, literary reading resists the instrumental logic of efficiency that increasingly governs educational discourse.

At the same time, the argument for literature in higher education cannot remain nostalgic. It is not enough to claim that books matter because they preserve a humanistic past. Rather, the challenge is to articulate what literature does now, under present conditions. This paper argues that literature functions as a form of ethical training in the digital age by cultivating not only emotional intelligence, but also embodied empathy (Goleman, 1995; Nussbaum, 1995). Emotional intelligence, as theorised in educational and psychological discourse, offers a useful starting point: it names the capacity to recognise emotions, interpret affective situations, and respond with nuance rather than impulse (Goleman, 1995). Yet literary experience often exceeds this cognitive-affective register. It does not simply teach students to identify what a character feels; it can bring them into a mode of co-presence in which vulnerability, conflict, and otherness are registered through affective and sensory imagination.

This is where the paper moves from emotional intelligence toward embodied empathy. Drawing on narrative ethics, embodied narratology, and phenomenological approaches to reading, the study argues that literature creates the conditions for what may be called ethical resonance. Martha Nussbaum's defence of literature as moral imagination remains essential here, as does Suzanne Keen's work on narrative empathy (Keen, 2007; Nussbaum, 1995). However, the paper also extends these discussions through the framework of embodied simulation developed by Vittorio Gallese and Hannah Wojciechowski, according to which readers do not merely infer the emotions of fictional others, but participate in them through bodily and sensory-motor resonance (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). To this line of thought, one may add the phenomenological emphasis of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for whom perception is never disembodied cognition but always a mode of being-in-the-world through the lived body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Literature, in this perspective, becomes more than an interpretive object; it becomes a training ground for intercorporeal awareness.

Another key theoretical frame is provided by studies of deep reading and reflective stillness. If digital environments encourage reaction, literature offers suspension. If algorithmic culture organizes experience through anticipation and rapid relevance, literary reading reintroduces delay, hesitation, and inwardness. Research on fiction as a "moral laboratory" is especially useful in this regard, as it frames reading as a space in which readers rehearse positions, test ethical responses, and encounter forms of vulnerability without the immediate penalties of real life (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). Literature does not provide moral formulas; rather, it cultivates the capacity to remain

with complexity; it teaches students to inhabit the unfinished, the unresolved, the emotionally difficult.

This is particularly important in higher education, where innovation is often discussed in terms of platforms, tools, and technological adaptation. Such discussions are necessary, but incomplete (Turkle, 2015; Wolf, 2018). They risk foregrounding delivery systems while neglecting the inner formation of the subject who reads, interprets, and responds. The question is no longer whether literature can survive in the digital age, but whether digital education can remain fully human without the forms of depth, stillness, and ethical imagination literature sustains.

While existing research has examined empathy, deep reading, and digital distraction separately, fewer studies have explored how these dimensions converge within literary pedagogy as a form of ethical training.

Against this background, the present study addresses the following research problem: contemporary discussions of innovation in digital education often emphasize access, efficiency, and technological tools, while underestimating literature’s role in cultivating deep attention, emotional intelligence, and embodied empathy (Carr, 2010; Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011; Wolf, 2018). In response, the paper aims to show that literary education functions as an ethical technology of the human by training readers in slow attention, bodily resonance, and morally complex forms of encounter.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. to examine literature as a medium for the development of emotional intelligence in higher education;
2. to analyse how literary reading fosters embodied empathy rather than merely abstract moral recognition;
3. to explore the role of deep reading and stillness in ethical formation under conditions of digital acceleration;
4. to reposition literary pedagogy within current debates on innovation and digital society.

By placing literature at the intersection of ethics, embodiment, and pedagogy, this paper argues that the future of education cannot be shaped by innovation alone, if innovation is understood merely as speed, access, or technological novelty.

It must also be shaped by those practices that preserve the depth of human attention. In an age that teaches students to move quickly across surfaces, literature remains one of the few spaces where they may still learn how to stay - long enough for another life to be felt, and long enough for feeling itself to become a form of thought.

2. Literature Review/ Theoretical Framework

2.1 Deep Reading, Digital Culture, and the Distracted Mind

The contemporary ecology of reading is increasingly shaped by digital environments that privilege speed, simultaneity, and fragmentation. Recent systematic reviews of digital distraction in educational contexts demonstrate that interruptions to attention are not merely individual failures, but the result of complex interactions between technological affordances, learning environments, and student behavior (Martin et al., 2025). Within this context, the distinction between *deep attention* and *hyperattention* becomes essential (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). *Deep attention* refers to the sustained, immersive engagement required by complex texts, while *hyperattention* describes a mode of rapid task-switching, low tolerance for boredom, and continuous partial focus. As Maryanne Wolf argues, deep reading is not an innate ability, but a cultivated cognitive practice that enables inference, critical analysis, and empathic engagement (Wolf, 2018). When reading habits are reconfigured by digital acceleration, the neural circuits associated with these processes risk becoming less elaborated.

This shift has important pedagogical consequences: the decline of sustained reading is not merely a change in medium, but a transformation in the very conditions of understanding. Reduced attention spans are often accompanied by a weakening of critical thinking, as interpretation is replaced by extraction and surface recognition (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). Empirical studies have also shown that digital distraction is associated with decreased academic performance and increased cognitive overload in both online and classroom settings (Martin et al., 2025). At the same time, empathic engagement is threatened by shallow reading habits that do not allow sufficient time for emotional complexity to unfold. Literature, which depends on duration, ambiguity, and interpretive labour, becomes increasingly difficult to inhabit within a culture oriented toward immediacy.

Closely related to this transformation is the phenomenon often described as the “Google effect”: the tendency to rely on external storage of information rather than internalizing knowledge (Carr, 2010). When readers assume that information is always retrievable, they may no longer engage in the effortful processes required to integrate, evaluate, and remember it. Yet it is precisely this effort that builds the cognitive and affective *background knowledge* necessary for ethical judgment. Without such internal resources, reading risks becoming a transient interaction rather than a formative experience.

In this sense, the crisis of reading in the digital age is not simply about literacy, but about the erosion of those capacities - attention, reflection, and imaginative

participation - that sustain ethical engagement. The defence of deep reading, therefore, is not nostalgic; it is pedagogically urgent (Wolf, 2018).

2.2. Emotional Intelligence and Literary Education

Within educational discourse, emotional intelligence has been widely recognised as a key component of human development (Goleman, 1995) as it encompasses the ability to recognize, interpret, and regulate emotions, both in oneself and in relation to others. In the context of literary education, emotional intelligence provides an initial framework for understanding how reading contributes to ethical formation.

Literary texts invite readers to encounter a wide range of emotional situations, often marked by ambiguity, contradiction, and vulnerability. Through processes of identification and perspective-taking, readers learn to recognize emotional complexity rather than reduce it to simple categories (Goleman, 1995; Keen, 2007). They are also required to tolerate uncertainty, as literary narratives frequently resist immediate resolution or moral clarity. This engagement fosters a form of reflective attention in which emotions are not merely experienced, but examined and interpreted.

However, while emotional intelligence offers an important entry point, it remains largely situated at the level of cognitive-affective recognition: it describes how readers understand emotions, but not fully how they come to feel with others in a deeper, more immersive sense. For this reason, emotional intelligence must be seen as a preliminary layer - necessary, but not sufficient - for a more comprehensive account of literary empathy (Goleman, 1995; Keen, 2007).

Recent pedagogical research further supports this perspective, showing that structured, dialogic reading practices can significantly enhance both literary and interpersonal empathy, particularly when students are guided toward deeper interpretive engagement (Rogoski & Pfeiffer-Flores, 2025).

2.3. From Theory of Mind to Embodied Empathy

The shift from emotional intelligence to embodied empathy marks the central theoretical movement of this paper. Traditional models of empathy often rely on the concept of *Theory of Mind*, understood as the capacity to infer the thoughts and intentions of others (Keen, 2007). While valuable, this model tends to privilege cognition over experience, framing empathy as a form of intellectual reconstruction.

Recent developments in embodied narratology, particularly the work of Vittorio Gallese and Hannah Wojciechowski, challenge this perspective by proposing that literary experience involves mirroring mechanisms rooted in

the brain's sensory-motor systems (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). Recent empirical work in literary studies further supports the claim that aesthetic form plays a crucial role in shaping empathic engagement, showing that stylistic features such as foregrounding can significantly intensify readers' affective and reflective responses to narrative (Bonasera, 2025). According to this view, readers do not simply interpret the actions and emotions of fictional characters; they participate in them through a process of embodied simulation. This process is described as *liberated* because, in the stillness of reading, the body is freed from immediate action and can deploy its full imaginative and affective resources toward the fictional world (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). Central to this framework is the notion of intercorporeity, the idea that understanding others is grounded in shared bodily resonance rather than purely abstract reasoning (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Through this resonance, readers experience what has been termed a *Feeling of Body*: a pre-reflective, non-introspective awareness of another's state as it is registered within one's own sensory and affective system (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). In this sense, empathy is not only something we think; it is something we inhabit. Literature, therefore, does not merely ask readers to imagine what a character might be thinking. It invites them to register otherness somatically, affectively, and imaginatively. The ethical dimension of reading emerges not only from understanding, but from this deeper form of co-presence, in which the boundaries between self and other are momentarily reconfigured through embodied engagement (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011).

2.4. Stillness and the Moral Laboratory

If embodied empathy describes how literature engages the body, the concept of stillness helps explain the conditions under which such engagement becomes possible (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Wolf, 2018). In contrast to the rapid, reactive rhythms of digital culture, literary reading introduces a suspension of immediate action. This suspension is not a lack, but a generative pause - a space in which reflection, imagination, and ethical attention can unfold. Research on literary response, particularly the work of Koopman and Hakemulder, conceptualises fiction as a *moral laboratory* in which readers can explore ethical situations without the immediate consequences of real-world action (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). Within this space, readers are invited to rehearse positions, confront dilemmas, and engage with forms of vulnerability that may be difficult to encounter directly. The absence of immediate action allows for a deeper engagement with complexity, as readers are not required to respond instantly, but can remain within the unfolding of the narrative.

Stillness, in this context, functions as a precondition for ethical reflection (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). It enables what might be called slow thinking - a mode of attention that resists impulsive judgment and allows for the gradual formation of understanding. In the stillness of reading, the reader's cognitive and affective resources are not dispersed across multiple stimuli, but concentrated within a single experiential field. This concentration intensifies the experience of narrative empathy, making it possible for readers to engage more fully with the interior lives of others.

Literature thus offers not only content, but a form of temporal resistance: it reintroduces duration, hesitation, and inwardness into a cultural landscape increasingly dominated by immediacy (Carr, 2010; Turkle, 2015; Wolf, 2018).

2.5. Emotional Grammars and Culturally Specific Feeling

While theories of empathy often emphasise universality, recent linguistic and cultural approaches complicate this assumption by demonstrating that emotions are shaped by the specific *grammars* of different languages and cultures. As Anna Wierzbicka argues, emotional concepts are not fully translatable across linguistic contexts; they are embedded in culturally specific scripts that shape how feelings are experienced, expressed, and understood (Wierzbicka, 2003). Literature plays a crucial role in making these emotional grammars accessible (Keen, 2007; Wierzbicka, 2003). Through narrative, readers encounter forms of feeling that may not exist within their own conceptual repertoire, expanding their capacity for emotional recognition and response. This process requires more than identification; it demands a willingness to inhabit unfamiliar affective landscapes, where meanings are not immediately transparent. In this sense, empathy must be understood not as a simple extension of one's own emotional framework, but as a practice of attentive translation. To read across cultures is to encounter the limits of one's own emotional language and to engage with other ways of structuring experience. Literature becomes a site where these encounters can take place, not through abstraction, but through the lived textures of narrative.

By integrating this perspective, the study moves beyond a generalised notion of empathy toward a more nuanced understanding of ethical engagement - one that is sensitive to difference, attentive to language, and grounded in the complexity of human experience (Wierzbicka, 2003).

3. Methodology

Building on the theoretical framework outlined above, which positions literary reading at the intersection of deep attention, emotional intelligence, and

embodied empathy, the present study examines how these processes unfold within a concrete pedagogical context. While Section 2 has conceptualised literature as a space of ethical and affective potential, the methodology that follows explores how this potential is activated, experienced, and articulated by students in classroom practice. The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, classroom-based research design, grounded in pedagogical practice within higher education. In line with the conference guidelines, the methodological approach ensures transparency, coherence, and alignment between research objectives, data collection, and analytical procedures. At the same time, the study is informed by a broader understanding of literary education not as content delivery, but as a slow pedagogical encounter - a space in which attention, affect, and ethical awareness are cultivated through sustained engagement with texts (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Wolf, 2018).

The analysis follows an inductive thematic approach, identifying recurring patterns across student responses related to emotional awareness, ethical reflection, and embodied engagement.

3.1. Research Design and Context

The research is situated within undergraduate and postgraduate courses in literature and cultural studies, where students engage with texts that foreground themes of vulnerability, identity, bodily difference, and sensory experience. These courses provide an appropriate context for examining how literary reading functions as a form of ethical training, particularly in relation to emotional intelligence and embodied empathy (Goleman, 1995; Nussbaum, 1995). The study follows a qualitative case-study design, focusing on the processes and effects of specific pedagogical practices rather than on generalisable quantitative outcomes. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how students respond to literary texts under conditions that deliberately encourage slow reading, reflection, and affective engagement.

The study was conducted over the course of one academic semester (14 weeks) and involved approximately 32 undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in literature and cultural studies courses. Data were collected across 8–10 seminar sessions specifically designed to incorporate slow reading, reflective pauses, and dialogic interpretation. This temporal structure allowed for repeated engagement with the corpus and for the observation of shifts in students' cognitive, affective, and embodied responses over time.

3.2. Participants and Corpus

Participants include students enrolled in the aforementioned undergraduate and postgraduate courses in literature and cultural studies, representing diverse

academic backgrounds within the humanities. Their engagement with the material - captured through written reflections, seminar discussions, and interpretive tasks - forms the primary basis for analysis.

The corpus consists of selected literary texts and narrative fragments that foreground themes of vulnerability, identity, bodily difference, and sensory experience. These include, among others, *The Danish Girl* (Ebershoff), *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood), *The Secret Sharer* (Conrad), and *The Dying* (Crutcheon), alongside selected contemporary narratives engaging with gendered embodiment, marginality, ageing, and affective perception. Particular attention was given to passages that stage sensory thresholds - especially those involving silence, interiority, and perceptual uncertainty - as sites of ethical and emotional intensification.

Additional excerpts were drawn from texts that engage with memory, fragility, and the limits of perception, prompting readers to negotiate proximity and distance, presence and absence, self and other. The corpus was intentionally heterogeneous, combining canonical and contemporary texts in order to explore how different narrative forms mediate ethical and embodied engagement. The selection of texts was guided not only by thematic relevance, but by their capacity to generate complex emotional and embodied responses, thereby supporting the study's focus on emotional intelligence and embodied empathy. In particular, Conrad's *The Secret Sharer* and Crutcheon's *The Dying* proved especially productive in prompting reflections on ethical proximity, silent co-presence, and the fragile boundaries between self and other.

These texts were explored across multiple seminar sessions and revisited through close reading, reflective writing, and guided discussion, allowing students to engage with them as sustained experiential fields rather than isolated interpretive objects. Together, these choices position literary reading at the intersection of cognitive, affective, and embodied processes - an area that remains underexplored in the context of digitally mediated education.

3.3. Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection is based on multiple complementary instruments designed to capture both cognitive and affective dimensions of literary engagement:

- 3.3.1. **Close reading tasks**, which guide students toward detailed textual analysis and sustained interpretive attention
- 3.3.2. **Reflective journals**, in which students articulate their emotional and intellectual responses to the texts
- 3.3.3. **Seminar discussions**, allowing for dialogic exploration of multiple perspectives and shared interpretation
- 3.3.4. **Instructor observation notes**, documenting patterns of engagement, hesitation, and transformation within the classroom

These instruments are selected to move beyond surface-level comprehension and to access the processes through which students interpret, feel, and negotiate meaning.

3.4. Pedagogical Procedures

The pedagogical framework of the study is structured around practices that deliberately counteract the fragmented rhythms of digital attention (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). Students are invited to engage in:

- 3.4.1. **slow-reading tasks**, emphasising duration, rereading, and interpretive patience;
- 3.4.2. **reflective pauses**, moments of stillness in which immediate reaction is suspended in favour of contemplation;
- 3.4.3. **dialogic interpretation**, where meaning emerges through interaction rather than individual assertion;
- 3.4.4. **sensory-affective prompts**, encouraging students to attend to the bodily, emotional, and imaginative dimensions of the text (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011).

These procedures are not incidental, but central to the study’s design. They create a learning environment in which literature is experienced not as information to be processed, but as an encounter that unfolds over time and engages the reader at multiple levels.

3.5. Data Analysis

The collected data are analysed through thematic analysis, with particular attention to three interconnected dimensions:

- 3.5.1. **emotional awareness**, including the recognition and articulation of complex affective states;
- 3.5.2. **ethical reflection**, understood as the capacity to engage with moral ambiguity, vulnerability, and difference;
- 3.5.3. **embodied imaginative response**, reflected in language that signals sensory, affective, or bodily forms of engagement with the text.

The analysis seeks to identify recurring patterns in student responses, as well as moments of shift or intensification, where reading appears to move from cognitive interpretation toward deeper forms of affective and ethical involvement.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to standard ethical principles in educational research. Participation is voluntary, and students are informed about the purpose and

scope of the research. All data are treated with confidentiality, and identifying information is removed through anonymisation. The aim is not to evaluate individual performance, but to understand broader patterns of engagement within a pedagogical context. By structuring the methodology in this way, the study maintains academic rigour while remaining faithful to its central premise: that literature, when taught as a space of attention, stillness, and encounter, can function as a form of ethical training in a digitally mediated world (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Wolf, 2018).

4. Results / Findings and Discussion

4.1 Deep Reading Restores Emotional Complexity

The analysis of student responses indicates that when reading is deliberately slowed down, the quality of engagement changes significantly. Instead of producing rapid summaries or extracting isolated meanings, students begin to articulate layered interpretations, often returning to the same passage multiple times in order to refine their understanding (Wolf, 2018). This shift from immediacy to duration allows for the emergence of nuance.

One of the most visible effects of slow reading is an increased tolerance for ambiguity (Keen, 2007; Nussbaum, 1995). Students no longer seek immediate resolution or definitive interpretation; rather, they remain within uncertainty, allowing emotional and narrative tensions to unfold gradually. This patience is reflected in their written responses, which display a greater openness to contradiction and a willingness to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously. This shift toward interpretive patience is also visible in students' written reflections. As one student noted:

“At first, I wanted to decide quickly whether the character was right or wrong, but the longer I remained with the text, the more I felt that the situation resists clear judgment. The strange proximity between the narrator and Leggatt unsettled any stable moral position, as if the boundary between self and other had begun to dissolve. It became uncomfortable to decide, and I came to see that this discomfort is not something to resolve, but something to remain within—an essential part of understanding.” (Student Journal, anonymized)

The excerpts included in this section are illustrative of recurring patterns identified through thematic analysis rather than isolated responses. Such reflections indicate a movement away from immediate categorization toward a more sustained engagement with ambiguity, where understanding emerges gradually rather than through instant resolution.

At the same time, students demonstrate improved emotional differentiation. Instead of using generalised terms such as *sad* or *happy*, they begin to describe

more precise affective states - hesitation, discomfort, tenderness, unease, quiet resilience. These distinctions suggest that deep reading reactivates a more refined emotional vocabulary, one that is often flattened in digitally mediated communication. Importantly, this process also reduces reductive reaction. Immediate judgments give way to reflective engagement, and interpretive responses become less polarized. Rather than responding quickly, students learn to remain with the text long enough for meaning to develop.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings resonate with Maryanne Wolf's argument that deep reading supports the development of cognitive and affective *circuits* necessary for critical thinking and empathy (Wolf, 2018). When reading is shaped by speed and fragmentation, these circuits remain underdeveloped; when reading is slowed, they are reactivated. In this sense, deep reading does not merely enhance comprehension - it restores a mode of attention in which emotional and ethical complexity can be perceived.

4.2.Literature Trains Embodied Empathy, Not Just Recognition

Beyond the level of emotional intelligence, the data suggest a shift toward what may be described as embodied empathy (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). Students do not only identify what characters feel; they begin to register these experiences in sensory, affective, and bodily terms.

In reflective journals and discussions, vulnerability is no longer described as an abstract condition, but as something physically and affectively apprehended: as weight, pressure, closeness, discomfort, or a tension that lingers. Moments of emotional intensity are articulated through embodied metaphors - tightness, warmth, distance, exposure - indicating that understanding has moved beyond cognition into a form of somatic imagination (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). As in *The Secret Sharer*, where proximity does not rely on speech but on an intense, silent alignment between bodies, students begin to experience narrative encounters as forms of felt co-presence rather than detached interpretation.

This shift toward embodied engagement becomes particularly visible in the language students use to describe their responses, and is consistent with recent empirical studies demonstrating that literary style - rather than content alone - can amplify empathic engagement and deepen reflective responses to morally complex characters (Bonasera, 2025). As one student writes:

"It wasn't just that I understood his fear. I felt it as a kind of pressure, like something closing in. I couldn't move past that scene quickly because it stayed in my body, not just in my thoughts." (Reflective Journal, anonymised).

Here, emotional understanding is articulated not as recognition, but as a form of sensory and affective co-presence, suggesting that the reading experience extends beyond cognition into bodily imagination.

This transition is further evident in responses where students move from explanation to resonance. Rather than stating that a character is afraid, they describe the atmosphere of fear, the texture of the situation, and the way in which the narrative seems to inhabit their own perceptual field. The encounter with the text becomes less about decoding and more about co-presence (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). Such responses can be interpreted through the framework of embodied simulation, according to which the reader's sensory-motor system is activated in ways that enable a pre-reflective sharing of another's experience. The notion of *liberated embodied simulation* is particularly relevant here, as it explains how, in the stillness of reading, bodily engagement is intensified rather than suspended. The resulting *Feeling of Body* is not metaphorical, but experiential: the reader's own bodily awareness becomes a site of connection (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011).

A similar pattern appears in seminar discussions, where students often shift from explanation to sustained presence:

"I don't think I can explain exactly what he feels, but I can stay in it. It feels like something fragile that I don't want to reduce." (Seminar discussion note, anonymised)

This movement from explanation to resonance reflects a deeper mode of engagement in which understanding is grounded in affective and somatic attunement rather than abstract inference.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings suggest that literature does not simply train readers to understand other minds; it invites them to inhabit other states of being. Empathy is no longer limited to recognition, but becomes a form of embodied resonance sustained through imagination. This shift from cognition to embodiment constitutes one of the central contributions of literary education to ethical formation. Similar responses emerged in relation to *The Dying*, where vulnerability is experienced less as narrative information and more as an affective atmosphere that readers are invited to inhabit.

4.3. Stillness Enables Ethical Reflection

A further finding of the study concerns the role of stillness as a condition for ethical engagement (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). In contrast to the rapid, reactive rhythms of digital culture, the pedagogical practices implemented here create moments of suspension - pauses in which immediate response is deliberately deferred. These moments of stillness appear to have a significant impact on the quality of student reflection. When not required to respond instantly, students demonstrate a greater capacity for ethical hesitation: they reconsider initial judgment, explore alternative interpretations, and acknowledge the limits of their own perspective. Ethical reflection, in this context, emerges not from speed, but from delay (Koopman & Hakemulder,

2015; Wolf, 2018). The importance of stillness is further reflected in students’ explicit recognition of the value of withholding immediate response:

“Normally I would react quickly and say what I think, but here I had to sit with it. After some time, I realised my first reaction was too simple. Waiting changed how I understood the situation.” (Reflective Journal, anonymised)

This suggests that ethical reflection does not emerge in spite of delay, but because of it. The suspension of immediacy allows for a reconsideration of initial responses and opens space for more nuanced judgment.

From this perspective, stillness should not be understood as the absence of activity, but as a precondition for thought. It enables what may be described as a redistribution of attention: instead of being dispersed across multiple stimuli, cognitive and affective resources are concentrated within a single narrative field. This concentration deepens engagement and allows for a more sustained encounter with complexity.

Within this framework, literature functions as both a temporal and ethical counter-space. It suspends the logic of immediacy and creates the conditions for reflective judgment. As Koopman and Hakemulder suggest, fiction can be understood as a *moral laboratory*, precisely because it allows readers to engage with difficult situations without the pressure of immediate action (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). The reader is not required to decide quickly, but to remain, to observe, to feel, and only then to interpret. In a culture that increasingly rewards rapid response, this capacity for remaining-with becomes ethically significant. Literature teaches students not only what to think, but how to delay thinking long enough for it to become responsible.

4.4.Literature as Resistance in Digital Culture

Taken together, these findings suggest that literary education operates as a form of resistance within the broader landscape of digital culture (Carr, 2010; Turkle, 2015; Wolf, 2018). This resistance is not oppositional in a simplistic sense; it does not reject technology, but challenges the values of speed, efficiency, and immediacy that often accompany it. The main patterns identified across the student data may be summarised as follows:

Digital Culture	Literary Ethical Training
speed	slowness
notifications	sustained attention
reaction	reflection
externalized memory	internalized thought
emotional flattening	affective complexity

abstraction	embodied experience

Within this framework, literature emerges not as an outdated form, but as a counter-temporal practice - one that reintroduces duration, depth, and interiority into environments dominated by acceleration. Its pedagogical value lies precisely in its resistance to reduction. It does not simplify experience; it complicates it. It does not accelerate understanding; it slows it down.

This resistance can be understood as a form of innovation in its own right. In a context where educational innovation is often equated with technological advancement, literature offers a different model: one based on the cultivation of attention, the deepening of emotional awareness, and the expansion of ethical imagination (Nussbaum, 1995; Wolf, 2018). It trains not the speed of response, but the quality of presence.

Thus, the findings of the study support the central argument of the paper: that literature functions as an ethical technology of the human, not despite the digital age, but precisely because it offers what the digital alone cannot sustain - a space in which thought, feeling, and embodiment remain intertwined (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011; Wolf, 2018).

A more detailed synthesis of the observed shifts in student responses is presented below:

Dimension	Observed Shift in Student Responses
emotional understanding	from general labels to nuanced affective vocabulary
empathy	from recognition to embodied, sensory engagement
ethical judgment	from immediate reaction to delayed reflection
reading practice	from scanning to sustained, recursive attention

The patterns summarized above confirm the central argument of the study: that literary reading cultivates not only interpretive skill, but a deeper ethical and embodied mode of engagement.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

This study argued that literature, within the context of digital education, should not be understood as a residual or nostalgic practice, but as a necessary corrective to the conditions that increasingly shape contemporary learning (Carr, 2010; Turkle, 2015; Wolf, 2018). In environments defined by acceleration, fragmentation, and externalized cognition, literary reading

reintroduces forms of attention, reflection, and embodied engagement that are essential for ethical formation.

By bringing together perspectives from deep reading research, narrative ethics, and embodied cognition, the paper has shown that literature operates not only at the level of emotional recognition, but at the level of ethical *attunement*. It cultivates emotional intelligence by enabling students to recognize and interpret complex affective states, but it also moves beyond this toward embodied empathy, where understanding becomes a form of resonance grounded in sensory and affective experience (Gallese & Wojciechowski, 2011). At the same time, the practice of slow reading creates conditions of stillness that allow ethical reflection to emerge (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015; Wolf, 2018). In this suspended space, students are not required to respond immediately, but are invited to remain with ambiguity, vulnerability, and difference.

Taken together, these findings support the claim that literature functions as an ethical technology of the human. It trains what may be called the *ethical sensorium*: the capacity to attend, to feel, to hesitate, and to respond with awareness rather than impulse. In doing so, it offers a counter-model to dominant forms of digital engagement, not by rejecting technological environments, but by restoring the depth of experience within them. Literary education, therefore, does not stand outside innovation; it redefines it by placing human attention, embodiment, and ethical imagination at its centre (Nussbaum, 1995; Wolf, 2018).

At the same time, the study is subject to several limitations. The research is based on a small-scale classroom context, and the findings emerge from a specific pedagogical environment that may not be directly transferable to other settings. The qualitative and interpretive nature of the analysis, while allowing for depth and nuance, also introduces a degree of subjectivity that cannot be entirely eliminated. As such, the results should be understood as indicative rather than universally generalisable. Furthermore, the study does not include a systematic comparison between digital and print reading modalities, an area that would benefit from further empirical investigation.

Future research could extend this work through mixed-method approaches, larger and more diverse participant groups, and comparative analyses across different reading environments (Carr, 2010; Wolf, 2018). Such studies would help to clarify the conditions under which deep reading and embodied empathy can be most effectively cultivated in contemporary education. Future research may also explore emerging forms of technologically mediated empathy, such as virtual reality environments, in order to assess how *embodied engagement* operates across both literary and digital immersive contexts.

Ultimately, the significance of literary education in the digital age lies not in its capacity to compete with technological systems, but in its ability to sustain what those systems often erode: the depth of human attention and the complexity of human response. In a culture that teaches students to react quickly, literature teaches them to remain long enough within another life for feeling to become thought, and thought to become ethical attention.

In this sense, the literary reader may be reimagined as a form of digital humanist - one who navigates technological environments without relinquishing depth of attention. This study contributes to ongoing debates by reframing literary education as a form of ethical and embodied training rather than solely a cognitive or cultural practice.

These findings have implications for curriculum design, suggesting that literary pedagogy should be positioned not as supplementary, but as central to the development of ethically aware and cognitively resilient students in digital education systems.

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Teaching poetry through Digital tools: Opportunities and Risks

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Abstract: Digital tools can become an integral component of student-centered teaching, contributing to the development of various student competencies. Their use is increasingly relevant in literature classes, including in the teaching of poetry. This paper aims to identify the digital tools that can be effectively integrated into literature lessons, while also examining the pedagogical opportunities, benefits, and the didactic or ethical risks associated with their use. The study focuses on how digital tools can encourage active student engagement through close reading, facilitate more direct access to poetry, and enhance understanding of the geographical and historical context in which poems are produced. At the same time, it addresses the potential risks of uncritical or excessive use of technology, which may lead to superficial reading, fragmentation of meaning, disruption of the logical and emotional coherence of poetic cycles or collections, and the emergence of automated interpretations.

Using qualitative methods such as textual analysis, concrete examples of poetry interpretation, and classroom observation of poetry-focused lessons, the paper argues that digital tools can fulfill their pedagogical function when used effectively and responsibly. The study proposes a hybrid teaching model that integrates digital tools with close textual analysis, supports the development of students' diverse competencies, and contributes to the achievement of instructional objectives in literature education.

Keywords: *digital tool, teaching poetry, literature, hybrid teaching, student*

1. Introduction

In a time of rapid technological development, the lesson period has become not only a space for didactic purposes, but also an environment that integrates innovation and the changes occurring in society.

According to UNESCO (2021), a lesson should aim to prepare future generations for the digital era, ensuring that the development of students' various skills progresses alongside technological advancement. In recent years, in Albania, thanks to the integration of technological devices into classroom environments, learning tools, learning resources, the learning environment, and above all, teaching methodology have changed. Effective methodology influences the achievement of the teacher's objectives, the student's psychology, the growth of interest, motivation, inclusiveness, and more. The use of technology and digital tools impacts not only quality education and successful outcomes, but also the development of students' skills such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing in an appropriate manner. The proper integration of technology in literature classes can bring literary activities that enrich the learning process, as there are many programs and applications that can develop students linguistically, intellectually, and emotionally. They can foster literary creativity, develop critical thinking, and nurture a sense of aesthetics through colours, symbols, and interpretative images that may emerge during a literature lesson.

The use of technology in a literature lesson helps teachers and students avoid relying on a single text; instead, they can work with hypertexts and at the same time gain access to various historical and cultural contexts much more quickly than they would through traditional teaching alone.

Furthermore, thanks to technology, students and teachers can approach literature not only visually but also through listening. They can also use different platforms to publish their own creations and access the works of others quickly and without economic cost.

Our study focuses not only on the subject of literature, but above all on the process of teaching poetry. Poetry, as a subjective genre, requires specific methodology to be understood at the metric, semantic, and pragmatic levels.

The research questions guiding this study are:

- Can digital tools be used in the process of teaching poetry?
- What are the advantages and risks of using these tools in a lesson?

The paper presents the need to implement a hybrid lesson. The inclusion of digital tools is necessary to adapt and integrate them with traditional teaching, because only in this way can we create a contemporary environment that progresses in parallel with a society that may be dominated by artificial intelligence in the future.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The Albanian educational system has faced major challenges over the past twenty years due to technological development, as not only the way learning

takes place and lessons are delivered has changed, but also the way the book is connected with technology. As Neil Selwyn (2016, p. 1) states *Education is now inseparable from digital technology, as learning increasingly takes place in technology-rich environments*. Various technological tools have transformed traditional teaching which was planned around three main actors: teacher–student–book and structured through a lesson plan into a more informal, multi-actors interactive process that fosters the development of diverse competencies within the same lesson and reflects a contemporary classroom model.

On the one hand, the integration of technology into the lesson has become a necessity, a need, and even a source of satisfaction that facilitates easy interaction between teachers and students. However, it has also become a challenge, because, as Neil Selwyn (2016, p. 23) emphasizes *technology in education does not automatically lead to better learning outcomes*. The difficulty is further increased by the lack of digital infrastructure in all school environments.

Moreover, many teachers are not familiar with these digital tools, have not been trained to use or implement them, and are often unaware that digital tools include applications, platforms, and technological programs that transform the processes of teaching and learning. As Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2011, p. 13) argue *Digital tools are central to new literacies, as they shape how meaning is made, shared, and interpreted*.

At the same time, there is widespread awareness that digital tools have significantly changed the organization of a lesson. For teachers, new opportunities have emerged for constructing diverse methodologies across different subjects, while students become actively involved in the learning process and develop various academic skills, whether in research or creative work.

This is also supported by Bernard R. Robin from the University of Houston, who states that *digital storytelling engages students in active learning by combining research, writing, and technology* (Robin, 2008, p. 222), and by Christine Redecker (2017, p. 10), who notes that *digital technologies enable learners to develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital competence*.

The use of digital tools has also changed the position of the teacher. Educators continuously face a generation born into technology, often ahead in its use. Therefore, today’s teacher needs more than strong theoretical preparation in the subject and solid pedagogical skills; they must also possess a very good knowledge of technology in order to use it effectively. As Punya Mishra and Matthew J. Koehler (2009, p. 66) emphasize, “Effective technology

integration requires understanding the complex relationships between content, pedagogy, and technology."

Thus, we believe that the integration of digital tools such as applications, programs, and technological platforms is a necessity for a contemporary educational system that supports both teaching and learning processes. During a lesson, digital tools increase students' motivation, make learning interactive, foster critical thinking, and adapt to different learning styles.

Literature, as a subject, particularly requires the inclusion of various platforms and programs in order to move across different historical periods, literary genres, and authors. In this way, students learn not to rely on a single text but to engage with hypertexts, to create, and to collaborate with one another. Digital tools provide opportunities for students to become more engaged by listening to audio recitations, watching dramatic texts, and participating in quizzes, forums, or online comments.

Furthermore, the learning process can take place according to each student's pace. They can reread texts at any time, listen to audio materials repeatedly, and use additional resources to further advance their study of literature.

The process of teaching literature through technology influences different learning styles, particularly visual and auditory styles, by giving students the opportunity to learn and interpret through images and audio materials. Literary theory, historical periods, or knowledge about authors can become more tangible through tools such as Microsoft PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi, and interactive smart boards.

A literature lesson can turn into a space of collaboration and communication, with the student at the centre, thanks to platforms like Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Padlet. In this way, literary texts are discussed in virtual groups, projects, and analytical activities that foster critical thinking. Literature is also a subject in which students can express their creative abilities through tools such as Canva, Adobe Express, Storybird, and Book Creator. Students can create digital poetry, produce video poems, and combine text, music, and images.

The analysis and interpretation of literary texts are central to the subject of literature, and this can be enhanced through online text annotation; Google Docs, which supports collaborative analysis; and Poetry Foundation, which provides both audio and written poetry resources. These tools help uncover hidden meanings through interactive analysis, where each student can add comments line by line on a digital platform.

Digital tools are also useful for teachers in the assessment process through platforms such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, and Google Forms. In this context, the teacher's role is no longer limited to transmitting knowledge, but extends to guiding, facilitating discussion, and supervising the critical use of technology.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study focuses on the use of digital tools in teaching poetry. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to explain the advantages and disadvantages of using digital tools in poetry instruction. The research is presented through a descriptive and case study analysis of poetry teaching in different high schools in Durrës, Albania.

Thus, the study applies a mixed methodological approach to support its aim: examining the teaching of poetry through digital tools, as well as the opportunities and risks involved. We observed poetry lessons in which different teachers explained the genre both through traditional methods and through technological tools. The focus of these observations was on identifying the advantages and disadvantages of traditional teaching compared to technology-enhanced instruction.

Participants/Sample

The focus of the study was the teaching of literature, with particular emphasis on poetry. The population of the study consisted of high school students enrolled during the academic year 2024–2025 who were involved in poetry teaching and learning through various technological tools.

The research was carried out through a total of 10 lessons, divided into two groups:

- A control group (traditional teaching)
- An experimental group (teaching with digital tools)

The purpose of using technological tools was to determine whether students’ interest changed in commenting on and interpreting poetic texts with the help of technology; whether their way of thinking changed; and whether they became more engaged in expressing their critical opinions.

Instruments

During the research process, various instruments were used, including questionnaires, interviews with teachers and students, and direct, open, and systematic classroom observation.

Data Analysis

At the beginning of the study, a questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was distributed to assess students’ perceptions of the use of technology in literature lessons, particularly in poetry. The questionnaire focused on issues such as whether technology helped visualize a poetic text better than a printed book; whether it facilitated the use of multiple poems simultaneously compared to focusing on a single poem from the textbook; and whether there was a

cognitive benefit (critical thinking, analysis, interpretation) when technology was used to interpret poetry as a hypertext.

The same thematic lesson was delivered in two different groups. In the traditional group, the poem was read from the textbook in class, and interpretation was guided by the teacher, relying on their personal skills and explanations. In the experimental group, students downloaded e-book applications and accessed a range of poetic works, reading and engaging with poetic texts in multiple digital formats beyond the printed text.

At the end of each lesson, the teacher administered tests to evaluate the results in terms of critical thinking, analysis, and interpretation of poetry in both the control and experimental groups.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, research ethics were respected. Data were collected honestly and were not altered, regardless of whether the findings supported or opposed the use of digital tools. The results were presented with objectivity, integrity, and good faith toward the observed groups.

4. Results

In the traditional teaching of a literature lesson focused on poetry, the student is positioned in front of the book, the teacher, and the blackboard. The teacher provides commentary, while the student concentrates on the poetic text, literary devices, their meanings, and the verse structure.

Out of 50 surveyed students regarding traditional teaching without the use of digital tools:

- 80% (40 students) responded “yes” to the question of whether the lesson was interesting;
- 10% (5 students) stated that the lesson was somewhat interesting;
- 5% (20 students) responded that they lost interest in the lesson.

The use of digital tools implies that during the explanation of poetry, educational platforms such as Google Classroom, LMS platforms, digital poetry archives, online libraries, digital poetry, and multimodal poetry with audio, video, and visual elements can be used. In addition, social networks such as Instagram and TikTok can function as poetic spaces, while AI tools and annotation tools may be used for text analysis and translation, along with Canva for creating digital poetry.

From the 12 surveyed literature teachers, when asked which digital tools made the explanation of a poetic text more interesting:

- Approximately 85% stated that poetry became more engaging when presented in multimodal form (audio, video, and visual elements through multimedia);

- 10% preferred digital poetry archives;
- 5% selected online libraries.

Before the use of digital tools, in the class that was not part of the experiment, we observed the traditional lesson. Twenty-five students were asked whether the following elements of the poetic text were clear to them when studied only through the school textbook:

The results from the control group (traditional teaching), based on responses from 25 students, are presented below:

Opportunities	Yes	No
- Clear visualization of the poem	24 (97%)	1 (3%)
- Access to poetry from different cultures and languages interactive hypertexts	0 (1%)	25 (100%)
- Familiarity with the poem in its original language	0 (1%)	25 (100%)
- Student motivation and engagement	23 (92%)	2 (8%)
- Satisfaction with the teacher’s poetic interpretation	24 (97%)	1 (3%)

The data indicate that in traditional teaching, students generally reported a high level of clarity in understanding the poem (97%) and strong satisfaction with the teacher’s interpretation (97%). Motivation and engagement were also relatively high (92%).

However, the results clearly show significant limitations in terms of access to poetry from different cultures and languages, as well as exposure to poems in their original versions. Nearly all students (100%) stated that they did not have access to interactive hypertexts or poetry from other linguistic and cultural contexts when relying solely on the textbook.

These findings suggest that while traditional teaching ensures clarity and structured interpretation guided by the teacher, it lacks opportunities for broader exploration, intercultural exposure, and interactive engagement that digital environments can potentially provide.

In the experimental group, the teacher integrated various digital tools as part of the methodology to facilitate the teaching process. Among the most frequently used were digital poetry archives, multimodal poetry (audio, video, and visual formats), online libraries, AI tools, and reels featuring different interpretations on TikTok and Instagram, as well as performances available on YouTube.

Based on classroom observation, the effective use of digital tools depended largely on the teacher’s ability to use technological tools proficiently, to select appropriate digital resources according to the thematic focus of the poem, to manage the available lesson time effectively, and to align technology use with lesson objectives and the development of students’ competencies.

Both groups were observed while studying the same topic: the analysis and interpretation of Canto III (verses 1–21) from *Inferno* by Dante Alighieri, part of the Divine Comedy.

In the experimental group, 25 students were asked how the following elements were experienced with the use of digital tools:

Opportunities	For	Against
- Clear visualization of the poem	25 (100%)	0 (0%)
- Access to poetry from different cultures and languages – interactive hypertexts	24 (96%)	1 (4%)
- Familiarity with the poem in its original language	15 (60%)	10 (40%)
- Student motivation and engagement	24 (96%)	1 (4%)
- Access to poetic interpretation	23 (92%)	2 (8%)

The results show that digital tools significantly enhanced students’ learning experiences:

All students (100%) reported that digital tools provided a clear visualization of the poem. Nearly all students (96%) benefited from interactive hypertexts, highlighting the advantage of exploring poetry beyond a single textbook. 60% of students felt they had better access to the poem in its original language, indicating a moderate improvement compared to traditional methods. 96% of students reported higher motivation and active participation. 92% felt that digital tools enhanced their understanding and interpretation of the poetic text. Overall, the experimental group demonstrates that integrating digital tools into poetry teaching can improve visualization, engagement, intercultural access, and interpretive skills, though support may still be needed for original-language comprehension.

The table above demonstrates that teaching poetry through digital tools has a positive impact. As Fisher, D. (2000) emphasizes, *students should benefit from technological tools in order to gain knowledge, attitudes, and skills.*

The percentage improvements observed after the use of digital tools show that students had a more positive experience in visualization: clearer representation of the poem; the students have the possibility to use interactive hypertexts:

access to poetry from different cultures and languages; Familiarity with the poem in its original language; Motivation: increased student engagement; Poetic interpretation: improved understanding and critical engagement.

These results indicate that integrating digital tools in poetry teaching can enhance learning outcomes significantly.

Furthermore, traditional tools can still play a complementary role in the classroom. For example, a blackboard can be used for writing; pens, paper, paint, and typewriters for creative exercises; voice recorders and video recorders for capturing oral and visual interpretations; telephones and video conferencing for remote communication; newspapers and television for media and internet access; e-mail for written messages; and libraries for archiving and saving written texts (Aksoy, Y., 2005). Together, this combination of digital and traditional tools creates a rich, multimodal environment that supports visualization, creativity, critical thinking, and interactive engagement in poetry lessons.

In the group where digital tools were used, the literature lesson gained significant interactivity. Teachers and students had more opportunities to access poets not only from the same literary period but also before and after Dante Alighieri. One of the problems encountered in teaching poetry is that literature educators often limit themselves to a single period, ignoring the fact that poetry is a continuous whole (Lloyd et al., 2007).

During the same lesson, teachers and students could access interactive hypertexts. Through these hypertexts, students navigate a dynamic literary world, following clickable links that provide immediate access to related texts and resources during the lesson.

Furthermore, literature lessons can provide opportunities to engage with poetry in its original language (when a translation exists) or even to attempt translating the poem themselves. Teaching poetry with digital tools becomes more interesting and motivating because students explore the context of the poem’s creation independently. They can access poetic fragments not included in the school textbook.

Through various language programs, students can develop communicative and intercultural skills, allowing them to adapt to different linguistic and cultural contexts. As Gilbert, J.K. (2006) emphasizes, *the development of intercultural awareness and critical thinking skills is essential for mastering successful communication, especially in the context of the new millennium*.

Since students are digital natives, the use of digital tools clearly increases their interest compared to traditional teaching. They feel more motivated to participate in the lesson because poetry as a visual and audio experience supports learning more effectively. Students engage with poetry not only from a literary-theoretical perspective but also through the emotions of the moment.

Digital tools help blur the boundary between poet and reader, allowing students to interact with the poem more easily than when the poetic text is presented solely through the literature textbook. This interactivity encourages deeper engagement, exploration, and personal interpretation because literature teachers, especially at the high school level, need to explain the concepts of image and symbol and, more importantly, to carry out activities aimed at discovering and interpreting these elements in poetry.

Digital tools provide the means to implement these activities in a more dynamic, interactive, and emotionally engaging way, aligning with students' digital fluency and enhancing their understanding of poetic imagery and symbolism. Digital tools also create a new approach to poetic interpretation. The visualization of literary devices helps students move from general statements like "The poem speaks..." to more precise observations such as "This is seen in the line..., where the poet uses..." The poetic lines can become a continuous exploration, allowing multiple justified interpretations based on the text itself. In this way, close reading goes beyond simply identifying literary devices; it emphasizes understanding how these devices function within the overall structure of the poem.

At the same time, audio poetry supports interpretation through the analysis of voice, rhythm, and intonation. By listening to a performance, students not only understand the poem intellectually but also experience it emotionally. The strength and softness of word pronunciation, speech pace, and meaningful pauses guide students to focus on key words in the poem. Even a single emphasized word can completely alter the meaning of a poem.

This combination of visual and audio elements, made possible by digital tools, allows students to engage with poetry in a more immersive and interactive way, connecting textual analysis with emotional and performative understanding.

Audio poetry helps make literary elements, such as metaphors, rhetorical questions, irony, sarcasm and much clearer. It also clarifies dialect words, historical poetic texts, and the structure of verses. Through audio poetry, students can form a personal connection with the text. When the interpretation comes directly from the poet (for contemporary poets), students experience an authentic reading; when delivered by an actor, they encounter a dramatic interpretation. In both cases, students engage with the poem cognitively and emotionally, fostering appreciation for the language, its beauty, and its musical qualities, including rhyme, rhythm, and melody. While audio poetry does not eliminate the need for textual analysis, it enriches interpretation with emotional sensitivity and context.

On the other hand, the use of digital tools in teaching poetry can also present challenges. Interviews with teachers highlighted several obstacles during

lessons, the most significant being the lack of infrastructure and insufficient ability to use technological tools effectively during a poetry lesson. Approximately 75% of teachers (9 out of 12) identified these limitations as their primary challenge in teaching poetry with digital tools.

This indicates that while digital tools offer strong benefits for engagement, interpretation, and interactivity, their successful implementation depends heavily on teacher training and school resources.

The freedom to explore different poems beyond the textbook and to access historical and literary context beyond what is provided in the school text can sometimes lead to a loss of focus on the lesson’s objectives and hinder the development of the appropriate student competencies.

Additionally, when using digital tools, students may shift from deep, reflective reading to rapid consumption. According to Nicholas Carr (2010), digital environments encourage a scanning-based form of reading, where users move quickly from one text to another without pausing for depth. In such cases, students may lose the ability to imagine; they neither find the time to visualize nor develop personal interpretations because everything is presented through pre-prepared images before they engage individually with the poem.

This phenomenon was observed when students were asked to imagine *Inferno*. Most of them had the same visualization, heavily influenced by pre-made videos found on YouTube, rather than creating their own imaginative interpretation, even though the verse text by Dante Alighieri was available. This illustrates one of the potential pitfalls of relying too heavily on digital tools without guiding students in reflective and imaginative engagement with poetry. Students may fail to analyze poetry at the aesthetic and semantic levels, reducing it instead to images or isolated quotes. This tendency is observable even on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, where many young users post not their emotional responses or deeper understanding of poetry, but disconnected verses or quotes from the original text. Neurocognitive studies suggest that the way one reads directly influences the brain structures activated during comprehension. As Maryanne Wolf (2007) emphasizes, the human brain is not biologically prewired for reading; this ability develops through sustained practice. Digital reading, characterized by multitasking, frequent interruptions, and engagement with hypertexts, reduces the capacity for sustained concentration and critical analysis. Consequently, the reader may understand the text at an informational level but struggle with interpretive comprehension.

Reading poetry purely at the informational level can lead to what Nicholas Carr (2010) calls the “illusion of understanding.” Students may feel they comprehend the text when reading quickly, but they do not process it critically. This illusion is reinforced by digital practices that reward speed and volume

of consumed information rather than depth of reflection, interpretation, and analysis. Another challenge highlighted by teachers is the potential dependency on technology when integrating digital tools in poetry lessons. Overreliance on automated tools can replace critical interpretation with mechanical analysis, preventing poetry from being experienced emotionally and intellectually.

Moreover, exploring poetry through digital tools can lead students to lose interest in authorship, the biographical and contextual connections of poetry, and its historical and literary background. Even when students attempt individual interpretation, overuse or misuse of AI can produce insensitive, mechanical analyses that merely replicate existing interpretations instead of fostering authentic engagement with the poem. In summary, while digital tools offer significant opportunities for engagement and interactivity, they also pose risks to deep comprehension, critical thinking, emotional connection, and the cultivation of literary sensibilities if not carefully guided.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

Observation of both classes showed that interactivity was greater in the experimental group where digital tools were used. Even students who were not particularly strong in interpreting poetry could participate effectively because they were skilled with technology and could contribute through digital tools. Despite a slight difference in interpretation scores, the teacher's live interpretation remained more emotionally engaging and empathetic than pre-recorded interpretations on YouTube.

While digital tools can enhance understanding of poetry, their use alone does not guarantee deeper interpretive engagement. The teacher's interpretation in the classroom continues to be the most impactful. Digital tools should serve the educational goals of the teacher, support the development of various student competencies, and enrich the learning experience, but they cannot replace human interpretation cultivated in a poetic environment.

Poetry remains a slow, reflective act of reading that requires direct engagement to evoke emotional responses in students. The main challenge for teachers is not to avoid digital tools—this is impossible in today's context—but to educate young readers to develop emotional sensitivity, critical thinking, and subjective interpretation in the digital age. Accordingly, this study concludes that poetry teaching should adopt a hybrid approach, combining technological elements with the teacher's interpretive guidance.

This study is not exhaustive but sheds light on the perspectives of different literature teachers regarding technology use in the classroom. Teachers were inclined to incorporate technology in lessons, but this must be guided by the

teacher rather than leaving students entirely free to explore poetry digitally. Observing two groups using different teaching tools, with one participating in the social experiment, and following multiple literature lessons to examine teacher-student interaction with and without digital tools, led to the conclusion that teaching poetry with digital tools can be beneficial but is insufficient on its own. Emotional engagement and deep interpretive understanding cannot be created solely through technological means.

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Interactive learning in Albanian language and literature: the role of digital tools

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Abstract: The integration of digital tools in education is transforming Albanian Language and Literature instruction, promoting interactive learning and enhancing student motivation. This study explores how digital tools can enhance student engagement in Albanian language and literature classes for lower secondary students (grades 6–9). It focuses on game-based learning platforms such as Blooket and Kahoot, online instruction through Google Classroom, and digital storytelling activities created with Canva.

To examine the impact of digital tools on student engagement, a mixed-method approach was used, combining a theoretical review of digital pedagogies with a quantitative survey of students. The survey collected data on learners’ perceptions of engagement, motivation, interaction, and enjoyment during lessons using these digital tools, providing both conceptual insights and empirical evidence of students’ experiences.

Results indicate that teacher-designed digital games and storytelling activities positively influence students’ attitudes toward learning. Students reported increased interest, participation, and enjoyment in lessons, demonstrating that digital tools can make learning more interactive, motivating, and enjoyable.

The study recommends that teachers continue designing tailored digital activities, integrate them into lesson planning, and ensure alignment with the curriculum while managing instructional time effectively.

Its expected contribution is to provide practical guidance for teachers and educational leaders on using digital tools to support student-centered teaching and foster a more engaging learning environment in Albanian language and literature classes.

Keywords: *Albanian language and literature, digital tools, game-based learning, student-centered learning.*

1. Introduction

Education shaped by digital technology has transformed how teaching and learning happen globally. For Albanian Language and Literature in lower secondary grades - six through nine - digital resources open paths to more interaction and learner-focused approaches. Often, such subjects rely heavily on textbooks and teacher-led instruction.

While these remain essential, it's clear they sometimes fail to capture full student attention. Engagement lags when lessons stay fixed in traditional formats. Active participation does not automatically follow from lectures or assigned readings. Learning deepens when students do more than just listen or memorize. Shifts toward dynamic classroom experiences matter especially now. Interest grows stronger if learners become part of the process. New tools offer chances to reshape old patterns without removing core content.

Change doesn't mean replacing everything - it means adding thoughtfully. Learning gains energy when classrooms include platforms such as Blooket or Kahoot, not just because they entertain, but since they spark curiosity through play. Tools like Google Classroom offer structure, yet still leave space for collaboration, while applications including Canva turn assignments into personal projects, especially during tasks involving digital narratives. Rather than staying passive, students begin shaping ideas actively once technology enters the lesson flow. Interactive quizzes emerge naturally, online debates gain momentum, multimedia finds its place in daily routines, besides prompting pupils to craft original digital tales. Engagement shifts subtly - students lean in, speak up, stay involved.

What happens, though, when these methods meet the study of Albanian Language and Literature? Behind screen interactions lies potential: deeper involvement, sharper focus, increased drive to explore texts. This inquiry examines both foundational theories about tech use in education and actual student experiences. Insight grows by viewing digital adoption not as a trend, but as a chance - to reshape learning so it feels meaningful, immersive, perhaps even enjoyable.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do digital tools influence student engagement and motivation in Albanian Language and Literature classes for grades 6–9?
2. How do students perceive the use of game-based learning platforms and digital storytelling activities in improving their learning experience?

2. Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining theoretical analysis with quantitative data collection.

First, a review of relevant literature was conducted to examine key concepts related to digital pedagogy, student-centered learning, and game-based learning. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding how digital tools can enhance engagement and interaction in language and literature education.

Second, a quantitative survey was administered to lower secondary students (grades 6–9) who experienced lessons incorporating digital tools. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions using a Likert scale to measure students’ perceptions of engagement, motivation, interaction, and enjoyment during digitally supported lessons.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods to identify trends in students’ responses. The combination of theoretical review and empirical data provides a comprehensive understanding of the impact of digital tools on student engagement in Albanian Language and Literature classes.

3. Literature Review

The rapid development of digital technologies has brought significant changes to educational systems across the globe, influencing not only how knowledge is delivered but also how it is constructed and experienced by learners. In recent years, the integration of digital tools into classroom instruction has shifted from being an optional enhancement to an essential component of effective teaching and learning. This transformation is particularly relevant in language and literature education, where the development of reading comprehension, interpretation, creativity, and communication skills requires active engagement rather than passive reception.

In the context of Albanian Language and Literature education at the lower secondary level (grades 6–9), the integration of digital tools is still in its early stages. Based on classroom practices and observations, instruction often remains largely teacher-centered, relying heavily on textbooks, explanation, and written exercises. While such approaches provide necessary structure and ensure curriculum coverage, they may limit opportunities for student interaction, creativity, and deeper engagement with literary texts. In my view, this creates a noticeable gap between students’ everyday digital experiences and their classroom learning environment.

Digital tools offer a promising way to bridge this gap. Platforms that incorporate interactive quizzes, collaborative activities, and multimedia storytelling can transform traditional lessons into more dynamic and participatory experiences. The value of these tools lies not only in increasing engagement but also in creating opportunities for students to take a more active role in their learning process. When students are encouraged to explore, create, and interact, their relationship with language and literature becomes more meaningful and personal.

This literature review explores key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies related to digital pedagogy, student engagement, motivation, game-based learning, digital storytelling, and online learning environments. It also reflects on how these perspectives can be applied within the Albanian educational context, aiming to provide a conceptual foundation for enhancing interactive learning in language and literature classrooms.

3.1. Theoretical Foundations of Digital Learning

The integration of digital tools in education is strongly supported by constructivist learning theory, which views learning as an active and dynamic process. According to Piaget (1970), learners construct knowledge through interaction with their environment, while Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural context in cognitive development. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is particularly relevant in digital learning environments. It suggests that students learn most effectively when they are supported through guidance and interaction. Digital tools can serve as effective scaffolding mechanisms by providing immediate feedback, guided tasks, and opportunities for collaboration. For example, interactive exercises and online discussions allow students to test their understanding and refine their thinking in real time.

What makes digital tools especially valuable in this context is their ability to make learning more visible and responsive. Unlike traditional methods, where feedback is often delayed, digital platforms provide instant responses that help students recognize their mistakes and improve continuously. This not only supports learning but also builds confidence.

Student-centered learning, closely linked to constructivism, emphasizes the active role of learners in constructing knowledge. In such environments, the teacher becomes a facilitator rather than the sole source of information. Digital tools naturally support this shift by allowing students to explore content independently, collaborate with peers, and create their own interpretations of literary texts (Jonassen, 1999).

However, it is important to note that simply introducing technology does not automatically result in student-centered learning. In my opinion, the

effectiveness of digital tools depends largely on how they are used. Without thoughtful integration, there is a risk that technology may simply replicate traditional teaching methods in a digital format rather than transforming them.

3.2 Self-Determination Theory and Motivation

Motivation is widely recognized as a key factor influencing student engagement and academic achievement. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), provides a useful framework for understanding how motivation can be enhanced in educational settings. According to this theory, three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—must be satisfied in order to foster intrinsic motivation.

Digital tools can support these needs in meaningful ways. For instance, students experience autonomy when they are given the freedom to choose topics, formats, or approaches in digital storytelling projects. They develop a sense of competence through immediate feedback in quizzes and games, which allows them to monitor their progress. At the same time, online collaboration and discussion platforms strengthen relatedness by encouraging interaction with peers.

One of the most noticeable benefits of digital tools is their impact on student motivation. Activities that incorporate elements of choice, creativity, and interaction tend to generate greater interest and participation compared to traditional exercises. When students are motivated, they are more willing to engage with complex texts, express their ideas, and persist in challenging tasks.

Nevertheless, motivation should not be driven solely by external rewards such as points or rankings. As highlighted by Ryan and Deci (2020), intrinsic motivation—where students engage in learning for its own sake—is more sustainable and meaningful. Therefore, digital tools should be used in ways that promote curiosity, exploration, and personal expression rather than simply competition.

3.3 Digital Natives and 21st-Century Skills

The concept of “digital natives,” introduced by Prensky (2001), suggests that modern students are accustomed to technology and digital interaction from an early age. While this idea has been subject to criticism, it still reflects an important reality: students today are highly familiar with digital environments and often expect similar experiences in their education.

This creates both a challenge and an opportunity for educators. On one hand, traditional teaching methods may appear less engaging to students who are used to interactive digital content. On the other hand, integrating digital tools

into the classroom can make learning more relevant and aligned with students' everyday experiences.

In addition, contemporary education increasingly emphasizes the development of 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Digital tools play a crucial role in supporting these competencies. For example, students can collaborate on shared documents, create multimedia presentations, and engage in discussions that extend beyond the classroom.

In language and literature education, these skills are particularly important. Students are not only expected to understand texts but also to interpret, analyze, and express their ideas effectively. In my opinion, digital tools can significantly enhance these processes by providing new ways for students to interact with texts and share their perspectives.

4. Digital Tools in Language and Literature Education

4.1 Game-Based Learning

Game-based learning (GBL) has gained increasing attention as an effective approach to enhancing student engagement and motivation. By incorporating elements such as points, challenges, and competition, gamification transforms learning activities into interactive experiences (Deterding et al., 2011).

Research indicates that game-based learning can improve participation and learning outcomes (Hamari et al., 2014). In language and literature classrooms, digital games can be used to reinforce grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, as well as to assess understanding of literary texts.

Based on my observations, one of the main advantages of game-based learning is its ability to involve all students, including those who are usually less active in traditional lessons. The interactive and competitive nature of games creates a more inclusive environment where students feel encouraged to participate.

At the same time, it is important to use gamification carefully. If the focus shifts too much toward competition or rewards, students may become more interested in winning than in learning. Therefore, in my view, game-based activities should always be clearly connected to learning objectives and designed to promote understanding rather than superficial engagement.

4.2 Digital Storytelling

Digital storytelling is widely recognized as a powerful tool for enhancing creativity and engagement in language and literature education. By combining text with images, audio, and video, it allows students to express their ideas in diverse and meaningful ways (Robin, 2008).

In literature classes, digital storytelling can be used to reinterpret texts, explore characters, or create alternative narratives. This process encourages students to think critically and engage deeply with the material. From my perspective, this is one of the most effective ways to make literature more accessible and interesting for students.

Research shows that digital storytelling improves writing skills, creativity, and self-expression (Sadik, 2008). It also supports different learning styles by integrating visual and auditory elements. Students who may struggle with traditional writing tasks often find it easier to express themselves through multimedia formats.

In addition, digital storytelling promotes collaboration. Students can work together to develop ideas, create content, and present their projects. In my opinion, this collaborative aspect is particularly valuable, as it helps students develop communication skills and learn from one another.

However, successful implementation requires careful guidance. Without clear structure and objectives, students may focus more on technical aspects than on content. Therefore, teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that digital storytelling activities remain focused on learning goals while still allowing for creativity.

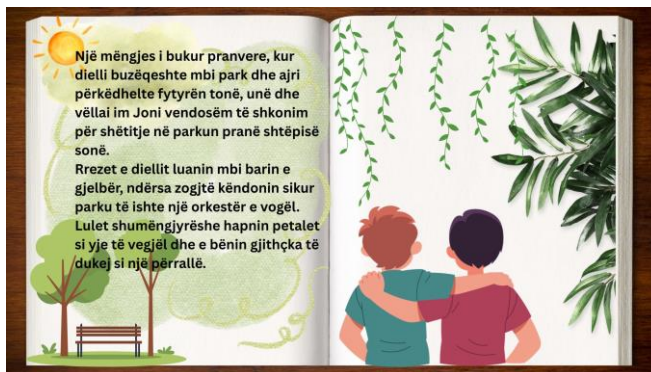


Image 1: Canva Digital Storytelling

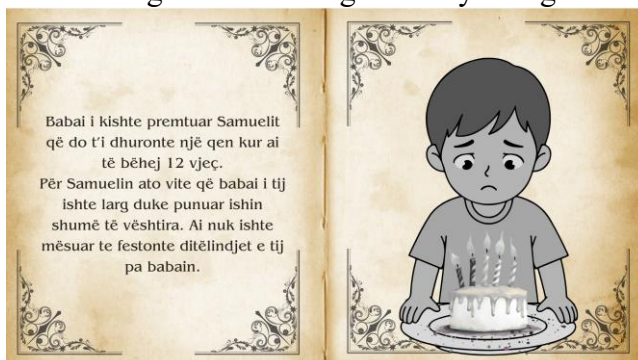


Image 2: Canva Digital Storytelling

4.3 Online Learning Platforms and Blended Learning

The increasing use of online learning platforms has become a defining feature of contemporary education, particularly in the context of digital transformation. Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as Google Classroom, Moodle, and similar platforms, provide structured environments where teachers can organize content, communicate with students, and manage assessment processes efficiently. These platforms facilitate the distribution of learning materials, assignment submission, and continuous feedback, thereby extending the learning process beyond the physical classroom.

Blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with online components, represents a pedagogical model that leverages the strengths of both traditional and digital approaches. According to Garrison and Vaughan (2008), blended learning promotes deeper and more meaningful learning experiences by integrating direct instruction with online interaction and reflection. This model allows for greater flexibility, enabling students to access materials at their own pace while still benefiting from in-person guidance and support.

Online platforms play a crucial role in supporting continuous and self-directed learning. Teachers can provide supplementary resources such as videos, readings, and interactive tasks, while students can revisit materials, ask questions, and participate in discussions outside of classroom hours. In my view, this extended access to learning resources is particularly valuable in language and literature education, where comprehension and interpretation often require time for reflection.

Empirical studies suggest that blended learning environments enhance student autonomy, responsibility, and academic performance (Means et al., 2013). In literature education specifically, online discussion forums create opportunities for more thoughtful and inclusive participation. Students who may feel hesitant to express their ideas in a traditional classroom setting often find it easier to contribute in an online environment, where they have more time to organize their thoughts.

However, the effectiveness of online platforms depends on several critical factors. Digital literacy skills, both for teachers and students, are essential for meaningful engagement. Additionally, reliable technological infrastructure and equitable access to devices and internet connectivity remain significant challenges. Without addressing these issues, the potential benefits of LMS platforms may not be fully realized. Therefore, careful planning, clear guidelines, and ongoing support are necessary to ensure effective implementation.

5. Student Engagement and Interactive Learning

Student engagement is widely recognized as a key determinant of academic success and meaningful learning. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

- Behavioral engagement refers to students’ active participation in academic activities, including attendance, effort, and involvement in tasks.
- Emotional engagement involves students’ interest, enjoyment, and sense of belonging within the learning environment.
- Cognitive engagement reflects the degree of investment in learning, including the use of strategies, critical thinking, and persistence in challenging tasks.

Digital tools have the potential to influence all three dimensions of engagement in significant ways. For example, game-based activities can increase behavioral participation by encouraging students to take part actively in lessons. Digital storytelling fosters emotional engagement by allowing students to connect personally with content and express their creativity. Meanwhile, online discussions and collaborative platforms promote cognitive engagement by encouraging reflection, analysis, and deeper understanding.

Research indicates that interactive digital environments can enhance attention, increase motivation, and reduce boredom among students (Schindler et al., 2017). From my own perspective, one of the most noticeable effects of digital integration is the shift in classroom dynamics—from passive listening to active participation. When students are given opportunities to interact, create, and collaborate, they become more invested in the learning process.

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that engagement is not determined by technology alone. As several scholars argue, the effectiveness of digital tools depends largely on pedagogical design (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Simply introducing technology without clear instructional goals may result in superficial engagement rather than meaningful learning. Teachers must carefully design activities that integrate digital tools in ways that promote critical thinking and purposeful interaction.

6. Challenges and Considerations

Despite the numerous benefits associated with digital integration, several challenges must be considered to ensure effective implementation in educational settings.

One of the primary challenges is teacher training and professional development. Educators need not only technical skills but also pedagogical knowledge to integrate digital tools effectively into their teaching practices (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Without adequate training, there is a risk that digital tools may be underutilized or used in ways that do not enhance learning.

Another important consideration is time management. Designing and implementing digital activities often requires additional preparation time, particularly in subjects such as language and literature, where tasks must be carefully aligned with learning objectives. From my perspective, this can be a significant barrier for teachers, especially when combined with existing workload demands.

The issue of the digital divide also remains a critical concern. Unequal access to devices, internet connectivity, and technological resources can create disparities among students, limiting the effectiveness of digital learning initiatives (Selwyn, 2016). Ensuring equitable access is therefore essential for inclusive education.

Additionally, the risk of cognitive overload must be addressed. According to Mayer’s Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (2009), excessive use of multimedia elements can overwhelm students and hinder learning. This highlights the importance of designing digital content that is clear, focused, and pedagogically meaningful.

These challenges do not diminish the value of digital tools but rather emphasize the need for balanced and thoughtful integration. Technology should complement, not replace, traditional teaching methods. A well-balanced approach allows educators to combine the strengths of both digital and conventional strategies, ensuring that learning objectives remain central.

7. Digital Tools in the Albanian Educational Context

In recent years, educational reforms in Albania have increasingly emphasized the development of digital competence and the adoption of interactive teaching methodologies. Despite these efforts, the integration of digital tools in Albanian Language and Literature classrooms remains relatively limited, and empirical research in this area is still emerging.

Existing studies and classroom experiences suggest that students respond positively to technology-enhanced instruction, particularly when activities are interactive, creative, and collaborative. From my perspective, this positive response reflects students’ familiarity with digital environments and their preference for more engaging learning experiences.

The cultural importance of literature in Albanian education makes the integration of digital tools especially relevant. Literature is not only a subject of study but also a means of preserving cultural identity and promoting critical thinking. Digital storytelling, in particular, offers a unique opportunity to connect traditional literary analysis with modern forms of expression. By allowing students to reinterpret texts through multimedia, teachers can create meaningful connections between past and present, as well as between formal education and students' everyday lives.

However, the successful integration of digital tools in this context requires careful consideration of local conditions, including infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum design. In my opinion, one of the key challenges is ensuring that digital innovation is accompanied by pedagogical support and clear educational objectives.

Furthermore, there is a need for more empirical research focusing specifically on the Albanian context. Future studies should explore students' perceptions, measure the impact of digital tools on engagement and achievement, and identify best practices for implementation in language and literature classrooms.

8. Conclusion of Literature Review

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that digital tools have significant potential to enhance student engagement, motivation, and interaction in language and literature education. Grounded in constructivist theory and Self-Determination Theory, digital integration supports key aspects of effective learning, including autonomy, competence, and collaboration.

Game-based learning promotes active participation and enjoyment, digital storytelling fosters creativity and deeper textual understanding, and online learning platforms extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom while encouraging communication and reflection.

At the same time, the effectiveness of digital tools depends on thoughtful pedagogical integration, adequate teacher training, and careful consideration of contextual challenges. From my perspective, the goal should not be to replace traditional teaching methods, but to enrich them by incorporating digital elements that enhance learning experiences.

In the context of Albanian Language and Literature education, digital tools offer promising opportunities to transform traditional classrooms into interactive, student-centered environments. By aligning technological innovation with pedagogical principles, educators can create meaningful learning experiences that prepare students for the demands of the modern world while preserving the cultural and educational value of literature.

9. Results and Data Analysis

Participant Overview

The study involved a total of 35 lower secondary students from grades 6 to 9. The distribution across grade levels was uneven, with a higher representation from grades 6 and 7. Specifically, 13 students (37%) were from grade 6, 14 students (40%) from grade 7, 5 students (14%) from grade 8, and 3 students (9%) from grade 9.

Although the sample size is relatively small, it provides a useful snapshot of student perceptions regarding the integration of digital tools in Albanian Language and Literature classes. From a practical perspective, the higher participation of younger students may also reflect greater enthusiasm or availability, which is worth considering when interpreting the results.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure students' perceptions, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Given the limited sample size ($N = 35$), the analysis focuses primarily on descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentage distributions.

Student Engagement

The findings reveal a consistently high level of student engagement associated with the use of digital tools. Mean scores ranged from 4.26 to 4.40, with more than 80% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with all engagement-related statements.

Students reported that digital activities make lessons more interesting (86%), increase participation (80%), and improve attention (83%). Notably, 85% of students agreed that digital games help them stay focused, representing the highest level of agreement within this category.

These results suggest that digital tools contribute significantly to both behavioral and emotional engagement. This is particularly important in language and literature classes, where maintaining student attention can often be challenging. The interactive nature of digital activities appears to reduce passive learning and encourage active participation.

Student Motivation

Motivation emerged as one of the strongest dimensions in the study. All items in this category received high mean scores, ranging from 4.23 to 4.54. The highest mean score ($M = 4.54$) was recorded for students' enjoyment of digital quizzes, with 91% expressing agreement.

Additionally, 86% of students reported feeling more motivated when digital tools were used, while 83% found digital storytelling enjoyable. A slightly lower, yet still strong, percentage (78%) indicated that students look forward to digital lessons.

These findings clearly demonstrate that digital tools have a powerful impact on intrinsic motivation. When learning activities are perceived as enjoyable and interactive, students are more likely to engage willingly rather than out of obligation. This shift in attitude is particularly valuable in subjects like literature, where student interest plays a key role in comprehension and interpretation.

Interaction and Collaboration

The results related to interaction and collaboration are positive, though slightly more moderate compared to engagement and motivation. Mean scores ranged from 4.02 to 4.20, with agreement levels between 71% and 80%.

Students indicated that digital tools improve communication with teachers (80%) and support collaborative learning (74%). Furthermore, 77% agreed that online discussions enhance their understanding, while 71% felt comfortable sharing ideas in digital environments.

Findings suggest that digital tools facilitate social interaction, although their impact may depend on how they are implemented. This slightly lower score may reflect students' varying levels of confidence in expressing ideas, particularly in online settings. It also highlights the importance of structured and guided interaction to maximize the benefits of collaborative tools.

Learning and Understanding

Students reported strong positive perceptions regarding the impact of digital tools on learning and understanding. Mean scores ranged from 4.25 to 4.49, with agreement levels exceeding 80% across all items.

The highest score in this category was associated with immediate feedback ($M = 4.49$; 89%), indicating that students value timely responses to their work. Additionally, 85% of students agreed that they learn more effectively through digital tools, while 83% reported improved grammar understanding through digital games.

Digital storytelling was also perceived as beneficial, with 80% of students indicating that it deepens their understanding of literary texts.

Findings are particularly significant, as they demonstrate that digital tools are not only engaging but also pedagogically effective. The combination of interactivity and feedback appears to support both comprehension and retention.

Overall Perception

Students expressed overwhelmingly positive attitudes toward the continued use of digital tools. The highest level of agreement (94%) was recorded for the statement that digital tools should continue to be used in Albanian language classes.

Furthermore, 91% of students indicated a preference for blended learning, while 89% agreed that digital tools make learning more enjoyable. A strong majority (86%) also recommended the use of digital tools in other subjects.

Results reflect a clear shift in student expectations. Learners increasingly value interactive and flexible learning environments, and they recognize the benefits of combining traditional and digital approaches.

Overall Statistical Summary

The overall mean score across all Likert-scale items was **M = 4.34**, indicating a high level of agreement with the positive impact of digital tools. Importantly, no item scored below a mean of 4.0, suggesting consistent positivity across all measured dimensions.

This consistency strengthens the reliability of the findings, even within a small sample. From my perspective, such uniformity in responses suggests that the perceived benefits of digital tools are not isolated but rather broadly experienced by students.

Considerations Regarding Sample Size

Despite the positive results, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The relatively small sample size ($N = 35$) and the uneven distribution across grade levels limit the generalizability of the findings.

In particular, the lower representation of grades 8 and 9 makes it difficult to draw conclusions about older students. Future research should aim to include larger and more balanced samples in order to provide more robust statistical analysis and enable comparisons between grade levels.

10. Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that digital tools positively influence student engagement, motivation, and learning in Albanian Language and Literature classes.

Digital Tools and Engagement

The high levels of engagement observed in the study align with constructivist principles (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasize active participation in learning. Digital activities appear to transform students from passive recipients into active participants.

This shift is one of the most important outcomes of digital integration. When students are actively involved, they are more likely to develop deeper understanding and maintain attention throughout the lesson.

Digital Tools and Motivation

The strong motivational impact observed in the study supports Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Digital tools appear to fulfill key psychological needs:

- Autonomy, through choice and active involvement
- Competence, through immediate feedback
- Relatedness, through interaction and collaboration

These findings are consistent with previous research on gamification (Hamari et al., 2014). Motivation is not just an additional benefit but a central factor in improving learning outcomes.

Digital Storytelling and Cognitive Engagement

The results confirm that digital storytelling enhances deeper engagement with literary texts. Students are not only understanding content but also interpreting and recreating it. This represents a meaningful shift toward higher-order thinking. By allowing students to connect texts with their own ideas and experiences, digital storytelling promotes critical and creative thinking.

Immediate Feedback and Learning

The importance of immediate feedback highlights the effectiveness of digital tools in supporting learning processes. This finding aligns with Mayer’s (2009) theory, which emphasizes the role of timely feedback in knowledge retention. This is one of the most practical advantages of digital tools. Students are able to learn from their mistakes instantly, which makes the learning process more efficient and responsive.

Blended Learning Preference

The strong preference for blended learning suggests that students value a balanced approach. Rather than replacing traditional methods, digital tools should complement them. This supports Garrison and Vaughan’s (2008) model and reinforces the idea that effective teaching involves combining different strategies. In my view, this balance is essential for maintaining both structure and innovation in the classroom.

Limitations

The study is limited by its small sample size, uneven grade distribution, and reliance on self-reported data. While the findings are consistent, they should be interpreted with caution. Future studies should incorporate larger samples and objective measures of academic performance to strengthen validity.

11. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that digital tools play a significant role in enhancing student engagement, motivation, and learning effectiveness in Albanian Language and Literature classes.

The findings indicate that digital integration:

- Increases participation and attention
- Enhances intrinsic motivation
- Supports deeper understanding of texts
- Improves interaction and communication

Students show strong support for the continued use of digital tools and express a clear preference for blended learning environments. Digital tools, when used thoughtfully, can transform traditional classrooms into more interactive and student-centered spaces without losing the core value of literary education.

12. Recommendations

For Teachers

- Integrate digital games regularly for revision and assessment
- Use digital storytelling to enhance literary analysis
- Maintain a balance between traditional and digital methods
- Clearly align digital activities with learning objectives
- Provide structured guidance to ensure effective use

For School Administrators

- Offer continuous professional development in digital pedagogy
- Ensure access to reliable technological infrastructure
- Promote collaboration and sharing of best practices among teachers

For Future Research

- Conduct studies with larger and more representative samples
- Compare results across different grade levels
- Include objective measures of academic performance
- Examine long-term effects of digital integration

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Teaching the senses in a digital world: reclaiming smell, touch and materiality in literary education

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Abstract: In digitally mediated classrooms, literary education increasingly unfolds on luminous screens, where meaning is seen, processed, and interpreted, yet rarely touched, inhaled, or physically inhabited. While digital environments expand access and connectivity, they tend to privilege visual and cognitive modes of engagement, leaving aside the sensory textures through which literary experience is often most deeply formed.

This paper proposes a reconfiguration of literary pedagogy through a sensory-oriented framework that reintroduces smell, touch, and material artefacts as active mediators of interpretation. Grounded in a qualitative, practice-based methodology, the study examines a series of multisensory classroom interventions implemented in literature and media courses, including scent-based prompts, tactile objects, and engagements with material culture, applied to texts ranging from Romantic poetry to modernist prose. Data is drawn from student-generated responses, guided activities, and classroom observation.

Findings suggest that the inclusion of non-visual sensory modalities expands the interpretive field by fostering associative thinking, enhancing memory retention, and enabling students to approach texts through layered, cross-modal connections. Meaning emerges not only as analysis, but as a form of situated experience, shaped by contact, proximity, and sensory recall.

The paper contributes to ongoing discussions on educational innovation by advancing a model of sensory-augmented literary pedagogy that brings digital and material modes of learning into productive dialogue. It argues that the future of literary education lies not solely in technological adaptation, but in restoring the sensory dimensions of knowledge, where interpretation becomes not only an act of reading, but also an act of sensing.

The study further supports the integration of sensory and material scaffolding into digital literary pedagogy as a means of preserving interpretive depth in technologically mediated learning environments.

Keywords: *pedagogical sensorium; literary education; materiality; multisensory learning; digital education*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In contemporary higher education, reading increasingly unfolds on luminous surfaces that do more than display texts - they reorganise how those texts are accessed, processed, and ultimately remembered. Digital platforms have rendered reading immediate, portable, and continuously available, placing the text within constant reach. Yet this expansion of access is accompanied by a quieter transformation: attention itself is being reconfigured. Reading now often takes place between notifications, tabs, and interruptions, within a dispersed rhythm that privileges movement across texts rather than sustained engagement.

Within this digital ecology, reading is shaped by three interrelated tendencies: the predominance of visuality, the acceleration of engagement, and the fragmentation of textual experience. Screen-based environments encourage scanning rather than lingering, directing the reader's gaze toward keywords, hyperlinks, and visually salient cues instead of toward the slower unfolding of meaning across sentences and pages. At the same time, the logic of speed (embedded in scrolling, clicking, and continuous access) recasts reading as a practice of immediacy, where efficiency may take precedence over interpretive depth. As a consequence, fragmentation becomes structural: texts are encountered in segments, windows, and layered interfaces rather than as continuous, materially bounded wholes.

This transformation becomes particularly evident in the reading of descriptive and atmospheric literature, where sensory density, whether in the vegetal textures of Romantic poetry or the industrial environments of Victorian prose, is at risk of being flattened into visual abstraction.

These developments are accompanied not only by changes in reading pace and structure, but also by a gradual attenuation of the sensory conditions that traditionally support orientation within the text. The tactile singularity of the page - its weight, texture, resistance, and spatial fixity - is replaced by a standardised interface that minimises variation in touch and navigation. The material heterogeneity of the book, including its thickness, edges, and the subtle geography of its pages, gives way to a smooth, uniform surface. What is altered, therefore, is not only the medium of reading, but the embodied framework through which readers locate themselves within the text and construct meaning over time.

Empirical research has begun to capture these transformations through what is often termed the *screen inferiority effect*, namely the recurrent finding that comprehension, recall, and critical engagement tend to be lower when reading from screens than from print (Mangen, Walgermo, & Brønnick, 2013; Delgado et al., 2018). Studies on the *digital-versus-paper comprehension gap* further suggest that readers of digital texts frequently overestimate their understanding, engage in more superficial processing, and retain less information over time. Such differences point not only to cognitive factors, but also to the diminished role of material and sensory cues - spatial orientation, tactile interaction, and physical progression - which in print contexts support memory, coherence, and interpretive stability.

Taken together, these developments indicate that the transition from page to screen is not merely a technical shift of medium, but a reconfiguration of the conditions under which meaning is produced and retained. If literary education is to remain responsive to contemporary forms of learning, it must address not only the cognitive implications of digitalisation, but also its sensory consequences. The challenge, therefore, is not simply to integrate digital tools into pedagogical practice, but to reimagine how reading might once again become an encounter - one in which meaning is not only processed and interpreted, but also situated, textured, and perceptually anchored.

This shift calls for renewed attention to what may be described as a *pedagogical sensorium*: the constellation of sensory and material conditions through which learning is experienced and meaning takes form. In the present study, this concept functions not as a metaphorical gesture, but as an operational framework guiding both pedagogical design and data interpretation. The tendencies outlined above will not be reiterated as a general diagnostic in what follows; rather, they serve as a conceptual baseline against which sensory interventions and reading practices are examined.

1.2 Research Problem

Building on these transformations, despite the intrinsic richness of literary texts as multisensory artefacts, capable of evoking texture, atmosphere, scent, and spatial depth, contemporary reading practices in digital environments tend to operate in a largely disembodied mode. This creates a fundamental mismatch between the sensory potential of literature and the conditions under which it is increasingly accessed and interpreted. The issue, therefore, is not simply one of medium, but of alignment: a divergence between what literature affords and what current reading environments sustain.

Where literary experience has traditionally relied on a dynamic interplay between cognition, perception, and material interaction, digitally mediated reading frequently narrows this interplay to visual processing and rapid

navigation. The text remains accessible, yet its experiential density is reduced: contact gives way to access, immersion to movement, and sensory orientation to interface logic. As a result, the interpretive field contracts, particularly in relation to those cues that operate through proximity, texture, atmosphere, and sensory memory.

This contraction has implications that extend beyond comprehension. The displacement of material and sensory anchors affects how readers situate themselves within the text, how they form associative links, and how meaning is stabilised over time. Under such conditions, reading risks becoming a predominantly cognitive operation, increasingly detached from the perceptual and embodied dimensions through which interpretation is deepened and sustained.

Against this background, the present study addresses the following problem: how can literary pedagogy respond to the sensory reduction of digital reading without disengaging from the technological frameworks that structure contemporary education? More specifically, it investigates how the sensory dimensions of literary experience can be reactivated within digital contexts, and how such reactivation may reshape interpretation, engagement, and knowledge formation.

In approaching this problem, the study explores the possibility of reconfiguring digital reading through the activation of a *pedagogical sensorium* - understood as a structured reintegration of sensory, material, and perceptual dimensions into the processes through which literary meaning is constructed.

1.3 Objectives

In response to this problem, this study aims to conceptualise reading as an embodied and sensory practice that extends beyond visual and cognitive processing, foregrounding the role of perception, materiality, and multisensory engagement in the construction of meaning. Building on this premise, it seeks to develop a pedagogical model of sensory-augmented reading that is adaptable to digital learning environments and capable of reactivating those dimensions of literary experience that are often attenuated in screen-based contexts.

At the same time, the study investigates the impact of sensory-based instructional strategies on key aspects of the reading process, with particular attention to interpretation, engagement, and memory. These are understood not as isolated outcomes, but as interdependent dimensions shaped by the conditions under which reading takes place and through which it is experienced.

1.4 Research Questions

Building on these objectives, the study is guided by the following interrelated research questions, which collectively map the conditions and effects of sensory engagement within digitally mediated literary education:

1. *How can the sensory dimensions of literary texts be activated within digital learning environments, and what forms might such activation take in pedagogical practice?*
2. *In what ways does sensory-oriented instruction influence students' interpretive processes, particularly in relation to depth, association, and meaning construction?*
3. *To what extent does the integration of sensory elements enhance student engagement and participation, and how are these forms of engagement sustained across different learning contexts?*
4. *How does sensory-based pedagogy support memory retention in literary study, particularly in relation to experience-based recall?*
5. *Finally, can digital platforms accommodate forms of embodied reading without reverting to exclusively material formats, and what pedagogical configurations are required to enable such a shift?*

By addressing these questions, the study situates itself within broader debates on innovation in digital education, responding directly to the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society.” Rather than approaching innovation solely in terms of technological advancement, the paper reframes it as a pedagogical and experiential challenge: how to design learning environments that sustain not only access and efficiency, but also sensory engagement, material awareness, and interpretive depth.

In this sense, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on digital transformation by proposing that the future of literary education depends on the integration of a *pedagogical sensorium*, a framework through which sensory, material, and perceptual dimensions of reading are deliberately reactivated within digital contexts. By bringing into dialogue digital pedagogy, embodied cognition, and sensory studies, the paper advances an approach to educational innovation that does not oppose technology, but seeks to reconfigure its use. It argues that digital platforms need not remain sites of sensory reduction, but can be reimaged as environments in which interpretive experience is expanded through carefully designed pedagogical interventions.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Paper vs Digital Reading: Cognitive Depth and Sensory Reduction

Extending the problem outlined above, the distinction between print and digital reading has been extensively examined in recent research, yet much of this scholarship reveals a persistent tension between efficiency and depth. While digital environments are frequently associated with accessibility and speed, empirical studies consistently indicate that these advantages may coincide with reduced comprehension, retention, and interpretive engagement. The issue, therefore, is not reducible to a simple opposition between two media, but involves a broader reconfiguration of how reading is cognitively and perceptually sustained.

One of the most widely discussed findings in this area is the so-called *screen inferiority effect*, which suggests that reading on screens leads to lower comprehension outcomes compared to print, particularly for longer or more complex texts. The experimental study conducted by Mangen, Walgermo, and Brønnick (2013) demonstrates that readers of print texts outperform digital readers in measures of narrative understanding and recall. Crucially, this difference cannot be explained solely by familiarity with the medium; rather, it points to the role of material and spatial cues, such as page layout, tactile feedback, and physical progression, in supporting cognitive mapping and orientation within the text.

These findings are reinforced by the meta-analysis conducted by Delgado et al. (2018), which confirms a systematic disadvantage for digital reading in terms of comprehension. Importantly, the authors note that this gap becomes more pronounced under time constraints, suggesting that digital environments may implicitly encourage faster, more superficial processing strategies. In this respect, speed and depth emerge not as complementary, but as potentially competing dimensions of reading practice.

At the same time, the cognitive differences between print and digital reading cannot be fully understood without considering metacognitive factors. Research has shown that readers tend to exhibit metacognitive overconfidence when engaging with digital texts, overestimating their level of understanding despite lower actual performance. This discrepancy between perceived and actual comprehension suggests that digital interfaces may generate an illusion of mastery, masking the effects of shallow processing and reducing the likelihood of rereading or reflective engagement.

Maryanne Wolf's work (2018) situates these developments within a broader transformation of the reading brain. She argues that deep reading - understood as sustained, inferential, and interpretive engagement - is not an automatic skill, but a cultivated cognitive practice that may weaken when reading habits are shaped by digital acceleration. From this perspective, the issue is not that digital reading is inherently deficient, but that it reorganises attention in ways

that privilege skimming, scanning, and rapid decision-making over slower, integrative forms of understanding.

Despite the strength of this body of research, an important limitation remains: the tendency to frame the print–digital distinction primarily in cognitive terms, often leaving the sensory and material dimensions of reading under-theorised. While studies acknowledge the role of tactile and spatial cues, these are rarely conceptualised as active components of meaning-making. As a result, reading risks being reduced to a question of comprehension metrics, without fully accounting for how materiality and sensory engagement contribute to interpretation, memory, and reader orientation.

This limitation becomes particularly significant in the context of literary education, where meaning is not only processed cognitively but also shaped through affective, spatial, and sensory associations. The present study builds on existing research by shifting the focus from comparison to reconfiguration: rather than asking whether digital reading is inferior to print, it examines how the sensory dimensions of reading might be reactivated within digital environments. In doing so, it introduces the possibility of a *pedagogical sensorium* in which embodied, material, and perceptual dimensions are not lost, but deliberately reintegrated into the act of reading.

2.2 Embodied Cognition and Sensory Reading

Extending this critique, the limitations identified in research on digital reading cannot be fully addressed within a purely cognitive framework. While studies on comprehension and attention reveal important differences between print and screen-based reading, they often leave unexamined a more fundamental dimension: the role of the body in meaning-making. Theories of embodied cognition provide a necessary corrective by positioning reading not as a purely mental or symbolic process, but as an activity grounded in sensory, perceptual, and motor experience.

From a phenomenological perspective, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s work remains foundational (**Merleau-Ponty, 1962**). His conception of perception as being-in-the-world through the lived body destabilises any strict separation between cognition and sensation. Reading, within this framework, is not an abstract decoding of signs, but a situated encounter in which the body participates in orienting, selecting, and structuring experience. Applied to literary contexts, this perspective suggests that meaning emerges not only from textual interpretation, but from the reader’s embodied engagement with the conditions of reading, conditions that are significantly altered in digital environments.

Cognitive linguistics further reinforces this position. Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor demonstrates that abstract thought is structured

through embodied schemas derived from physical experience (**Lakoff & Johnson, 1999**). Concepts such as depth, proximity, movement, or containment are not neutral descriptors, but extensions of bodily interaction with the world. In literary reading, these schemas underpin interpretive processes, enabling readers to construct meaning through spatial and sensory mappings. However, when reading environments minimise sensory variation, as is often the case in digital interfaces, these embodied anchors may become attenuated, narrowing the range of interpretive associations available to the reader.

Empirical research in cognitive science, particularly the work of Barsalou, extends these insights through the concept of perceptual symbol systems (**Barsalou, 2008**). According to this model, cognition is grounded in simulations of sensory and motor experience: understanding is achieved not through abstract representation alone, but through the partial reactivation of perceptual states. Within this framework, reading becomes a process of multisensory encoding, in which visual, tactile, and spatial cues contribute to the construction and retrieval of meaning. The standardisation of such cues in digital environments raises important questions about how effectively these simulations can be activated under conditions of reduced sensory input, and what forms of pedagogical intervention might compensate for this reduction. Closely related to this is the role of haptic and episodic memory in reading practices. Physical interaction with a text, i.e. turning pages, navigating spatially, registering weight and texture, generates memory traces that are not only cognitive but also sensory. These traces support orientation within the text and facilitate recall by linking information to embodied experience. In contrast, digital reading environments, which rely on uniform gestures and interfaces, may limit the diversity of such cues, affecting both memory retention and the reconstruction of textual pathways. What is diminished, therefore, is not simply tactile engagement, but the dynamic interplay between perception, memory, and meaning.

Anthropological approaches to materiality, particularly those advanced by Tim Ingold, further extend this perspective by reframing reading as a process of engagement with materials rather than with abstract content alone (**Ingold, 2007**). Ingold's emphasis on materials as active participants in meaning-making challenges the notion of the text as a stable, disembodied object. Instead, reading emerges as a relational practice shaped by the interaction between reader, text, and medium. From this perspective, the shift to digital reading entails not only a change in format, but a transformation in the ecology of materials through which knowledge is produced and experienced.

Despite the growing recognition of embodied cognition across disciplines, its pedagogical implications for literary reading in digital contexts remain

underdeveloped. Existing research tends either to prioritise cognitive outcomes or to theorise embodiment at a highly abstract level, without translating these insights into structured teaching practices. As a result, the potential of sensory engagement as a pedagogical resource remains insufficiently explored.

The present study addresses this gap by proposing a framework of sensory reading that integrates embodied cognition, multisensory encoding, and material interaction within digital learning environments. Rather than treating embodiment as incidental, it positions sensory engagement as a central mechanism through which interpretation, memory, and engagement are shaped. In doing so, it moves from theoretical description toward pedagogical operationalisation, advancing a model in which the sensory, material, and perceptual dimensions of reading are deliberately reintroduced as part of a reconfigured *pedagogical sensorium*.

2.3 The Materiality of the Book: Spatial Orientation and Tactile Meaning

Extending the embodied perspective outlined above, research on digital reading has often privileged cognitive performance, while a growing body of work suggests that materiality itself plays a constitutive role in how texts are understood, navigated, and remembered. The physical book, far from serving as a neutral container of content, provides what may be described as material anchors: stable sensory cues that support orientation, memory formation, and interpretive continuity. In this sense, reading unfolds not only through interpretation, but through an ongoing negotiation between body, surface, and spatial structure.

Mangen and Kuiken’s work is particularly relevant in this regard, as it emphasizes the role of tactile and spatial interaction in shaping the reading experience. Their studies suggest that engagement with print texts involves a form of tactile navigation in which readers continuously register their position within the text through physical cues such as page thickness, spatial location, and the kinaesthetic act of turning pages. These interactions contribute to the formation of spatial memory, enabling readers to recall not only what was read, but where it was encountered within the physical structure of the book. Such spatial embedding supports comprehension by creating a mental map of the text, linking content to position and progression, and grounding interpretation within a materially structured experience.

By contrast, digital reading environments tend to disrupt these material anchors. The uniformity of screens, combined with scrolling-based navigation, reduces the stability of spatial reference points and replaces them with fluid, often ephemeral positioning. While digital interfaces may simulate

pagination or progress indicators, such representations lack the tactile and kinaesthetic dimensions that characterize print reading. As a result, the reader's sense of orientation becomes less grounded in embodied interaction and more dependent on abstract or visual cues, which may prove less effective in supporting memory and interpretive coherence.

The significance of these differences becomes clearer when viewed through the lens of media materiality. N. Katherine Hayles challenges the assumption that content can be separated from its medium, arguing instead that meaning is always mediated by the material conditions of its inscription and transmission (**Hayles, 2012**). From this perspective, the shift from print to digital formats entails not only a change in access, but a transformation in how texts are experienced and processed. The materiality of the book, its resistance, texture, spatial boundedness, and gradual unfolding, contributes to a form of reading that is temporally and spatially anchored. Digital texts, by contrast, are marked by fluidity, mutability, and a relative absence of material resistance, which reconfigures the reader's engagement at both sensory and cognitive levels.

However, existing discussions of materiality often remain at the level of medium comparison, implicitly positioning print as inherently superior to digital formats. Such arguments risk overlooking the possibility that digital environments might be reconfigured to incorporate alternative forms of material anchoring. The issue, therefore, is not simply that digital reading lacks materiality, but that its material dimensions are differently structured, redistributed, and insufficiently theorised within pedagogical contexts.

This gap becomes particularly significant in the context of literary education, where the loss of tactile navigation and spatial memory may affect not only comprehension, but also the depth and stability of interpretive engagement. If meaning is partly constructed through the reader's interaction with material anchors, then their absence or transformation in digital environments calls for a rethinking of pedagogical strategies, one that does not seek to restore the book as object, but to rearticulate its functions under new conditions of reading.

The present study builds on this insight by shifting the focus from the opposition between print and digital toward the design of materially enriched digital reading practices. Rather than attempting to replicate the book, it explores how digital environments can incorporate alternative forms of sensory and spatial anchoring, through multisensory prompts, hybrid materials, and embodied interaction, in order to support orientation, memory, and interpretive depth. In doing so, it extends theories of materiality beyond medium specificity toward a pedagogical framework in which material

engagement remains central, even within digitally mediated contexts, and becomes a key component of a reactivated pedagogical sensorium.

2.4. Sensory Studies and Literary Experience: Beyond the Visual Paradigm

Extending the material and embodied perspectives outlined above, the field of sensory studies offers a necessary expansion of the interpretive framework by foregrounding the role of the body, the senses, and affective experience in meaning-making. Within this perspective, literature is no longer understood solely as a visual-textual object, but as a multisensory field capable of activating complex forms of sensory imagination. What is at stake, therefore, is not only how texts are interpreted, but how they are experienced, how they are sensed, inhabited, and reconstructed through the interplay of perception and memory.

Constance Classen’s work is particularly influential in challenging the hierarchy of the senses that has historically positioned sight as the dominant mode of knowledge (Classen, 1994). In *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Smell* (1994), Classen demonstrates that sensory perception is culturally constructed and hierarchically organized, with smell and touch often marginalized in Western epistemologies. This hierarchy is reflected in literary studies, where visual imagery and symbolic interpretation have been extensively theorised, while olfactory and tactile dimensions remain comparatively underexplored. As a result, a significant layer of literary experience - one that operates through atmosphere, proximity, and affect - risks being overlooked or reduced to a secondary, decorative function.

David Howes extends this critique by conceptualising the senses as an integrated system rather than as discrete channels of perception (Howes, 2005). His work in sensory anthropology emphasizes that meaning emerges through the interplay of sensory modalities, each contributing to the formation of cultural and experiential knowledge. Applied to literary contexts, this perspective suggests that reading is not confined to visual decoding, but involves the activation of a sensory imagination through which readers reconstruct textures, sounds, and smells that are not physically present. However, this multisensory potential is unevenly supported across reading environments. Digital platforms, which tend to standardise sensory input, may limit the extent to which such cross-modal activation occurs, thereby narrowing the experiential range through which texts are engaged.

Jim Drobnick’s work on smell culture further deepens this perspective by foregrounding olfaction as both a cultural signifier and an affective trigger (Drobnick, 2006). In *The Smell Culture Reader*, smell emerges not as a marginal or merely atmospheric detail, but as a culturally mediated mode of

perception, memory, and signification (Drobnick, 2006). By repositioning smell within aesthetic and cultural analysis, Drobnick challenges its marginalization in both artistic and academic discourse. In literary texts, smell often operates at the threshold between the material and the symbolic: elusive and difficult to represent, yet deeply connected to memory and emotional response. This paradox renders olfactory imagery a powerful, though still underutilised, component of literary interpretation. At the same time, its ephemeral nature poses particular challenges for pedagogy, especially in digital environments where sensory input is largely confined to the visual and auditory, and where olfactory and tactile cues are structurally absent.

A key limitation of existing scholarship lies in its tendency to treat sensory elements as descriptive features of texts rather than as active mechanisms of interpretation. While studies acknowledge the presence of sensory imagery, they rarely examine how such imagery shapes reading processes or how it might be mobilised pedagogically. This limitation is particularly evident in the treatment of smell, which is often analysed symbolically without considering its role in structuring memory, atmosphere, and affective engagement. As a consequence, the sensory dimension of reading remains conceptually acknowledged but pedagogically underdeveloped.

Moreover, the relationship between affect and the body remains insufficiently integrated into dominant models of literary reading. Sensory perception is not a neutral channel through which information passes, but a mode of embodied engagement that situates the reader within the experiential space of the text. The activation of sensory imagination involves not only representation, but also a form of affective attunement, in which readers respond to literary stimuli through bodily and emotional resonance. In digitally mediated reading environments, however, this dimension is often attenuated, as the sensory conditions necessary for such engagement are reduced, standardised, or displaced by interface-driven interaction.

The present study builds on sensory studies by shifting the focus from the representation of the senses in literature to their activation within the reading process itself. Rather than treating smell, touch, and sensory imagination as thematic elements, it approaches them as pedagogical resources capable of expanding the interpretive field. In doing so, it addresses a significant gap in the literature: the absence of models that integrate sensory theory into concrete teaching practices, particularly within digital contexts, where the sensory dimensions of reading are most at risk of being diminished.

By bringing into dialogue the work of Classen, Howes, and Drobnick, this section establishes the theoretical foundation for a sensory approach to literary education that moves beyond the visual paradigm. It argues that the future of literary pedagogy depends not only on adapting to digital technologies, but on

reactivating the sensory dimensions of reading that allow texts to be experienced as more than visual artefacts - as atmospheres, textures, and embodied encounters. In this sense, the study advances the need for a reconfigured pedagogical sensorium, within which sensory, affective, and material dimensions are not peripheral to interpretation, but constitutive of it.

2.5. Digital Pedagogy and the AI Context: Between Innovation and Reduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into education has generated an extensive body of research centred on innovation, accessibility, and pedagogical transformation. Much of this discourse, however, remains oriented toward functionality, platforms, tools, and efficiency, rather than toward the qualitative conditions under which learning takes place. Within this context, critical digital pedagogy has emerged as an important corrective, questioning the assumption that technological integration is inherently progressive and emphasising instead the need to examine how digital environments reshape knowledge, attention, and the role of the learner. What is at stake, therefore, is not merely the adoption of new tools, but the reconfiguration of the conditions through which learning is experienced and made meaningful.

Neil Selwyn’s work is particularly influential in articulating this critical perspective (Selwyn, 2019). In his analysis of digital education, Selwyn cautions against uncritical narratives of technological advancement, arguing that the adoption of digital tools often reproduces existing limitations while introducing new forms of dependency and standardisation. His question, whether technologies such as AI should replace or redefine teaching, shifts the focus from capability to consequence, foregrounding the need to consider not only what digital systems can do, but how they transform pedagogical relationships, attention structures, and modes of engagement. From this perspective, digital education cannot be understood solely in terms of innovation, but must also be examined in relation to its effects on depth, interaction, and interpretive practice.

Institutional frameworks further reinforce the centrality of digital transformation in education. UNESCO (2020) and the European Commission (2022) emphasise the importance of digital literacy, adaptability, and innovation in preparing students for contemporary social and professional contexts. These policy orientations advocate the integration of digital tools and AI-driven systems as essential components of future-oriented education, while simultaneously repositioning the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than a transmitter of knowledge. Although this shift reflects a significant pedagogical reorientation, it also raises critical questions regarding the nature

and depth of the engagement being facilitated, and the conditions under which such engagement unfolds.

Indeed, the movement toward facilitation, while pedagogically valuable, risks displacing sustained interaction with content in favour of the management of learning processes. AI-driven tools, in particular, tend to prioritise personalisation, efficiency, and rapid feedback, often operating through predictive models that anticipate user responses. While such features can enhance accessibility and responsiveness, they may also reinforce patterns of accelerated interaction and surface-level engagement, aligning with the broader tendencies toward speed and fragmentation already identified in digital reading environments. In this respect, the promise of innovation may coexist with a subtle contraction of experiential and interpretive depth.

Moreover, dominant approaches to digital pedagogy continue to privilege cognitive outcomes such as information processing, problem-solving, and skill acquisition, while paying comparatively limited attention to the sensory and material dimensions of learning. The emphasis on adaptability and technological fluency, though necessary, often overlooks the extent to which learning is shaped by embodiment, perception, and interaction with material environments. As a consequence, digital pedagogy risks reinforcing a model of the learner as a primarily cognitive agent, increasingly detached from the sensory conditions through which meaning is experienced and stabilised.

This limitation becomes particularly visible in the context of literary education, where interpretation is not only an intellectual activity but also an experiential process shaped by atmosphere, memory, and sensory association. While digital platforms expand access to texts and modes of interaction, they rarely incorporate mechanisms that support these dimensions in a structured or sustained manner. Instead, they tend to standardise the conditions of reading, reducing variability in sensory input and limiting opportunities for embodied engagement. What remains underdeveloped, therefore, is not access to literature, but the conditions through which literary experience becomes perceptually grounded, memorable, and interpretively rich.

Despite the expanding body of research on digital pedagogy and AI in education, two significant gaps persist. First, sensory reading is not systematically integrated into models of digital pedagogy, remaining largely absent from discussions of educational innovation. Second, existing frameworks focus predominantly on cognitive processes, with insufficient attention to embodiment, materiality, and sensory experience as constitutive dimensions of learning. As a result, the sensory dimension of reading - central to interpretation, memory, and engagement - remains conceptually acknowledged but pedagogically marginal.

The present study addresses this gap by proposing a reconfiguration of digital literary pedagogy through the activation of a pedagogical sensorium, in which sensory, material, and perceptual dimensions are not treated as supplementary, but as integral to the design of learning environments. In doing so, it moves beyond models of digital efficiency toward a more comprehensive understanding of educational innovation, one that accounts not only for what technology enables, but for how learning is experienced, embodied, and sustained.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design, grounded in a classroom-based case study approach. Such a framework is particularly suited to the exploratory nature of the research, which seeks to examine how sensory-oriented pedagogical interventions shape reading practices, rather than to quantify outcomes through predefined metrics. Accordingly, the study is concerned not only with what students understand, but with how meaning is experienced, articulated, and transformed under conditions of structured sensory engagement.

The case study design enables an in-depth investigation of teaching and learning processes within a specific educational context, allowing for close attention to the complexity of students' interactions with literary texts under pedagogically modified conditions. By situating the research within actual classroom practice, the study ensures ecological validity and maintains direct relevance to pedagogical application. At the same time, it facilitates the observation of how a pedagogical sensorium may be operationalised within digitally mediated learning environments - not as an abstract theoretical construct, but as a set of situated, observable practices.

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted with university students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in literature and cultural studies. The participant group consisted of approximately 30–35 students, representing diverse academic backgrounds within the humanities and spanning multiple levels of study, including first-, second-, and third-year undergraduate cohorts, as well as Master's-level programmes.

More specifically, the study drew on students enrolled in first-year BA courses focused on practical academic writing and literary tropes; second-year BA courses in Romantic poetry and the Victorian novel; third-year BA courses in modernist and postmodernist short fiction; and Master's-level courses such as

Shakespeare's Adaptations, Artistic Forms and Literary Representations, Narrative Conventions and Filmic Adaptations, and British Cultural Spaces. This distribution ensured exposure to a range of literary forms, historical periods, and interpretive frameworks, relevant to the study's focus on sensory engagement across genres and levels of complexity.

Participants were selected on the basis of course enrolment and engaged in the study as part of their regular academic activities. This ensured a naturalistic learning environment in which the pedagogical interventions could be meaningfully integrated into existing curricula, allowing for the observation of authentic reading practices rather than artificially constructed responses.

3.3 Corpus

The corpus was intentionally designed as cross-level and genre-diverse, comprising lyric poetry, prose fiction, short stories, and adaptation-based materials selected for their sensory density and pedagogical suitability. This diversity enabled the investigation of sensory engagement across different literary forms, historical periods, and levels of interpretive complexity.

At undergraduate level, the corpus included Romantic poetry, such as Coleridge's *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* and selected odes by Keats, as well as extracts from Victorian fiction, where atmosphere, material detail, and descriptive texture support sensory engagement. Texts such as D. H. Lawrence's *Odour of Chrysanthemums* and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* were particularly relevant in this respect, offering rich olfactory, industrial, and material environments conducive to multisensory interpretation. In addition, selected poems by Wordsworth and Shelley provided further opportunities to explore sensory perception in relation to landscape, movement, and affect.

Third-year undergraduate courses drew on modernist and postmodernist short fiction by authors such as Mansfield, Woolf, and Carter, where fragmentation, interiority, and shifting perceptual frameworks invite complex forms of multisensory engagement.

At Master's level, the corpus included adaptation-based materials, Shakespearean adaptations, filmic reinterpretations, and cultural-space texts, allowing for the exploration of sensory translation across media, particularly in relation to costume, texture, spatial atmosphere, and embodied presence.

Text selection was guided by the presence of olfactory, tactile, atmospheric, and material cues capable of supporting structured multisensory interpretation within digital reading contexts. While some of the texts included in the corpus have been previously employed in related pedagogical settings, they are approached here through a distinct analytical framework, with emphasis placed on sensory activation and multisensory interpretation rather than on

ethical or affective analysis. This shift in focus ensures both methodological continuity and conceptual differentiation.

3.4 Instruments and Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through a set of complementary qualitative instruments designed to capture both the cognitive and sensory dimensions of reading. These included reflective journals, in which students articulated their interpretive and sensory responses to literary texts; sensory prompts embedded within reading tasks, aimed at activating non-visual modalities such as olfactory, tactile, and spatial associations; guided exercises, which directed attention toward specific aspects of sensory engagement; and instructor observation notes, documenting patterns of participation, hesitation, and the development of interpretive responses over time.

Taken together, these instruments were designed to move beyond surface-level comprehension and to access the processes through which students construct meaning through sensory and experiential engagement. The combination of individual reflection, structured prompting, and classroom observation enabled methodological triangulation, allowing for the analysis of convergences between reported experience, interpretive articulation, and observed behaviour within the learning environment.

3.5 Procedure

The study followed a structured pedagogical sequence implemented across multiple seminar sessions. Students were initially assigned literary texts in digital format, accessed through standard educational platforms. During reading activities, sensory prompts were introduced as interpretive catalysts, encouraging engagement with the text through non-visual dimensions. Initial prompts included questions such as: *What does this scene smell like? What textures or surfaces are present in this moment? How would you describe the spatial or atmospheric quality of this scene?*

Alongside these open-ended interventions, a more systematically structured set of sensory questions was employed across sessions in order to sustain cross-modal engagement and deepen interpretive attention. These included prompts such as: *What does this scene smell like, and how does that smell shape its atmosphere? What textures or surfaces are implied in this passage? If this space had weight, temperature, or pressure, how would you describe it? Which object functions as a material anchor in this scene, and why? What detail would remain in memory after closing the screen?* Taken together, these prompts were designed to activate cross-modal perception and redirect attention from visual decoding toward multisensory interpretation.

Following the reading phase, students engaged in individual reflection, recording their responses in journals or structured worksheets. This stage was followed by guided group discussion, during which participants compared interpretations, tested sensory associations, and explored variations in perception. The instructor, who also functioned as the researcher, facilitated these discussions by linking sensory responses to broader interpretive frameworks and encouraging students to articulate the relationship between perception, meaning, and textual analysis.

Overall, the procedure was designed to integrate sensory engagement into digital reading without altering the primary mode of text delivery, thereby testing the compatibility between sensory-based pedagogy and digitally mediated environments. In this sense, the classroom functioned as a site in which elements of a pedagogical sensorium were deliberately activated within an otherwise standardised reading context.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic coding, with a focus on identifying recurring patterns across student responses. The analysis was structured around three primary dimensions: sensory language, including references to smell, texture, spatial perception, and atmosphere; emotional engagement, reflected in the intensity, nuance, and variability of responses; and interpretive depth, indicated by the complexity, originality, and associative richness of students' interpretations.

This analytical framework enabled the systematic identification of shifts in reading practices, particularly in relation to the activation of non-visual interpretive pathways. By examining the interaction between these dimensions, the study traced how sensory engagement functioned not only as a descriptive layer, but as a structuring mechanism influencing interpretation, engagement, and memory formation. In this way, the analysis captures not only what students understood, but how meaning was constructed, experienced, and retained within a multisensory interpretive framework.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to established ethical standards in educational research. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study. All data were anonymised to ensure confidentiality, and no identifying information was included in the analysis or reporting of results. Participants were further assured that their involvement, as well as the content of their responses, would not influence their academic evaluation.

Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and the study was conducted in accordance with institutional guidelines governing research ethics. These measures ensured that the implementation of pedagogical interventions remained aligned with principles of transparency, responsibility, and respect for participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Findings

The analysis of student responses revealed consistent patterns across three interrelated dimensions: sensory activation, interpretive depth, and memory and engagement. Presented here in direct relation to the research objectives, these findings indicate observable shifts in reading practices following the introduction of sensory-oriented pedagogical interventions. The responses discussed below derive primarily from interventions conducted on Romantic lyric poetry, Victorian prose, modernist short fiction, and adaptation-based materials at MA level.

Sensory Activation

The introduction of sensory prompts led to a noticeable expansion in descriptive language beyond the visual register. Students produced richer and more differentiated accounts of textual scenes, frequently incorporating references to smell, texture, temperature, and spatial atmosphere. Description began to thicken, moving from surface observation toward perceptual immersion.

Compared to initial responses, which tended to rely on general or abstract descriptors, later reflections displayed greater density, precision, and variability of sensory detail. Environments were no longer framed simply as "dark" or "tense," but as "humid," "heavy," "sharp," or "stagnant," suggesting a shift toward more embodied and perceptually anchored forms of description. What emerges here is not merely lexical variation, but a reorientation of attention: the scene is no longer apprehended only visually, but sensed, inhabited, and spatially experienced.

This lexical and perceptual expansion indicates that students began to engage with the text through multiple sensory channels, even in the absence of direct stimuli. In this sense, sensory prompting functioned not as an external addition to interpretation, but as a mechanism through which the interpretive field itself was widened.

This shift is illustrated in responses such as: "*The room did not feel simply dark; it felt stale and airless, as if the silence had a smell.*" (Year 2 BA), or "*I imagined the walls as damp and cold, and that made the character seem trapped in a physical way.*" (Year 3 BA) These responses suggest that sensory

activation enabled students to translate atmosphere into embodied perception, transforming abstract description into lived, almost tactile experience.

This tendency became particularly evident in the interpretation of texts with pronounced material and atmospheric density, such as D. H. Lawrence's *Odour of Chrysanthemums* and the industrial landscapes of Dickens's *Hard Times*. In these cases, students extended their descriptive range beyond visual observation to include olfactory and tactile dimensions, reconstructing environments as dense sensory fields rather than as purely visual settings. The industrial space, for instance, was frequently described in terms of weight, residue, and suffocating atmosphere, while domestic interiors were reimagined through textures, temperature, and lingering scents. Such responses indicate not only an expansion of vocabulary, but a shift toward embodied modes of reading, in which perception becomes a primary entry point into interpretation.

Interpretive Depth

The activation of sensory dimensions was accompanied by a discernible increase in interpretive complexity. Student responses moved beyond surface-level summary toward more nuanced readings, often generating layered, symbolic, and associative connections.

Importantly, sensory elements were not treated as decorative additions, but as interpretive cues that actively contributed to meaning construction. Olfactory and tactile references, for instance, were linked to character psychology, narrative tension, and thematic development, indicating a shift from descriptive noticing to analytical interpretation. In group discussions, students also demonstrated greater openness to multiple perspectives, frequently building on one another's sensory observations to develop more complex and dialogic readings.

A representative example may be seen in a response such as:

"The smell was not just part of the room; it felt like a clue to the character's inner state, as if the space itself was carrying anxiety." (Year 3 BA)

This response suggests that sensory prompting did more than enrich verbal description: it enabled students to treat material and atmospheric details as interpretive anchors, deepening their engagement with symbolic and affective layers of the text.

This tendency became particularly visible in the analysis of passages characterised by high sensory density, including Romantic poetry and Victorian prose. In readings of poems such as Wordsworth's *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud* or Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, students began to associate sensory elements - movement, texture, air, and temperature - with emotional states and shifts in consciousness, interpreting natural imagery not only as visual description but as embodied experience. Similarly, in Victorian

texts such as *Hard Times* or *Odour of Chrysanthemums*, sensory cues - especially those related to smell and atmosphere - were increasingly interpreted as indices of psychological tension, social constraint, and environmental pressure.

Rather than isolating meaning at the level of explicit narrative or thematic statement, students used sensory details to construct interpretive pathways, linking material description to interiority, mood, and symbolic structure. In this sense, interpretation became less linear and more relational, unfolding through networks of association in which sensory perception functioned as a catalyst for deeper analytical engagement.

Memory and Engagement

Data collected from reflective journals and follow-up discussions indicate a consistent enhancement in the recall of textual details among students who engaged with sensory-based tasks. Participants demonstrated an increased capacity to remember specific scenes, descriptions, and narrative moments, frequently anchoring recall in sensory impressions rather than in abstract or thematic summaries. Memory, in this context, appeared less as the retrieval of information than as a re-entry into an experienced scene.

This pattern suggests that sensory engagement contributes to the formation of more durable and differentiated memory traces, in which textual elements become linked to perceptual and affective cues. Rather than recalling what a passage meant in abstract terms, students were more likely to recall how it felt - its imagined texture, atmosphere, or sensory density.

This tendency is reflected in responses such as: "*I remembered the scene because of the imagined velvet texture - it gave it weight.*" (MA student) or "*I would normally forget the passage, but the smell question made it stay with me.*" (Year 1 BA)

Such responses indicate that sensory prompting facilitates a form of embodied encoding, in which interpretation is stabilised through perceptual association. Scenes characterised by strong sensory density - particularly olfactory and textural descriptions in nineteenth-century prose - were more frequently retained and more readily reconstructed in subsequent discussion. In texts such as *Odour of Chrysanthemums* or industrial passages from *Hard Times*, students often recalled not only narrative events but the atmosphere of enclosure, heaviness, or stagnation, suggesting that memory operated through affective and sensory imprint rather than through abstract summarisation.

In addition to improved recall, students reported higher levels of engagement during reading activities. This was evident not only in the increased length and depth of written responses, but also in more sustained and active participation during seminar discussions. Sensory prompts appeared to slow down the reading process, encouraging students to remain with the text, revisit passages,

and explore interpretive possibilities through iterative attention rather than rapid progression.

Taken together, these findings suggest that sensory engagement functions as a stabilising mechanism for both memory and attention. By embedding textual experience within a perceptual framework, it transforms reading from a transient cognitive act into a more sustained and inhabitable encounter.

The patterns identified across the corpus - particularly in texts marked by atmospheric, material, and sensory density - may be summarised schematically as follows:

Table 1. Sensory Prompts and Their Interpretive Effects

Prompt Type	Response Pattern	Interpretive Effect
Olfactory prompts (e.g., “What does this scene smell like?”)	Use of smell-related descriptors; association with atmosphere and emotional tone	Transformation of abstract setting into embodied experience; linking environment to character psychology
Tactile prompts (e.g., “What textures or surfaces are present?”)	References to weight, pressure, temperature, and material qualities	Increased perception of physical constraint or proximity; grounding interpretation in material detail
Spatial/atmospheric prompts (e.g., “How would you describe the space?”)	Description of space as dense, open, oppressive, or fluid	Enhanced sense of immersion; development of atmosphere as interpretive category
Cross-modal prompts (e.g., combining smell, touch, and space)	Integration of multiple sensory registers within a single response	Expansion of associative thinking; emergence of layered, symbolic interpretation
Memory-oriented prompts (e.g., “What detail remains after closing the screen?”)	Recall anchored in sensory impressions rather than abstract meaning	Formation of durable memory traces; improved retention through perceptual encoding

As indicated above, sensory prompts do not function as isolated techniques, but as interconnected mechanisms that reshape attention, interpretation, and memory within digital reading environments.

4.2 Discussion

The findings presented above indicate that the integration of sensory prompts into digital reading practices exerts a substantive influence on how students engage with literary texts. Rather than merely enriching descriptive output, sensory activation appears to restructure the interpretive process itself, expanding the range of associations through which meaning is constructed and sustained.

From the perspective of embodied cognition, the observed increase in sensory language and associative thinking supports the view that understanding is grounded in perceptual simulation rather than in abstract processing alone. The activation of multiple sensory modalities facilitates both the encoding and retrieval of information by generating richer and more differentiated memory traces, in line with theories of multisensory encoding. Interpretation thus emerges not as a purely cognitive operation, but as a process distributed across perceptual, affective, and experiential domains.

At the same time, the increase in interpretive depth suggests that sensory engagement enables a more flexible and open-ended reading practice. By introducing alternative entry points into the text, sensory prompts disrupt narrowly linear or exclusively cognitive approaches to interpretation, allowing meaning to unfold through atmosphere, texture, and affective association. In this respect, the findings directly counter the reductive tendencies often associated with digitally accelerated reading, where speed and surface processing tend to limit interpretive scope.

These results carry important implications for digital pedagogy. While digital platforms are frequently associated with standardisation and reduced sensory input, the present study demonstrates that sensory engagement can be reintroduced through pedagogical design rather than through technological modification alone. The limitations of digital reading, therefore, are not inherent to the medium itself, but are shaped by the conditions under which it is pedagogically enacted.

In this sense, the findings extend existing theories of reading by demonstrating that sensory engagement is not an optional enhancement, but a structuring condition of interpretation. The improved recall and orientation observed among participants provide empirical support for theories of material anchors, suggesting that sensory prompts can function as compensatory mechanisms in digital environments. Although digital texts lack the stable physical reference points characteristic of print, structured sensory engagement appears capable of generating alternative anchoring systems through which readers situate, organise, and retain meaning.

The study also challenges dominant models of digital pedagogy that prioritise efficiency, speed, and streamlined interaction. When rapid processing and

immediate accessibility become the principal indicators of innovation, depth and variability of engagement risk being quietly diminished. By contrast, the present findings suggest that interpretive richness depends less on acceleration than on the diversification of perceptual pathways through which texts are experienced and understood.

Crucially, these results complicate any rigid opposition between print and digital reading. Rather than confirming the inherent superiority of print, they indicate that the limitations of digital reading are, to a significant extent, pedagogically mediated. The absence of sensory engagement in digital contexts is not an unavoidable consequence of the medium, but a result of how reading practices are structured within it.

Digital environments do not eliminate embodiment; they require its pedagogical reactivation.

This shift in perspective carries significant implications for educational design. It suggests that innovation in digital pedagogy should not be measured solely in terms of technological advancement, but in the capacity to reintegrate sensory and material dimensions into learning. In this sense, the findings point toward the necessity of reactivating a pedagogical sensorium within digital environments, where sensory, material, and affective dimensions are deliberately structured as integral components of the reading process.

4.3 The Embodied Digital Reading Model

Building on the findings and theoretical framework outlined above, this study proposes the ***Embodied Digital Reading Model*** as a pedagogical framework for integrating sensory engagement into digitally mediated literary education. The model conceptualises reading as a layered process in which perception, interpretation, and memory operate in dynamic interaction, and in which sensory activation functions as a structuring condition rather than a supplementary feature.

The model is organised around three interconnected dimensions:

Sensory Activation Layer

At the first level, reading is initiated through the deliberate activation of non-visual sensory modalities. This is achieved through structured prompts that direct attention toward smell, texture, spatial atmosphere, and material qualities within the text. Rather than treating sensory elements as descriptive additions, this layer positions them as primary points of entry into interpretation, expanding the perceptual field of reading and enabling engagement across multiple sensory channels.

In this phase, attention is redirected from visual decoding toward embodied perception, allowing the reader to situate the text within a sensory framework that supports both orientation and experiential immersion.

Interpretive Expansion Layer

The second level concerns the transformation of interpretation through multisensory engagement. As sensory input is activated, readers construct meaning through associative and cross-modal connections, linking perceptual cues to symbolic, thematic, and narrative structures. This process facilitates more nuanced readings, supports the emergence of symbolic associations grounded in sensory perception, and enables a shift from linear interpretation toward networked, relational meaning-making.

Interpretation is thus reconceptualised as a process that unfolds across both sensory and cognitive domains, where perception does not precede analysis but actively participates in its formation.

Memory and Engagement Layer

The third level addresses the effects of sensory engagement on retention and participation. Multisensory encoding supports the formation of richer and more stable memory traces, linking textual information to perceptual and experiential cues. At this level, the model accounts for improved recall of narrative details, extended duration of attention, and heightened student involvement in both individual and collaborative reading practices.

Engagement is understood not as immediate responsiveness, but as sustained interaction with the text - an ongoing process of return, reactivation, and interpretive deepening.

Model Implications

The Embodied Digital Reading Model challenges the assumption that digital reading must remain predominantly visual and efficiency-driven. Instead, it demonstrates that sensory and material dimensions can be reintroduced through pedagogical design, even within standardised digital environments.

By structuring reading as a layered interaction between perception, interpretation, and memory, the model provides a replicable and transferable framework for literary education - one that aligns with contemporary digital contexts while preserving interpretive depth and experiential richness.

In this sense, the model operationalises the concept of a pedagogical sensorium, offering a structured approach through which sensory, material, and perceptual dimensions of reading can be deliberately integrated into digital pedagogy. It reframes digital environments not as sites of sensory

reduction, but as spaces in which embodied engagement can be reconfigured, redistributed, and pedagogically sustained.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

5.1 Conclusion

This study has argued that sensory engagement constitutes a fundamental dimension of literary reading rather than a supplementary or decorative feature. The findings demonstrate that when sensory modalities are deliberately activated, students engage more deeply with texts, producing richer interpretations, stronger associative connections, and improved recall. In this sense, sensory reading emerges not as an optional pedagogical enhancement, but as a core mechanism of meaning-making through which interpretation becomes situated, embodied, and experientially grounded.

At the same time, the study challenges the assumption that digital reading environments are inherently disembodied. While digital platforms tend to standardise sensory input and privilege visual-cognitive processing, the results indicate that embodiment can be reintroduced through pedagogical design. Digital reading, therefore, should not be understood as the absence of sensory experience, but as a context in which sensory engagement must be deliberately reactivated. From this perspective, the limitations of digital reading are not intrinsic to the medium itself, but are shaped by the conditions under which it is pedagogically structured.

These insights point toward a broader reconfiguration of literary pedagogy. The future of reading instruction lies not in choosing between print and digital formats, but in developing hybrid models that integrate technological accessibility with embodied, multisensory engagement. Such approaches make it possible to reconcile innovation with depth, ensuring that digital education does not come at the expense of interpretive richness or experiential learning.

More specifically, the study advances the concept of a **pedagogical sensorium** - operationalised through the Embodied Digital Reading Model - as a framework through which the sensory, material, and affective dimensions of reading may be systematically reintegrated into digital learning environments. In doing so, it reframes literary pedagogy as a site not only of interpretation, but of experience, where meaning is not merely processed, but sensed, inhabited, and sustained.

5.2 Limitations

This study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged, particularly in relation to scope, methodology, and context.

First, the research is based on a relatively small sample of university students, which limits the generalisability of the findings. While the results provide valuable insight into classroom dynamics and the effects of sensory-based interventions, they should be interpreted as indicative rather than universally applicable across broader educational populations.

Second, the qualitative nature of the study, while allowing for depth, nuance, and sensitivity to interpretive processes, does not permit precise measurement of the observed effects. The reliance on thematic and interpretive analysis introduces a degree of subjectivity that, although methodologically justified, cannot be entirely eliminated.

Third, the study is context-specific, having been conducted within literature and cultural studies courses in a particular institutional setting. As such, the outcomes may vary across disciplines, educational levels, and cultural contexts, where reading practices, sensory hierarchies, and pedagogical expectations differ. These contextual limitations point to the need for further research across more diverse settings in order to assess the broader applicability of the findings.

5.3 Directions for Future Research

Future research may extend the present study in several directions, building on both its findings and its methodological limitations.

Experimental studies could complement the qualitative insights presented here by measuring the impact of sensory-based interventions on comprehension, retention, and engagement across larger and more diverse samples. Such approaches would enable the quantification of effects that, in the present study, are observed primarily through interpretive and experiential data.

Cross-cultural investigations would provide valuable insight into how sensory reading practices interact with different educational traditions and culturally specific sensory hierarchies, particularly in contexts where non-visual modalities are differently valued or more prominently integrated into learning practices.

The integration of AI and sensory pedagogy represents a particularly promising field of exploration. Future studies could investigate how digital platforms, including AI-driven systems, might be designed or adapted to support multisensory engagement, moving beyond models that prioritise efficiency and personalisation toward more embodied forms of learning. In this sense, the development of digitally mediated pedagogical sensoriums offers a productive direction for rethinking educational innovation - not only in terms of technological capability, but in relation to how learning is experienced, remembered, and made meaningful.

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Critical reflection on Slovak literary and translation studies research in the context of Western European tradition and the current state of humanities studies

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Abstract: The Slovak tradition of reflection on literature and literary translation can be divided into three basic types: scientific, critical, and artistic reflection. The specific feature of these types is the frequent overlaps, which are encountered in individual personalities and members of groups, schools, and movements dealing with the issue of artistic translation, whether between languages or forms of artistic expression such as theatre, film, comics, and new digital hybrid forms. The paper identifies the significant theoretical, practical, and poetic potentials of this tradition and their specifics regarding the current situation and challenges of teaching literature today. At the same time, it identifies obstacles to the full development of this contribution and seeks ways to overcome them. This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the Contract no. APVV-23-0586.

Keywords: *Literature studies, literary production and reception, literary translation, literary criticism, literary creation and interpretation.*

1. The Situation Today

1.1 Basic theoretical texts

Today, we often encounter situations where not only students, but also many otherwise capable young researchers either know nothing or have a very distorted and impractical idea of the Slovak tradition in the field of literary and translation studies research. This tradition was experienced by the older generation of researchers and educators, and its best outputs are relatively difficult to access in libraries, written in a language and style that is difficult for today's young people to understand, relying on context and knowledge that is foreign to them. On the other hand, the current state of global reflection in this area is easily accessible online in English, and it is more suited to the style and context of today's students and younger researchers. It might seem that

this logical outcome is inevitable, and, from the perspective of the natural sciences, where it makes no sense to discuss any national research tradition, that it is actually a positive state.

However, in the humanities, culture, and the arts, this rule for the natural sciences and perhaps also for philosophy does not apply. From a theoretical point of view, where we would expect successful theoretical models to transcend the boundaries of individual national linguistic cultures and the global picture to be more universal and functional than individual cultural traditions, which are somehow open and interconnected, we would expect that better, more functional, and more relevant theoretical tools and models would prevail. Unfortunately, this is not the case, although I think that it could and should be so.

The problem is that a detailed study of the best results of these investigations, primarily from the 1960s and 1970s, compared with current theoretical approaches in this field at the global level, has many advantages. This mainly concerns the idea that we use certain translation techniques in translation, i.e., to improve a literal translation, the translator chooses from a range of largely equivalent techniques. Although this model is partially applicable in practice, it is actually a typology of formal differences between the original and translated texts, and it is clear that with increasing linguistic typological and cultural-historical differences, the idea of literal translation becomes increasingly absurd. This fundamental shortcoming is not found, for example, in the theoretical approach of the Slovak founder of translation studies, Anton Popovič, according to which the goal of translation is the equivalence of the theme of the original and translated texts, and the result is a new form that does not have to formally resemble the original if it is stylistically and functionally, i.e., communicatively, equivalent.

The problem is that it seems that no one has taken on this task to date. The text is incomprehensible to global theorists, and there is minimal motivation to translate texts that are 50-60 years old and search for better models than the current ones. In contrast, the situation is different in the case of Russian formalism and Prague structuralism, where the fundamental texts have been largely translated into English and are relatively easily accessible. The world's scientific elite in this field is well aware of the potential of this corpus, though its potential is far from exhausted.

The situation is not so bad, although one must search specifically to find either historical or more recent results of these efforts, which are not available in digital form or updated with regard to today's current cultural-theoretical context.

From a theoretical point of view, our project aims to overcome this obstacle, i.e. to translate these basic texts into world languages and compare them with

the situation of global research in this field. The result should be a higher-quality and more comprehensive model for understanding the translation and reception of literary texts in particular; however, it appears that, with certain modifications, this model can be applied universally, i.e., to all types of texts in different linguistic and cultural environments.

Today, we are seeing efforts to use these texts in their original, historical form, as well as allow students and young researchers to combine them with the best of current global practice. However, this task is proving to be unreasonably difficult for them. Our situation is that we are in contact with them and with the older generation, which is still working at the highest level, although linguistically and methodologically it no longer has the strength or the means to do so.

2. The situation in practice

In the natural sciences, situations where groundbreaking theoretical discoveries take a long time and require considerable effort to find practical applications are often encountered, which is a natural and normal phenomenon. It is because the goal of theory is understanding that should be universally valid, i.e., it should transcend individual, historical, and cultural conditions, while practice is about how to do something in the best possible way, primarily without any immediate relation to theoretical understanding and the creative impact of the activity.

In general, there is a long way between theoretical understanding and optimal practical application. Practical knowledge, i.e., skills, is needed in this area by writers, translators, and editors themselves. The process of creation, interpretation, and reception is largely automated and consciously controlled, corrected by theoretical knowledge and is part of a creative process in which the experience, intentions, needs, and creativity of both the author and the reader come together, with the author of an artistic translation being both the primary reader and the secondary author. While it may be easier at first glance to identify the theme and context of a prose, technical, popular, or administrative text, distinguishing between interpretation and overinterpretation in the case of a lyrical or otherwise highly subjective text is a fundamental problem. It is easier to control the narrative and factual rather than subjective dimensions of the theme and context; whereas, in a subjective and individually specific context, this is highly challenging, and it is often precisely this dimension that literature is concerned with.

Ideally, a translator should be an expert on the subject matter, the cultural and factual context, and the language in both the source and target environments, as well as a creator and wordsmith. He or she should not be unable to work

directly with the original or create their own text. A good philologist and language expert can sometimes translate a text without losing the subject matter and artistic function, even if the artistic dimension of the result is more modest than in the original. In the Slovak tradition, this is the case with the translation of the Iliad and the Odyssey by the outstanding philologist Okál. He is accurate in terms of theme, yet the artistic dimension of the text in his translation blends into the background because it is difficult to convey to a linguistically and culturally distant reader. A more artistically oriented and educated translator, for example, less familiar with the philosophical context analytically, consciously, and in a controlled manner, can make a successful translation when his experience and intuition complement what is missing from the analysis or what even the best analysis cannot cope with. The result is a high-quality translation in which artistic means or narrative techniques are used to express meanings that a trained specialist and analyst in the field might translate more accurately, but in a way that is much less acceptable to the reader.

Such is, for example, the translation by philologist and literary scholar Milan Žitný of the highly demanding work by Danish philosopher and writer Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or* (Enten-Eller). The translator was able to draw on the artistic dimension of the text and thus translate its philosophical dimension in a concise and reader-friendly manner. In Slovakia, the Czech translation of the seminal work by Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno by Jaroslav Zaorálek from 1927 was much more popular than the newer Slovak translation by Vladimír Oleríny from 1982. Oleríny's translation appears to be linguistically correct; however, thematically, despite the time and language gap, the much older translation in another language, which is traditionally the language of culture and literature for Slovaks, is more appealing and understandable to Slovak readers. But the main reason is Zaorálek's outstanding artistic work, in which the philosophical dimension is predominantly expressed through artistic means.

The main problem in teaching literature today is not so much the quality of Slovak, English, or foreign-language literary texts and their translations into Slovak, but rather that young people lack proper reading and writing habits. First and foremost, we learn to read and write in a practical way, i.e. by reading and writing. You have to start with that first and then get to a functional level. The problem is motivation, because unlike in the past, when written text was the main and highest-quality source of knowledge about the world, science, and learning, as well as an important leisure activity along with other forms of art, today, in the virtual, digital environment, there are many easily accessible multimedia sources that are much easier to process and presented in a very convincing way. The level of effort required is significantly lower, and the

time it takes to absorb information is much shorter. With modern technology, the virtual environment of games, social networks, current information, informal and formal education, work, study, and leisure is becoming the home environment. However, we should not see this situation only as an obstacle, but also as a path to literature and, in fact, as a form of literature itself. The problem lies in the way literature is taught. Perhaps the most pointless approach is to teach literature dogmatically, memorising rules and learning the contents of works instead of reading them.

Such an approach is more of an obstacle than a path to literature and to what it has to offer. Literary theory is best used in the reception and interpretation of appropriately challenging, interesting, and rewarding works. And reading is the foundation of writing. At university, we often feel that we have nothing to build on because our students do not read even in their native language, not even the works that we remember as being a source of inspiration, joy, relaxation, and encouragement at their age.

The basis of reading used to be the parents, grandparents, or relatives reading to children before they learned to read themselves. Today, we forget that reading originally had a social character; one person could read relaxing and uplifting literature to many others, who could then devote themselves to other activities. Later, this role was partially taken over by radio, film, and television, and today it is also taken over by social networks, the internet, blogs, chat rooms, YouTubers, and games. Although literature is thriving in this environment, it is more so in relatively closed communities, and outside of them, the potential of this environment is not being sufficiently exploited. The media consensus is that the only meaningful activities are practical ones, but their usefulness is measured by financial gain and the social prestige that comes with it. That is why technical and applied fields or specialisations have the highest prestige, even though the ratio of effort to profit is often more favourable in administration and services. Society cannot support thousands of programmers and artificial intelligence specialists, as suggested by the example of Pakistani computer scientists. Though it is precisely those who are successful who are characterised by what literature leads to, or at least should lead to, namely, critical thinking and creative work with information.

But it is not good to start by reading works that suit us, but rather works that suit them, both in terms of language and subject matter. It is important to discuss the text we have read, to express and defend our positions not only in front of specialists, but also in front of a wider audience. First, we must refute prejudices in specific cases and in practice, and only then can we move on to theory and argue based on knowledge of principles and laws, analytical skills, and artistic principles. We understand creativity in literature as the ability to be artistically truthful, to express the unique experience of discovery. In this

sense, the reader discovers the theme and text of a literary work, and the author, translator, editor, or teacher act as mediators and creators of something artistic or otherwise real or true.

3. A bit of history

In this sense, the naive idea that art should depict external, physical reality as it is is an obstacle to literary education. This idea arose during the period of naive positivism at the end of the 19th century. Paradoxically, at the time, it led to a focus on the inner lives of literary characters, as authors had no other access to the reality of other people's thoughts than through their external expressions and empathy, which is desperately insufficient for the deeply human need to observe and follow the inner world of others. Realistic literature is thus paradoxically "more real" than is possible in the real world of human senses, experiencing reality only through them. Although science, mathematics, and many writers have gradually come to an understanding informed by the development of science and art.

This modernist understanding, which does not automatically reject or deny the counterintuitive understanding of new science and the influences of technology, can be critical, can seek to revive, update and recontextualise traditional and folk motifs. Nevertheless, it is characterised by a new demandingness, unobviousness, and conviction of its own truth, the origins of which it is not ashamed to admit in the form of manifestos, without which its texts are very difficult to decode. Modernism is reworking itself into seemingly mutually exclusive, radically different approaches, from neo-styles through Art Deco to the Avant-garde, which is breaking with tradition and, in the form of futurism and surrealism, is distancing itself from contemporary thinking while slowly transforming it with great detachment.

However, this one instance of criticism supporting surrealism is significant. It continues to be an important impetus for the development of art, which is in no way inferior to science in its sophistication and in transcending the traditional limitations of previous thinking. It is no coincidence that the critic Mikuláš Bakoš translated and commented on a selection from the formal method of the Russian structuralist movement, which had been banned at home since the 1930s. Since then, this impulse, which emerged during World War II, has been in a difficult situation for many years after its ban by the communist totalitarian regime in Russia, but it still has an undeniable influence on literary science. The text itself was banned during the war and largely destroyed by the clerical-fascist regime, and during the communist totalitarian regime of 1948-89, it was published in small print runs but was

almost impossible to obtain. Bakoš himself managed to continue working as a scientist, although he could no longer express himself as a critic.

While post-structuralism and postmodernism have been gaining ground in Europe and around the world since the 1960s, in Slovakia, the relaxed ideological situation and partial support for scientific and artistic, albeit not ideological, freedom has manifested itself in the great development of literary science, creation, and criticism, though, as later developments show, this was a fragile situation. The texts that are being produced are still groundbreaking, and the methods of cooperation between scientists and translators were at a level that we have not yet managed to restore. Overall, apart from open opponents of the regime, this is a further development of modernism and structuralism, albeit informed by developments in the world and based on domestic cultural dynamics. The Nitra School, a large collective of literary and art scholars, deserves special mention. It gradually moved from a formalist and structuralist approach to a systemic, semiotic, functional-qualitative understanding of artistic text, which became established in the global context decades later. In linear translation, the translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a collaboration between the leading philologist, literary scholar, and critic Jozef Felix and the talented poet Viliam Turčány, stands out as a great success. The result is a text that is the product of thorough linguistic, thematic, and contextual analysis as well as well-controlled artistic treatment, the fruit of the highest scientific and artistic preparation, collaboration, and sensitivity.

In the field of literary criticism, two dominant figures emerged at this time: the aforementioned Jozef Felix and Alexander Matuška. The fate of both men reflects the fact that the connection between literary criticism and ideology is stronger than in the case of science, even though both were exceptionally educated and sensitive critics. Their ideological backgrounds were different: Matuška was a staunch communist, while Felix focused not only on Slovak culture but also on Western culture, especially Romance literature, and expressed his ideology more indirectly but all the more firmly – he rejected modernism until the anti-modernist oath in the Catholic Church was abolished after the Second Vatican Council.

His position is more realistic and not openly ideological. Already in 1942, he writes that "symbolism, impressionism, expressionism, poetism, surrealism. These are all just stages in the further liberation of the word, whether they represent an effort to remove the sign value of the word in favour of melodic effect, intonation, or even an effort to work with the word as an independent value." (Felix, 1985 (1942), p. 38)

Felix thus rejects one aspect of modernism and even avant-garde art, namely its extraordinary demands and efforts to achieve a comprehensive approach, while accepting another aspect of this movement, of which he is, whether he

likes it or not, a part: the discovery of the very material of art, material in its new, unprecedented forms and possibilities. But when the word carries only sound and not an artistic or otherwise equivalent meaning and significance, it has not the ability to appeal in a way that is relevant to the reader. When a surrealist poet manages to fill the form of the word with an equally original and yet topical meaning, Felix becomes its even more ardent advocate.

Felix takes an even stronger stance against literature, which he considers an escape from reality, although he is even more bothered by the fact that it is often associated with a loss of self-reflection and self-importance. In his study *Harlekýn skolonený nad vodou* (Harlequin Bent Over Water), he creates a suggestive image of a creator gazing at his own perfection and exclusivity, who, like Narcissus in love with his own reflection, despises others. It is questionable how accurate this image is in the specific cases he mentions, but it is an attitude that is still widespread in Slovak culture today and is as harmful to it now as it was then.

He finds several reasons to condemn this approach by poets, the first of which has already been mentioned, and the second is derived from the first: "the egocentrism and subjectivism of our poets. However, this is not subjectivism in the Montaignean sense, which aims to understand human nature, but poetic egocentrism, whose sole purpose is aesthetic self-reflection." (1942, p. 44) The reason is clear: writers write for readers, and according to Felix, readers "cannot be interested in the intimacy of poets, their painful youth, painful loves, and the like, nota bene, if the poet was unable to extract objective moments from his subjectivity, they cannot be interested in what does not directly concern their circle of life and life in general." (ibid.) Thus, the context of the reader's reception is the sphere of his life, and the framework of literary, artistic, and scientific creation is concrete life and life in general. Artistic and scientific truth is the truth of the moment and of eternity, of the subject and the object, to which the creator has the highest obligation, which should be above his ego.

Felix rejected selfish, aestheticising, and irresponsible modernism and defended those authors who were able to overcome these maladies. After the Catholic Church abolished its anti-modernist oath, he did not have to change his stance; he was never against modernity, but modern artists were often unable to stand up to their egos, their pettiness, and their opportunism. Therefore, in one of his masterpieces, *Modernity of the Present*, he shows how, even in the pre-modernist era, there were authors who could appeal to today's readers because they fought for life and not for survival, as one of today's false slogans claims. In this sense, survival is more the opposite of life than its most miserable and senseless form.

So, he formulated an understanding of modernity as a timeless principle, which is certainly a contribution, but in understanding modernism as a designation for a broad movement and period of the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century, he remained an obstacle: this understanding has not yet prevailed in Slovakia.

The violent suppression of the revival process by the armies of the Eastern Bloc in 1968 was a disaster for all that wanted to be true and free. The harshly "normalising" totalitarian regime brought obedience bought for relative prosperity, and even many former communists turned against it. Felix was openly persecuted by the regime and died prematurely. Matuška agreed with the regime for ideological reasons and lost his previously unblemished moral profile among a large part of the population; moreover, his authority declined significantly. Although he apparently remained morally consistent, he was quietly rejected by a large part of the public.

Like Felix, Anton Popovič, one of the leading representatives of the Nitra School, was also persecuted. During the period of political liberalisation in the 1960s, he began to establish contacts at the international level, and when harsh totalitarianism returned, he was considered an enemy. In the 1970s, before the regime had become so oppressive, he even managed to stay in Canada, where he published his most important work in English: *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation*. However, the work lacked the quantity, linguistic and graphic design that would have corresponded to its intended impact. The dictionary itself looks more like internal working material, lacking both high-quality linguistic editing in English and proper graphic and editorial processing.

Jaroslav Špírk, one of the few specialists who considered why there was no significant response to this dictionary, came to the following conclusion: "There are several drawbacks to the Dictionary. First of all, although Popovič regards terminology as an essential vehicle in promoting his approach to the study of translation (under the influence of the so-called "exact methods" or "scientism" in the humanities), it is hardly conceivable that an Anglophone reader would understand Popovič's writing (and all the contexts implied in it: that of the Nitra School, that of Slovak literary and translation studies, that of the Czechoslovak study of translation, and — ultimately — that of the East, as Popovič draws heavily on Polish, Bulgarian and especially Soviet scholars)." (Špírk, 2009, p. 11) The work, which is relatively short (37 pages) but contains a complex analytical apparatus, is the result of decades of demanding collective study and discussion, about which the Western public knew nothing, and the ability to resist the intense pressure of totalitarian ideology. To fully understand it, one must examine its origins and gradual development. At the time, there was nothing to compare its results with, but

today there is: a similar systematic approach developed in the English-speaking world decades later and on a broader basis. The statement that a group of scientists under strong ideological pressure achieved results comparable and, in some ways, more advanced than those corresponding to the current state of thinking in the world will not make much sense if we cannot compare and explain it historically, theoretically, and comprehensibly. After returning to an even less free country, where even a high level of scientific achievement did not protect him from persecution, even this attempt was unsuccessful. Under this pressure, his health failed and, like Felix, he died prematurely.

Another representative of this school, the equally famous František Miko, found refuge in science and, with the fall of the regime, naturally shifted to postmodern positions. For him and his students, the shift from theory and logic to subjectivity and emotional experience of a work of art and pluralistic and fragmentary reception aesthetics was natural after they had gone as far as they could, but for his students, the command to forget theory and fully experience the work may have been confusing.

4. What can be done in the current situation?

If we want to revive the potential of Slovak tradition in literary science, translation, and criticism, it is necessary not only to translate fundamental works into world languages, but also to critically confront them with the current state of world literary science, philosophy, semiotics, communication theory, the state of aesthetic and artistic thinking, and the understanding of literature as the art of the word, the most aesthetically developed linguistic form dealing with all current topics, whether social, environmental, ideological, religious, political, or subjective. The teaching of literature should develop the joy of reception and creation, both Dionysian and Apollonian in character. Whether a scientist, writer, critic, or any reader, one needs theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and poetic experiences to develop one's potential for oneself and for the future. In general, we should realise the need for cooperation and open communication between theorists, practitioners and creators so that students and pupils become our partners and teachers. The future of literature teaching will not be a utopia, nor does it have to be a dystopia. We need to openly seek viable paths and not reject in advance those that seem difficult or even impossible—from a practical point of view, we must start from what is; in contrast, from a poetic point of view, we must achieve what is not yet. In the field of literature, this means openness to new forms, means of expression, technologies, and styles. And we have no reason to be ever satisfied and passive.

We need to openly seek viable paths and not reject in advance those that seem difficult or even impossible – from a practical point of view, we must start from what is, but from a poetic point of view, we must strive to achieve what is not yet. In the field of literature, this means openness to new forms, means of expression, technologies, and styles. We should never be satisfied and passive. Let us seek the path of dialogue and create a culture of dialogue; let us analyse objectively and synthesise with full commitment, not only of reason, but also of will and emotion. Let us create minority communities and not give up the need to cultivate the majority.

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From printed text to animated film in Slovak and Albanian art for children and youth with the theme of death

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Abstract: This paper examines the representation of death in selected works of Slovak and Albanian literature for children and young people, with particular attention to the developmental, cultural, and literary contexts in which this theme occurs. From a literary-historical perspective, the study investigates the treatment of death from earlier narrative traditions to contemporary Slovak and Albanian children's literature, where the topic appears only to a limited extent, and (possibly) animated film.

Using a comparative and contrastive methodological approach, the paper highlights both synchronic and diachronic development in the literary portrayal of death and loss. Using analysis, our aim is to identify the selected texts contribute to children's emotional education, particularly to fostering adequate understanding of death, coping with loss, and developing resilience. The findings confirm relative scarcity of such themes in children's literature and educational practice, while simultaneously emphasizing the urgent need for their sensitive, intentional, and pedagogically guided integration into literary education and didactics.

Keywords: *Slovak and Albanian literature for children and youth; theme of death; literary tradition; animated film; emotional education; loss and resilience*

Proverbs and ballads in Slovak literary

The rich literary tradition typical for the **Slovak literary context** incorporates the theme (motif), the problem or the character of **death** promoted in the past

in pre-literary (from 1778), partly also literary texts (from 1918), but only to a limited extent in the modern Slovak literature (from 1956).

This tradition and the motif of death can be found in several key Slovak **pre-literary works** intended for children and youth delimited by years 1778 – 1918. They include literature of the national revival, the **Enlightenment and Štúr literature**, or **literature of the Matica and post-Matica period**. The pedagogical effort of the scholars of the Enlightenment culminated in Kollár’s *Reader* (*Čítanka*; 1825) which contains various genres. The **motif of death** usually occurs in them in connection with life and health. Many proverbs, sayings, fables, and the idyll are suitable examples.

Proverbs, which teach lessons, and sayings are shorter genres that convey folk wisdom to a potential recipient figuratively (they associate old age with the specific period of life, emphasise the need to live with the awareness of mortality, capture characteristics of old age and attach symbolic meaning to them).

Examples include:

“Youth – joy, old age – illness.” (Kollár 1825, p. 97)

“Do not judge by gifts, think of the bier.” (Kollár 1825, p. 97)

“Gray hair is the flower of the grave.” (Kollár 1825, p. 99)

In fables, animals act and think like people and **death** is the result of poor reasoning or of imprudent actions, which leads to criticism of human actions, to the moral point.

One example is the fable *The Bee and the Elephant*, in which death is the result of an unreasonable punishment or the bee's unreasonable actions: “She wanted to punish him for it with a sting,/ But – the elephant did not feel it, and the bee died.” (Kollár 1825, p. 216)

Except for Kollár’s *National Songbook* (*Národné zpievanky*; 1834, 1835), the compilation of Slovak songbooks that preceded the compilation of folk prose genres, the **motif** or the **theme of death** can also be identified in later literature intended for children and youth (in folk songs, ballads and plays). One example of a genre suitable for a younger recipient is the ballad of *Enchanted Daughter* (*Zakletá Dcera*) (Kollár 1835, pp. 4 – 5), which is characterised by a gloomy and dramatic plot with a tragic end. It depicts a story of a mother whose curse turns her own daughter into a maple that “**dies**” for the human world, although she continues to feel and think, does not act though, which is why she asks the musicians to convey her message. In the ballad, the mother who curses her daughter and thus breaks the moral law is punished by an incessant voice of her conscience.

Excerpt from the ballad:

“This is the maiden,/ cursed to the maple tree,/ this is the violin,/ from your Annie./ And these strings,/ from her right little hand! ” Kollár 1835, pp. 4 – 5)
The interest of **Štúr and his followers** in children's literature, which expanded its didactic content to include a patriotic aspect, resulted in the publication of two volumes of *Morning Star (Zornička)* in 1846 – 1847 by Augustus Horislav Škultéty and Jonatan Dobroslav Čipka, as well as in Škultéty's publication of *Rhymes for Slovak Schools (Rečnovanky pre slovenské školy)* in 1850 and 1855.

One example from *Rhymes* is a poem *Withering Rose (Zvädlá ruža)* which meets a moral objective based on psychophysical parallelism, that is by evoking similarity between a rose and a child, as well as between their evolution or through the child's observation of the natural world and confrontation of the findings with the knowledge of an adult (*Rhymes* [Rizner 2015, orig. 1885]).

Excerpt from the poem:

“An excerpt from the poem: “Here you go, he says, my daughter,/ the image of human beauty.”// A rose in the garden, a rose in the cheek,/ both perish quickly:/ only virtues and a pure heart/ never perish!”

(Rečnovanka I. [Rizner, 1885; https://zlatyfond.sme.sk/dielo/1876/Rizner_Kytka-z-Tatier/18])

In the poetry collection *Spring Flowers (Jarnie kvety; 1863)*, authored by Ján Levoslav Bella, Andrej Černiansky and Ján Kršák, the national awakening and moral functions were emphasised. Texts with the motif of **death** reminded young readers of the need to lead a life without sin (*Pomni, na čos' na svete – Remember Why You're in the World*) or of the need for national values.

Excerpt from the poem:

“We were born/ We will die again./ Death will come to take life/ after a short time.” (Čerňanský 1863, p. 63)

In the **interwar period**, prose writers such as F. Kráľ, M. Hranko, Ľ. Podjavorinská, or P. Jilemnický refused the exclusion of children from societal and social reality, therefore they thematised socially “distorted” reality with the **motifs of death**. An example of the thematization of socially-conditioned reality can be the work of Frano Kráľ, e.g. the prose of *Čenkova's children (Čenkovej deti; 1932)*, in which poverty also conditions children's health and leads to death.

Excerpt from the prose:

“WHAT MIŠO’S MASTER FORESAW also happened. No salvation fell from heaven for the suffering, which is why Kasper’s family continued to die. Poverty continued to complete its destructive work. Mrs Kasper died of tuberculosis and the other members of the family became the owners of this disease of the poor. The master fell ill, his children fell ill and so did apprentice Mišo. The doctor diagnosed them all with pulmonary tuberculosis.” (Král’ 1980, pp. 94 – 95)

In the **post-war period**, the socialist model of children's literature is established in our region. However, memoir prose also enters literature for younger recipients, in which the method of socialist realism was not applied and which portrayed the theme of war and the Slovak National Uprising (e.g. H. Zelinová – *Jakubko*, 1959; J. Špitzer – *White clouds*; *Biele oblaky*, 1963).

Excerpt from the prose:

“She didn't even feel the pain. She knelt forward, then slowly lay down on her side, then on her back. She just sighed. The shot-through accordion fell into the snow next to her. Perhaps the German soldier didn't even know who he was shooting at. They were so scared that they shot at everything that moved... Above her was a dazzling blue sky with flying white clouds. A bitter smile came over her face. - They are flying towards the sun, - she said quietly. These were her last words. [...]

In the middle of her snowy heart, Zuzka lay like an enchanted princess waiting for the liberating kiss of a brave hero to wake her from her sleep.” (Špitzer 1963, pp. 165 – 166)

In the **current Slovak literary context**, a strong link to the Slovak folklore-vintage tradition, to a broader international cultural tradition, to the historical legacy of events and to the tradition of the portrayal of the problem of death and the figure of death in literature can be found.

In Milan Rúfus’ poetic work *Godfather’s Death and the Miraculous Doctor* (*Smrt’ kmotra a zázračný lekár*) from the collection *Saturday Evenings* (*Sobotné večery*; 2004, orig. 1979), which follows a folk tale, the philosophical problem of facing death, which is challenging for a younger recipient to accept, was transformed and revived.

Erik Jakub Groch’s picture story *A Girl with Matches* (*Dievčatko so zápalkami*; 2006) not only revives the “Andersen” fairytale tradition („I have never come to terms with your death“ Groch 2006, 10th double page) and the problem of a child’s death, but also the Biblical cultural tradition, which initiates overlaying the symbol of a child – the little one – with the child of God – Christ Jesus in the manger.



Illustration from *A Girl with Matches* by Jana Kiselová-Siteková.
In: Groch 2006, unnumbered page.

Excerpt from the story: “‘Where are you?’ I called out, because I didn’t see anyone anywhere.

“Look, here,” the same sweet, gentle voice came again from the wooden crib under the tree.

And indeed, in a tiny alder cradle lay my little girl with matches, exactly where wooden Baby Jesus had been laid before. I couldn’t believe my eyes and thought I was dreaming”.

Erik Jakub Groch’s graphic novel *The Spelling Book of Fivetowns* (*Šlabikár päťmestia*; 2013) presents the history of a town as “bloody”, since it is connected with the rejection of the value of humanity or humanism as a principle of being.

One of the stories that Erik Jakub Groch and illustrator Juliána Chomová will tell is of the deportation of the author's father to the Caucasus. The story is a testimony about the tactics of ideologically conditioned power as well as about the unbreakable strength of the spirit or soul.

The authors talk about the fatal consequences of the influence of the "red" ideology on many human lives, about death ("Many of those dragged away froze on the way." Groch, 2013, unnumbered page) through images with a dominant red colour (blood) and a strongly expressive effect on the ochre background.

The signs or symbols of the red flag, soldiers and their weapons, transports to the Caucasus, freight trains, or dead prisoners, but also mines are situated in opposition to the symbol of the soul, which is presented in blue.

Excerpt from the graphic book:



Illustration from *My father's story* by Juliana Chomová.

In: Groch 2013, unnumbered page. <http://julianachomova.tumblr.com/>

In the current cultural context, attention can also be drawn to animated films intended for children and youth that depict the problem of death (of a grandparent) and use audiovisual techniques and means.

The Czech-Slovak-Polish film story *The Kite* (*Šarkan*; 2019, directed and written by Martin Smatan, ČSFD) is a memory of those who have already died. The story follows a situation where a grandfather gives his grandson a kite and flies it with him. When the kite carries the grandson away, he catches it. In autumn, which is accompanied by the falling leaves and evokes the grandfather's old age, the grandfather weakens and a strong wind carries him into the cloudy sky.

The animated film with a minimum number of words can also be intended for a foreign context, giving instruction on how to embrace a difficult situation of a loss in life.





Illustration from the story *The Kite*. In: [Šarkan \(2019\) | Galéria - Z filmu | ČSFD.sk](#)

The selected works that can be included in the literary-historical context (pre-artistic period between 1778 and 1918: Enlightenment and literature of Štúr and his followers in children's literature until 1863, literature for children and youth in the Matica period and the post-Matica period between 1863 and 1918; the period of the formation of the artistic form of literature for children and youth between 1918 and 1945, i.e. interwar literature for children and youth; the period of the formation of modern literature for children and youth since 1956) fulfill several functions, from moral, educational (proverbs, sayings, fables, moral poems) to the artistic function in the interwar and modern Slovak literature, while the artistic function is a key function in the latter.

It is clear that texts (or animated films) for a younger audience can contribute to the emotional education of child recipients, to a more appropriate understanding of death as an integral part of life, or to the development of greater resilience to the problem of mortality, especially if they have artistic value. They offer instructions for solving or embracing a difficult situation, therefore they should be integrated into the reading list of children and young people.

The motif of death and the necessity of narrative: Albanian literature for children and youth in historical perspective

Confrontation with death generates narrative necessity. When someone dies, silence becomes almost impossible: we speak of the deceased, we remember them, and we retell who they were. It is as though the soul of the departed cannot rest unless it is narrated. Storytelling becomes an act of vigil, a form of resistance against disappearance. As the researcher Erlind Sulko (2017) argues

in *Pejsazhe të Fjalës (Landscapes of the Word)*, literature itself originates in this need to narrate in the face of mortality. The writer's task differs from communal mourning only in one respect: the death confronted is not another's, but his own.

Faced with finitude, the writer narrates in order to overcome it. The tearful recounting beside the dead becomes, in this sense, the very essence of literature. It is therefore no coincidence that the Epic of Gilgamesh, often regarded as the first major literary work, is structured around Gilgamesh's confrontation with death and his desperate search for immortality.

"Immortality was not granted to man!

Cruel death it is, that determines every fate."

From the Eleventh Song)

This anthropological and poetic understanding of narrative as a response to death provides a fruitful framework for examining Albanian literature for children and youth. Across its historical development, the motif of death evolves from moral-didactic instruction embedded in folklore to psychologically nuanced and artistically mediated explorations of loss.

Oral Tradition: Death as Moral Obligation

In the Albanian pre-literary context, children encountered the motif of death primarily through oral forms: ballads, laments (*vajtime*), lullabies, legends, and proverbs. These texts were not exclusively composed for children, yet they functioned as formative narrative material transmitted across generations. Before the consolidation of written literature for children, Albanian young audiences encountered the motif of death primarily through oral folklore, including ballads, legends, lullabies, laments (*vajtime*), and proverbs. These genres were not exclusively created for children, yet they functioned as formative narrative material for younger generations. A paradigmatic example is the ballad of *Kostandini dhe Doruntina*, where death is transcended through the sacred promise (*besa*). The dead brother returns from the grave to fulfill his vow to his mother. For younger recipients, the story communicates moral obligation, loyalty, and the idea that ethical values are stronger than death itself.

A paradigmatic example is the ballad *Kostandini dhe Doruntina*. Here, death is not irreversible annihilation but subordinate to ethical obligation. The dead brother rises from the grave to fulfil his promise (*besa*) to his mother:

Kostandin, o biri im, ku eshte besa qe me dhe, qe do te me sillje Doruntinen, tet moter ? Besa jote vdiq bashke me ty e kalbet ne varr te zi.

"Kostandin, O my son, where is the besa⁶⁵ you gave me, that you would bring back Doruntina, your only sister? Your besa died together with you and rots in the dark grave." (Kuteli, M. 2005, pg. 50)

The same connotation we see in the other ballad "Besa e Halil Garrisë – Besa of Halil Garria", where the sister blames her brother for not obtaining besa:

Motra del ditë për ditë, rri nën mollë, shikon malet e largët, psherëtin e loton:
- Ah Halil, vëllath! – thotë. – E shkele besën!

The sister stays everyday under the apple tree, stares at the high mountains, whispers and cries: Ah Halil, my little brother, - says, - You didn't maintain besa! (Kuteli, M. (2005, pg. 59)

Another example to the period we are discussing is *Songs of Muji and Halili Heroic Epic* (Këngë Kreshnikësh),⁶⁶ Death as Honor and Destiny. Within the Albanian epic cycle, death appears primarily in battle contexts. It is anticipated, confronted, and frequently verbalized before occurring.

Formulaic expressions, such as "Better to die with honour than live in shame – Gjergj Elez Alia, Ajkuna qan Omerin"

Predetermined fate: death is often framed as inscribed in destiny as in Ymer Agë Ulqini: "Nëntë ditë janë pak, moj vashë. Udha ime është e gjatë. Edhe lufta është e gjatë. Se kjo luftë bëhet në dhe të largët. Në më do siç të dua, ti të me presësh, nente vjet e nente ditë. Si të shkojnë të nente vjetet e të nente ditët e unë të mos kthehem, ti vashw, martohu e trashëgothu, se kështu qenka thënë: Atehere unë s'do të jem gjallë.

"Nine days are too few, my girl. My road is long. And the war is long as well. For this war is fought in distant lands. If you love me as I love you, you must wait for me nine years and nine days. And when the nine years and nine days have passed, and I have not returned, then you, my girl, marry and build your family, for so it has been ordained: By then, I shall no longer be alive." (Kuteli, M. (2005, pg.78)

Oath and promise before death, heightening moral gravity - Rozafati, pg.39.
Kostandini i vogelith, pg. 74

⁶⁵ Besa is a central ethical and juridical concept in Albanian customary law, particularly codified in the Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini. It denotes a sacred pledge of honor that creates an inviolable moral obligation between individuals and communities. Within the Kanun, besa functions as a mechanism of social order: it guarantees protection, suspends blood feuds for a defined period, and ensures safe passage under one's word. More than a personal promise, besa constitutes a binding covenant rooted in honour, trust, and communal accountability. Its force is both moral and quasi-sacred, extending beyond legal enforcement into the realm of ethical identity and collective cohesion.

⁶⁶ Visaret e Kombit II, Eposi i Kreshnikeve, Mbledhur dhe redaktuar nga At Donat Kurti dhe At Bernardin Palaj, Plejad, 2005.

Symbolic Meaning

Death functions as a test of moral integrity. The hero's willingness to die affirms his ethical code and masculine identity. For children listening to epic recitations, death was stripped of randomness and fear. It became a measure of courage, a confirmation of loyalty, a dignified endpoint rather than a collapse.

This exposure cultivated an ethos in which mortality was acknowledged but subordinated to values of honour and collective belonging.

With the consolidation of written children's literature in the interwar period (1912–1945), death remains present but is carefully mediated. In *Tregime të moçme shqiptare* by Mitrush Kuteli, traditional narratives are reshaped for younger readers. Danger and mortality may threaten protagonists, yet narrative equilibrium is restored through poetic justice or symbolic transformation. In these texts, death may punish wrong doing, the innocent are often spared, and the moral order ultimately prevails.

Thus, the motif fulfils a restorative-didactic function. Tragedy is softened, and the narrative reassures rather than destabilizes.

Proverbs

They transmitted to children within family contexts also reflect awareness of mortality. The examples below are abstracted from Lowton, R (20216)

“Vdekja s'pyet për moshë – Death does not consider age”

“Sot për mua, nesër për ty – Today for me, tomorrow for you”

“Jeta është mysafire – Life is a guest”,

Here, death is presented as universal and inevitable, encouraging humility and moral awareness rather than fear. The supernatural return transforms death into a moral test. Loyalty and family duty transcend biological finality. For younger recipients, mortality is framed not as terror but as a domain governed by honour and responsibility. Similarly, proverbs transmitted within domestic and communal settings reinforce the inevitability and universality of death. Such proverbs normalize mortality, embedding it within ethical consciousness rather than existential despair.

Existential Break: Migjeni's⁶⁷ Radical Reconfiguration

According to Eco, U (2007; 20), “The already written stories also teach us how to die. I believe that this education, in the sense of fate and death, is one of the primary functions of literature.”

⁶⁷ Millosh Gjergj Nikolla, Alias Migjeni is not a children writer. We consider his narrative as children readings.

The prose of Migjeni, mainly collected in editions of his works such as **Veptra**, is deeply marked by tragedy and social protest. Death is not presented merely as a biological end, but as a direct consequence of poverty, misery, and social injustice.

In stories like *"Luli i vocërr – Little Luli"*, death appears as a silent threat hanging over a childhood oppressed by poverty. The child does not necessarily face physical death, but rather a spiritual one, the loss of innocence and hope.

In *"Bukën tonë të përditshme falna sot – Our daily day, let us have today"*, death is closely connected to hunger and inhuman living conditions. It emerges as the outcome of a social system that abandons the individual to suffering.

Ultimately, in Migjeni's prose (2006;82), death represents a consequence of social injustice, the extinction of hope, a protest against hypocrisy and poverty, evidence of existential human suffering.

It is not romanticized; it is harsh, realistic, and deeply unsettling.

A profound transformation in the literary treatment of death in Albanian children occurs with Migjeni, particularly in "The Suicide of the Sparrow." Although not strictly a children's text, its symbolic compression and allegorical clarity mark a turning point in Albanian literary consciousness.

As Eljon Doçe (2014) observes, through the fragile figure of the sparrow, the almost surreal spatial setting, and the elevated tone reminiscent of biblical cadence, Migjeni constructs a brief yet artistically expansive meditation on death. Suicide is presented neither as heroism nor as moral punishment, but as an act "in the name of nothing and no one, yet equally of everything and everyone." Death here becomes a crisis of meaning.

For Sabri Hamiti (2009) until the threshold of modern Albanian literature, a boundary marked by Koliqi, Kuteli, and Migjeni, death often appears in epic forms—sometimes as a taboo, always as a mystery, dense as self-sacrifice in the name of an ideal, and never as suicide in the clinical sense of the word. Migjenian suicide, seen through the metaphor of the sparrow, seems to open the way for Albanian literature toward the desacralization of an aesthetic taboo, a taboo that begins with oral literature and continues into cultivated literature.

The sparrow embodies vulnerability, the small, exposed being confronted by an indifferent world. Mortality is no longer governed by moral law or divine justice; it is existential rupture. Migjeni thus displaces the discourse of death from ethical teleology to metaphysical absurdity. This shift profoundly influences later representations, including those accessible to younger audiences.

Socialist Period: Heroic Sacrifice and Ideological Framing

During the socialist period (1945–1990), children's literature integrates death into patriotic narratives, particularly stories of the National Liberation War. Fallen child-heroes and young partisans embody meaningful sacrifice. Mortality is framed as collective duty rather than personal tragedy.

Death functions here as moral exemplum, as reinforcement of collective identity, as pedagogical affirmation of ideological values.

Yet even within this framework, a gradual emotional modulation becomes visible in later decades. In the "Balada e lirise (1979) – Freedom's Ballad" and "Zerat e femijerise (1986) – Childhood's voices" of Odhise Grillo, loss appears through symbolic imagery, autumn landscapes, fading flowers, the quiet disappearance of grandparents. Mortality is no longer solely heroic but intimate, filtered through tenderness and memory.

Odhise Grillo also wrote works for children with themes drawn from the National Liberation War, featuring partisan figures, collective heroes, and motifs of resistance.

Various poems included in primers and reading textbooks of the 1970s–1980s are mainly with war-related themes. In these works, one can observe the idealization of the partisan figure, collective heroism, a sense of sacrifice and patriotism, the use of simple language and a mobilizing tone adapted for children.

For the scholar Rudina Alimerko (2014), the novel "Griva" by Petro Marko has been regarded as one of the most beautiful novels for children. As in all his works, here too Marko offers a narrative rich in events and episodes skillfully interwoven with one another, where profound human feelings are intertwined, such as love for one's homeland, for family and fellow villagers; the desire for the country's freedom; hatred toward foreign rule; and the urge to overthrow everything that is unjust and oppressive.

The events of the novel take place during the period of King Zog and partly during the Fascist occupation, in the author's native village of Dhërmi. The life and hardships of the villagers are vividly portrayed, especially their forced separation from their families and homeland, as many were compelled to emigrate beyond the country's borders in search of a better life.

At the centre of the story is an animal that gave profound meaning to Jaku's life and to that of his family, a mule they called "Griva." More than a work animal, she became a member of the family, sharing in their sufferings and their joys:

"The arrival of Grivë in our family changed the heavy atmosphere that forced us children not to laugh, not to play, not to sing like the others... She did not understand the joy she brought us, but I could see it in her large eyes—she looked at us with compassion." (Marko, P. pg.9)

By placing the events in Jaku's own voice, it becomes clear that the author has personally lived through these situations. The entire story unfolds and is experienced through the eyes of Jaku, a child who grows up too early, as hardships and difficulties compel him to see the world differently.

The novel "Griva" by Petro Marko is perhaps the only narrative in Albanian children's literature that addresses death in such an open and direct manner. Griva is neither a human being nor a close family member, but a mule to whom the children—and especially Jaku (the protagonist and narrative voice)—become deeply attached. Their bond is so strong that she is naturally perceived as part of the family.

Her killing by Italian soldiers, while she was carrying food to the partisans in the mountains during the Second World War (known in Albania as the National Liberation War), remains one of the most moving and emotionally profound moments in the entire novel. Jaku's grief is so intense, his heart so painfully constricted, that it is impossible for this emotional state not to affect young readers immediately—not merely to move them, but to make them experience the loss with the same intensity.

His pleas as Griva is dying are natural, vivid, and filled with sorrow and tenderness:

"Griva, Griva! Don't die! Where are you leaving me? Where are you leaving us? My Griva!"

(Marko, p. 221)

The author - protagonist continues his confession:

"I bent completely over the head of my Griva, who remained with her eyes open. I could not bear that gaze and lowered her eyelids. I closed her beautiful brown eyes. Then, I am not ashamed to say, I began to sob uncontrollably, a sobbing that shook my body and soul... And why should I not cry? My Griva had died." (ibid., p. 221)

Through this scene, Petro Marko shifts the experience of death from the sphere of collective heroism to that of intimate, personal grief. Loss is not presented as a grand historical act, but as the rupture of a bond of love—an approach that renders the emotional experience especially powerful for child readers.

Post-1990 Literature: Psychological and Emotional Depth

After 1990, Albanian children's literature gains thematic autonomy and aesthetic plurality. The motif of death increasingly appears in contexts such as, the loss of grandparents, war trauma, especially related to Kosovo, migration and separation.

The child's subjective perspective becomes central. Death is explored through confusion, grief, memory, and resilience. Rather than functioning as ideological instruction, it becomes part of emotional education. Narrative

space allows children to process absence, articulate fear, and preserves memory.

Vilhelme Vranari describes, with a distinctive style and great love, the beauties of our country. She skilfully intertwines various historical events with information about different natural and social phenomena, doing so with remarkable ease and sweetness.

In the novel, the main character, Amanti, goes through many hardships. He grows up an orphan, without parental care, experiencing suffering, pain, poverty, and hunger. He is raised and educated by the wise words of his gentle grandmother. Even after her death, she continues to remain spiritually close to him, helping and advising the boy:

“A man without land is as good as dead. The land is his soul. Plant olive trees everywhere, Amant, for there is no wealth more sacred, my son.” (Vranari, V. 2003. p. 18)

The novel also conveys numerous pieces of advice and sayings that contribute to children’s moral education and familiarize them with the rich lexical and phraseological heritage of the Albanian people.

Across its historical trajectory, the motif of death in Albanian literature for children and youth performs shifting functions:

Period	Dominant Function
Oral tradition	Moral-ethical (honour stronger than death)
Interwar literature	Restorative-didactic
Socialist period	Patriotic-ideological
Late socialist	Symbolic-emotional
Contemporary	Psychological-aesthetic

Conclusion

The Albanian case reveals a gradual movement from collective and morally regulated representations of death, to ideologically frame heroic sacrifice, to intimate and psychologically complex explorations of grief.

In contemporary children’s literature, death is increasingly understood not as spectacle, punishment, or martyrdom, but as an integral dimension of human experience. Artistic mediation supersedes purely didactic framing, positioning literature as a formative space where young readers encounter mortality in ways that foster emotional resilience and existential reflection.

In this sense, the Albanian trajectory parallels broader European developments: literature becomes not merely a moral guide but a space where

the necessary narrative born from confrontation with death continues to unfold.

Like the Slovak context, Albanian literature demonstrates that texts intended for younger recipients can contribute to emotional education, encourage awareness of mortality as part of life, strengthen resilience in facing loss, and transform fear into reflection through aesthetic experience.

The evolution from collective, moralized representations of death (*folklore and patriotic literature*) toward individual, introspective, and artistically complex portrayals (*modern and contemporary literature*) reveals a broader cultural shift: from death as destiny and social law to death as personal experience and existential question.

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Literature as a bridge between classical humanism and contemporary digital ethics: questioning the other

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Abstract: This paper examines literature as a bridge between classical humanism and contemporary digital ethics, placing the concept of the Other at the centre of its inquiry. While digital technologies have reshaped modes of communication and ethical engagement, they have also intensified the fragmentation of human relationships and increased distance from the Other. Within this context, literature appears as a fragile bridge, exposed to rhythms that reshape digital cultural experience.

The aim of this study is to explore whether, and in what ways, literature continues to sustain ethical relations with the Other despite contemporary digital conditions. The paper adopts a theoretical and interpretive methodology, bringing the principles of classical humanism into dialogue with approaches to digital ethics and literary theory. The analysis focuses on narrative structures, ethical ambiguity, and modes of representing subjectivity, examining how literary texts create reflective spaces that resist the instrumental treatment of human experience.

The analysis suggests that literature’s contribution to digital ethics lies not in normative principles, but in its capacity to keep ethical relations with the Other open. Through the experience of reading and narrative form, literature creates conditions in which responsibility does not appear as a fixed rule, but as a process of interpretation and engagement. In this sense, ethical reflection shifts from abstract principles toward lived experience. The paper argues that literary perspectives can enrich reflections on digital ethics by keeping the human dimension of responsibility at the centre of digital culture.

Keywords: *literature, classical humanism, digital ethics, the Other, ethical reflection*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation in education is often framed as a matter of tools, access, and efficiency. Yet beyond technological innovation lies a deeper shift: a

change in the way experience is organized and meaning is produced. Digital systems normalize a rationality grounded in selection, prediction, and operational clarity, while educational ideals continue to invoke critical thinking, interpretation, and ethical awareness. The tension between these two orientations forms the starting point of this study.

While much research has examined digitalization in terms of practice and infrastructure, less attention has been given to its epistemological and anthropological implications. Specifically, the gradual transition from an interpretative rationality – shaped by narrative, ambiguity, and relational understanding – toward an optimizing rationality that privileges categorization and functional clarity remain insufficiently explored. This study therefore examines how this shift reshapes the conceptualization of the Other and the ethical formation of the subject.

The primary aim of this paper is to investigate whether literature can function as a mediating space between classical humanist thought and contemporary digital ethics, preserving forms of interpretative rationality within increasingly algorithmic environments. More specifically, the study asks: How does the shift from interpretative to optimizing rationality affect the ethical relation to the Other? And in what ways can literary discourse sustain a mode of ethical engagement that resists reduction to operational logic?

In this context, literature is approached not as aesthetic retreat but as a mode of thought capable of sustaining complexity and resisting reductive binaries. In relation to the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society,” the paper argues that innovation must be understood not only as technical advancement, but as a transformation in the organization of meaning itself. The structure of the paper first outlines the theoretical tension between interpretative and optimizing rationalities, then analyses their implications for the concept of the Other and finally proposes literature as a critical bridge within digital educational contexts.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

This study unfolds at the intersection of classical humanism, narrative identity theory, and contemporary digital ethics, bringing these perspectives into dialogue around the question of the Other.

Classical humanism, articulated in Cicero, conceives the human being as a bearer of dignity and moral responsibility. Ricoeur (1992) extends this vision by framing identity as narrative and relational: the self is not a fixed substance, but a being shaped through time, promise, and exposure to others. In this tradition, ethical responsibility emerges from relation.

Contemporary digital ethics, particularly in Floridi (2013), describes a different horizon. Within informational environments, subjectivity increasingly appears as data, profile, and calculable pattern. While this framework clarifies the structural conditions of digital agency, it tends to foreground governance and regulation, leaving less space for the narrative and experiential dimensions of ethical formation. Similarly, Nussbaum (1990; 2010) and Todorov (2007; 2015) affirm literature’s ethical force, yet without fully confronting how digital mediation alters the conditions under which alterity is encountered.

Taken together, these traditions illuminate either the dignity of the relational subject or the logic of informational systems, but rarely their convergence. The mediating role of literature between narrative selfhood and algorithmic rationality remains underdeveloped. It is precisely this space of mediation that the present study seeks to clarify.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative theoretical-conceptual research design. The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the nature of the research questions, which seek to interpret conceptual transformations of subjectivity and ethical responsibility rather than to measure empirical variables.

The research design is analytical and comparative. It is based on hermeneutic textual analysis of selected philosophical and literary works, including texts by Cicero, Ricoeur, Floridi, Nussbaum, Todorov, Woolf, Euripides, and Cavafy. These works function as theoretical and illustrative case studies through which the concepts of alterity, narrative identity, and algorithmic rationality are examined.

Data collection consists of close reading and conceptual examination of primary texts. Data analysis is conducted through interpretative comparison, identifying convergences and tensions between classical humanist anthropology and contemporary digital ethics.

The study does not involve human participants and therefore does not require informed consent or institutional ethical approval. Ethical standards are ensured through accurate citation, intellectual integrity, and transparent theoretical argumentation.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

4.1 The Logic of the Boundary: “Either – or” As a Structure of Thought

Every act of knowing begins with a defining gesture. To name something and place it within a category is not simply a linguistic move; it is a way of

structuring reality. Once defined, a thing enters a field of distinctions, acquires a position, and becomes intelligible. Yet this clarity comes at a cost: definition requires reduction. To determine what something is, we must trace its boundary – and every boundary is drawn through exclusion.

Classical logic formalized this gesture in its simplest expression: a thing is either A or not-A. Aristotle presents this as the most secure principle of thought: "*It is, that the same attribute cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject and in the same respect...*" (Aristotle, 1924, IV.3, 1005b19–20).

The "either – or" secures coherence within a system of distinctions; yet in doing so, it narrows the range of what can appear as meaningful. Definition thus functions not only as a tool of clarity but also as an act of exclusion.

In literary studies, this logic becomes visible whenever a work is stabilized within an interpretative frame. Whether we speak of movements, genres, poetics, or aesthetic orientations, naming operates synecdochically: one feature is elevated into a principle, and the part stands in for the whole. Categorization enables critical exchange, but it also flattens. What does not conform to the chosen framework recedes to the margins of interpretation.

And yet no literary text ever fully coincides with the category assigned to it. A concept may establish a center of gravity, but the text itself continually shifts around that center. What appears dominant proves to be only one layer among many, as meaning reorganizes itself in relation to context and reading.

If definition works by stabilizing boundaries and excluding what falls outside them, then the problem is not only epistemological but anthropological: how might the subject be conceived beyond a binary schema? At this point, classical humanism can be understood not merely as a historical moment, but as a movement from categorization toward relation.

This movement becomes especially clear in historical encounters that fail precisely because the Other is interpreted through our own categories. As Tzvetan Todorov observes in his study of the conquest of America, the tragedy of that encounter lies not solely in military domination, but in the inability to recognize the Other as a subject. Once the Other is reduced to an object of knowledge, it ceases to function as a relation and is absorbed into our own system of meaning (Todorov, 2017).

This structural dependence on the Other is poetically rendered in Constantine P. Cavafy's poem *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where the presence of the anticipated "Other" organizes the entire political imagination of the city. The citizens prepare, deliberate, and suspend decisions in expectation of the barbarians' arrival, convinced that they will impose order and provide resolution. Yet when night falls, the announcement comes:

"Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come.

And some people have arrived from the borders,
and they say that there are no barbarians any longer."

The poem closes with an even more revealing recognition:
"And now, what's going to happen to us without barbarians?
Those people were a kind of solution" (Cavafy, 1992).

Here, the Other appears not merely as an external figure to be excluded, but as a constitutive absence through which identity sustains itself. The city's stability depends on the projection of alterity; when the expected Other vanishes, the coherence of the self-falters. The boundary that once secured meaning is revealed to have required precisely what it excluded.

4.2 Classical Humanism and Ethical Responsibility

Classical humanism should not be understood simply as a historical period or a cultural movement confined to the Renaissance, but as an anthropological paradigm that shapes the way the human being is conceived as a moral subject. At its core stands the concept of *Dignitas hominis*, rooted in the Roman classical tradition, where in Cicero human dignity is associated with rational nature and with the capacity for moral self-reflection (Cicero, 1991).

Within this paradigm, the human being is conceived as an autonomous subject, endowed with reason and with the ability to distinguish good from evil. Education, culture, and art are not regarded merely as the accumulation of knowledge, but as formative forces that shape character. Humanist formation thus seeks to cultivate an individual who not only think, but who reflect on their place in the world and on the relationships through which that place acquires meaning.

Yet the affirmation of dignity within classical humanism has not always been stable. Historically, it has operated within political and epistemological structures that, while elevating the human as a universal subject, simultaneously confined that universality within specific cultural, gendered, or political norms. Here emerges a fundamental paradox: the human is affirmed as the center of value, yet at the same time risks being reduced to a function or role within a system.

In response to this tension, humanism gradually shifts its focus from social status to ontological condition. Dignity comes to be understood not as distinction earned or privilege granted, but as intrinsic to being. The subject has value not because of performance or achievement, but by virtue of being a moral being. At this point, humanism moves from a simple anthropocentrism toward an ethics of relation: dignity is realized not in isolation, but in encounter. Relationship with the Other becomes a condition for the formation of the subject; the human being is shaped not in isolation, but in dialogue.

Within this framework, ethical responsibility is not an external moral supplement but a constitutive dimension of humanist anthropology. Rational autonomy does not imply self-sufficiency; it presupposes answerability. To be a subject is to be capable of responding – to the presence of the Other, to the norms that regulate communal life, and to the consequences of one’s actions. Responsibility thus becomes the practical articulation of dignity: it is through responsible action and judgment that dignity acquires ethical substance. Humanist education, accordingly, aims not merely at cultivating knowledge, but at forming subjects capable of deliberation, interpretation, and moral accountability. The capacity to respond precedes the capacity to control; ethical maturity lies not in mastery, but in responsiveness.

At this juncture, Paul Ricoeur’s concept of narrative identity offers an important clarification. In *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur (1992) distinguishes identity as *idem* (same) – the continuity of traits – from identity as *ipse* (self), which refers to the capacity to keep promises and assume responsibility over time (p. 118–120). This distinction develops the idea that the subject is not defined solely by the traits that characterize it, but by the way it responds and commits itself in relation to the Other. As Ricoeur writes, “The selfhood of oneself implies otherness to such an intimate degree that one cannot be thought of without the other” (Ricoeur, 1992, p. 3). The self is formed through narrative, yet narrative is always addressed, answered, and mediated through the presence of the Other. In this sense, responsibility appears as an intrinsic structure of selfhood rather than a superimposed moral obligation.

It is precisely this understanding of the subject in relation to the Other that is being challenged today by the transformations of digital culture, where new forms of mediation reshape the way the relationship with the Other is experienced and structured.

4.3 Contemporary Digital Ethics and the Problem of the Other

If classical humanism understood the subject as a being formed through relation to the Other – as a consciousness that matures and deepens through encounter, dialogue, and exposure to another presence – the digital age reshapes this relation in a fundamental way. Today, the meeting with the Other rarely takes place directly; it is filtered through technological systems. This is not simply a change in medium. It affects how experience is structured and how the Other comes into view.

At the center of this mediation stands the algorithm – not only as a technical system that processes information, but as a structure that selects, orders, and anticipates, translating the subject into an informational form (Floridi, 2013). The subject (both you and I) appears less as a narrative being marked by

continuity and reflection, and more as a collection of data, as profile assembled and adjusted within a system.

This transformation may also be understood through a deeper structural analogy between classical logic and algorithmic systems. Classical philosophy organized thought through the binary structure of "either-or", where meaning emerges through distinction and exclusion. Contemporary algorithmic systems reproduce a similar gesture at the level of digital classification. Recommendation systems, predictive models, and data profiling operate by sorting individuals into categories that determine visibility, relevance, and value. In this sense, algorithmic rationality may be interpreted as a contemporary extension of the logic of exclusion: what classical philosophy formulated as a logical principle, digital infrastructures operationalize through computational systems. The Other is not simply excluded from discourse but filtered, ranked, and positioned within informational hierarchies.

This marks a decisive movement: from the subject as history – one who narrates, remembers, and relates – to the subject as information, measurable and classifiable, shaped within systems of prediction. When the relationship with the Other becomes a relationship with the Other's data, something essential is altered, particularly in the way moral responsibility is experienced. What occurs is not the erasure of the subject, but a displacement: from lived experience to coded representation. The individual persists, yet as a set of signals that can be compared, traced, and projected forward. Dehumanization does not appear as an open denial of dignity; rather, it takes the quieter form of translating dignity into operational value.

In this transformation, ethical responsibility does not disappear, but it becomes refracted through systems that obscure direct accountability. Decision-making processes are often automated, distributed, or governed by opaque criteria. The subject encounters the Other not in immediate presence but through filtered representations shaped by algorithmic priorities. As a result, the ethical encounter risks being displaced by procedural interaction.

A similar displacement of the Other can be observed in contemporary cinema. In *Her* (Jonze, 2013), a man forms an intimate bond with an operating system that responds, learns, and adapts to him. The relationship feels emotionally real, yet the Other appears only as voice and interface, without embodied presence. The film offers a striking example of how alterity may persist as interaction while losing the resistance and vulnerability that define genuine encounter.

It is precisely here that literature, as a form of reflective life, may reopen the ethical dimension – not by opposing technology, but by restoring experience where it risks being reduced. It brings attention back to the face of the Other rather than the profile. Narrative does not confine the subject to a single

instant; it situates the subject within time and history, creating space for reflection, complexity, and responsibility (Nussbaum, 1990).

4.4 Literature as an Ethical Bridge

Understood as a mediating space, literature must be approached through the way it organizes time, subjectivity, and relation, rather than as a nostalgic alternative to technology. Its ethical dimension does not lie in moralizing or in the transmission of norms, but in its narrative structure, which preserves the complexity of time and of the Other. In this sense, action is not exhausted in the instant; it lingers in consciousness and demands further reflection.

Time in literature is not merely structural; it determines how the Other appears and is recognized. A particularly meaningful example appears in *Mrs. Dalloway*, where a single day in London unfolds into an entire life. The striking of Big Ben marks objective time – "There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air" (Woolf, 1925/1953, p. 5) – yet this marking does not seal the moment as complete. On the contrary, it releases it from the linearity of the clock and places it within the flow of consciousness.

Amid traffic, urban noise, and constant movement, the narrator evokes an "indescribable pause" – a pause that occurs within experience itself. Reflection begins precisely there. Clarissa does not merely inhabit the present; she experiences it in dialogue with memory, with past choices, and with unrealized possibilities. As readers, we no longer remain outside the character as detached observers. We share the hesitations and return that do not resolve at once. Reading becomes a way of dwelling in the time of the Other.

This temporal unfolding also shapes character. The figure does not appear as a fixed trait or function, but as a consciousness developing through time, marked by tension and contradiction. The author does not dictate emotion; space is opened for the reader to remain with that complexity.

Such suspension of judgment is one of literature's earliest ethical gestures. In Euripides' *Medea*, the protagonist resists simple moral classification. She is both betrayed woman and agent of an unthinkable act. The tragedy refuses to settle her into a single identity and instead sustains the tension between pain, pride, and revenge. In this ambiguity lies its ethical force: the reader (or spectator) learns not to reduce the Other to a final verdict, but to recognize her through the complexity of her experience. As Martha Nussbaum argues, literature enlarges moral imagination by placing readers within conflicts that must be lived through rather than judged from a distance (Nussbaum, 1990). Wayne C. Booth (1988) similarly argues that fiction shapes ethical perception by placing readers within relationships that require judgment, sympathy, and reflection.

Serious reading therefore demands attention and patience. It requires the reader to remain with ambiguity rather than resolve it immediately. In this pause lies an ethical gesture: to encounter the Other not as a manageable category, but as a subject who resists closure.

What makes literature mediating is not simply that it exists, but how it is read. When a novel is reduced to plot, a character to type, or a conflict to illustration, the temporal depth that enables reflection disappears. The problem is not technology as such, but the habits of attention it cultivates. Digital environments encourage rapid transitions from text to text, image to image, fostering an expectation of immediacy. When this habit is applied to literary reading, narrative is experienced differently. It is no longer followed in its development or inhabited in its layers; it is pressed toward instant grasp.

In that shift, the character loses temporal depth and appears as something to be grasped quickly rather than as a consciousness unfolding in time. The relation to the Other changes accordingly – from sustained encounter to brief contact.

In this sense, literature operates as an ethical mediation between classical humanism and digital modernity. It sustains a conception of subjectivity grounded in narrative continuity and relational exposure, precisely within a cultural environment shaped by speed and abstraction. Rather than opposing technological systems, literature unsettles their simplifying tendencies by reintroducing ambiguity, duration, and interpretative responsibility. In doing so, it preserves the conditions under which the Other may be encountered not as a unit of information, but as a presence that demands response.

4.5 Literature, Digital Society, and Ethical Education

Digital society has significantly reshaped the ways we communicate, process information, and organize knowledge. As Byung-Chul Han (2017) observes, digital communication often fragments attention and replaces sustained dialogue with the rapid circulation of information. What is at stake is not simply technological change, but a shift in the conditions under which knowledge is formed and experienced. Within this landscape, education faces a tension: how to cultivate technical competence without neglecting the formation of judgment and responsibility.

If literature has been described above as a space where time, subjectivity, and relation are held together, its educational significance becomes evident. Literary reading requires duration and interpretative effort; it slows perception and interrupts habitual certainty. Through this process, the reader is drawn beyond fixed viewpoints and invited to reconsider assumptions. What emerges is not sentimentality, but a discipline of perspective: the capacity to see beyond one's own position.

This is where literature acquires ethical relevance. Attentive reading makes it more difficult to reduce the Other to stereotype or functional description. It trains the mind to remain with ambiguity rather than rush toward simplified judgment. For example, when students encounter a character, whose motivations remain partially opaque, they must tolerate uncertainty instead of reacting immediately. Such practice contrasts with digital interactions that often reward rapid evaluation and categorical response.

Tzvetan Todorov’s reflection on literature “in danger” speaks directly to this issue. The risk, he argues, does not lie in the disappearance of literary works, but in the way, literature is approached in educational contexts, when it is treated primarily as an object of technical analysis. The solution he proposes is a return to reading as an experience of meaning and as a relation to the world (Todorov, 2007). Literature’s role in digital society, therefore, is not to preserve tradition for its own sake, but to sustain reading as an act of understanding.

In practical educational terms, this implies rethinking how literature is integrated within curricula. When texts are approached as spaces of sustained engagement rather than as material for extraction, the classroom becomes a site of ethical exercise. Students learn to articulate reasons for judgment, to listen to alternative interpretations, and to confront complexity without premature closure. Such capacities are increasingly fragile within digitally accelerated environments.

As Martha Nussbaum (2010) argues, education focused solely on economic productivity risks neglecting the cultivation of critical thinking and empathetic imagination. The humanities are therefore not supplementary, but essential to the formation of reflective and responsible citizens—an imperative that becomes even more urgent within digitally mediated societies.

In this way, literature does not stand outside digital reality; it operates within it as a space where the humanist model of the subject may be experienced again as relation. It does not solve the technical problems of digital ethics, but it contributes to the formation of the subject who will confront them.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study has reconsidered the relationship between classical humanism and digital ethics not as a simple historical contrast between successive periods, but as a difference between two ways of understanding and shaping human experience. In the humanist tradition, the subject is formed over time and in relation to others; responsibility arises not from an abstract inner core, but from engagement, interpretation, and exposure to what lies beyond the self.

Digital systems, by contrast, organize experience through selection, calculation, and prediction. They rely on patterns and probabilities rather than on narrative continuity. In this shift, what becomes less visible is the slower work of reflection through which meaning develops and through which the presence of the other resists being reduced to a fixed description.

Against this background, the study has argued that literature retains significance because it preserves a narrative way of engaging with experience. Literature does not provide moral formulas, nor does it stand outside technological modernity. Instead, it sustains a mode of attention in which time matters, complexity is not immediately resolved, and understanding remains open to revision. Its value lies in maintaining a space where interpretation unfolds rather than being settled at once. What is ultimately at stake is not merely the place of literature within education, but the preservation of forms of subjectivity capable of sustaining responsibility under conditions of technological acceleration.

The argument presented here is conceptual rather than empirical. It does not draw on field studies of digital platforms or classroom practice, and its conclusions should therefore be read as theoretical contributions to an ongoing debate. The absence of empirical data limits the study’s capacity to assess the measurable impact of literary education within specific digital contexts. In addition, the discussion relies primarily on Western philosophical and literary traditions, which inevitably narrows its cultural scope.

Further research could explore how literary reading functions within digitally mediated environments and how different cultural frameworks approach subjectivity and alterity. Such work would deepen our understanding of how narrative and algorithmic systems coexist in shaping contemporary ethical awareness. The challenge, therefore, is not to oppose technological development, but to ensure that narrative forms of reflection continue to inform the ethical horizons within which digital systems operate.

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Literature in the digital age: preserving and teaching Albanian cultural identity in the Diaspora

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Abstract: The preservation of heritage language and cultural identity represents a significant challenge for diaspora communities in the context of globalization and linguistic assimilation. This study explores how digital technologies can support the teaching and preservation of Albanian language, literature, and cultural heritage among diaspora youth. Drawing on two complementary case studies, the research examines the role of digital pedagogy and digital cultural infrastructures in diaspora education.

The first case study analyzes the practices of an Albanian language teacher in Finland who integrates interactive digital platforms such as Kahoot, Wordwall, Padlet, and Book Creator to enhance students’ engagement with language learning and cultural storytelling. The second case study focuses on the Shkodër Digital Archives (ADSH), a digital heritage initiative developed by academic and public libraries in Albania that provides open access to historical texts, periodicals, literary works, and cultural documents relevant for diaspora education.

Building on insights from digital humanities, heritage language education, and participatory learning theories, the study proposes a conceptual framework described as a Digital Cultural Ecosystem of the Albanian Diaspora. The model integrates micro-level digital pedagogy, meso-level digital cultural infrastructures, and macro-level transnational cultural networks that collectively support heritage language retention and identity formation.

The findings suggest that digital technologies not only facilitate access to cultural resources but also enable participatory forms of cultural production that strengthen emotional connections to heritage. By linking educational innovation with digital heritage platforms, the proposed ecosystem offers a sustainable approach to preserving Albanian cultural identity in transnational contexts.

Keywords: *digital heritage, diaspora education, Albanian language, digital pedagogy, cultural identity, digital libraries*

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, diaspora communities face significant challenges in maintaining their heritage languages and cultural identities. Migration, linguistic assimilation, and the dominance of global languages often weaken the transmission of cultural heritage across generations. For smaller linguistic communities such as the Albanian diaspora, these challenges are particularly evident in educational contexts where pupils are exposed primarily to the dominant language of the host country.

At the same time, the rapid development of digital technologies has transformed both education and cultural heritage preservation. Digital learning platforms, online cultural archives, and participatory media tools have created new opportunities for teaching heritage languages and fostering cultural engagement among diaspora youth. These digital environments allow learners not only to access cultural resources but also to participate actively in the production and reinterpretation of cultural narratives.

Recent research in digital humanities, heritage language education, and diaspora studies suggests that digital technologies can play a critical role in supporting cultural sustainability by connecting educational practices with digital cultural infrastructures and transnational networks (Jenkins, 2006; Gee, 2007; Anderson, 2006; Kress, 2010). However, the integration of digital tools and cultural heritage resources in diaspora education remains uneven and often depends on individual initiatives by educators and cultural institutions.

This study explores how digital technologies contribute to the preservation and teaching of Albanian language, literature, and cultural identity in diaspora contexts. The research is based on two complementary case studies: the use of interactive digital pedagogical tools in Albanian language teaching in Finland and the role of the Shkodër Digital Archives (ADSH) as a digital cultural infrastructure supporting access to Albanian literary and historical materials.

Building on these cases, the article proposes a conceptual framework described as a Digital Cultural Ecosystem of the Albanian Diaspora, which integrates classroom-level digital pedagogy, digital heritage infrastructures, and transnational cultural networks. The study aims to contribute to international discussions on digital heritage and diaspora education by highlighting how digital ecosystems can support sustainable cultural transmission among diaspora communities.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, which is particularly suitable for exploring complex educational and cultural phenomena within

specific contexts (Yin, 2018). Case study methodology allows for an in-depth analysis of practices, institutional initiatives, and digital environments that contribute to heritage language education in diaspora settings.

Two complementary case studies were selected to capture distinct dimensions of digital cultural engagement in the teaching and preservation of Albanian language and culture in the diaspora. Both case studies were presented during the Seminari XVIII Mbarëkombëtar me Mësuesit e Gjuhës dhe Kulturës Shqiptare në Diasporë (Shkodër, 31 July–3 August 2025), which brought together more than 250 teachers from over 20 countries under the theme *“Gjuha shqipe dhe kultura shqiptare në epokën digjitale.”* This seminar provided an important professional and scholarly platform for discussing innovative pedagogical approaches and digital tools that support the transmission of Albanian linguistic and cultural heritage across diaspora communities.

The first case study focuses on the pedagogical practices of an Albanian language teacher working with diaspora students in Finland. The analysis examines how digital learning platforms such as Kahoot, Wordwall, Padlet, and Book Creator are integrated into classroom activities to support language learning, cultural storytelling, and student engagement.

The second case study analyzes the Shkodër Digital Archives (ADSH) as a digital cultural infrastructure developed through collaboration between academic institutions and public libraries in Albania. The archive provides open access to historical documents, literary works, and cultural materials that can be used by educators and students in diaspora contexts.

Data sources for the study include:

- classroom observations and descriptions of digital pedagogical practices,
- analysis of digital platforms used in teaching,
- documentation and content analysis of the ADSH digital archive,
- relevant literature on digital pedagogy, diaspora education, and digital heritage.

The analytical approach is interpretative and comparative, aiming to identify patterns of interaction between digital tools, cultural resources, and educational practices. The findings from the two case studies are then synthesized to develop a conceptual model of a digital cultural ecosystem that supports diaspora language education and identity formation.

3. Results

The analysis of the two case studies reveals several important patterns regarding the role of digital technologies in diaspora education.

Digital Pedagogy and Student Engagement

The Finnish classroom case study demonstrates that interactive digital platforms significantly enhance pupils participation and motivation in heritage language learning. Tools such as Kahoot and Wordwall transform traditional vocabulary and grammar exercises into interactive learning experiences, while platforms like Padlet and Book Creator enable students to engage in collaborative storytelling and digital content creation.

These activities not only support language acquisition but also encourage pupils to express their cultural experiences and personal connections to Albanian traditions, literature, and history.

Digital Heritage as Cultural Infrastructure

The Shkodër Digital Archives represent an important digital cultural infrastructure that makes Albanian literary and historical materials accessible to diaspora communities. By digitizing rare books, periodicals, manuscripts, and cultural documents, the archive creates new opportunities for teachers and students to engage with authentic cultural sources.

Digital archives also play a crucial role in overcoming geographical barriers by connecting diaspora learners with cultural institutions in Albania.

Participatory Cultural Production

A key finding emerging from both case studies is the increasing importance of participatory cultural production. When students engage in digital storytelling, multimedia projects, or collaborative learning environments, they move beyond passive consumption of cultural materials and become active contributors to the interpretation and transmission of cultural heritage.

This participatory dimension strengthens emotional connections to cultural identity and supports long-term engagement with heritage language learning.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that effective diaspora education requires the interaction of multiple levels of digital engagement. Based on the analysis of the two case studies and insights from international literature, this article proposes the concept of a Digital Cultural Ecosystem of the Albanian Diaspora.

This ecosystem can be understood as a multi-level structure consisting of three interconnected dimensions.

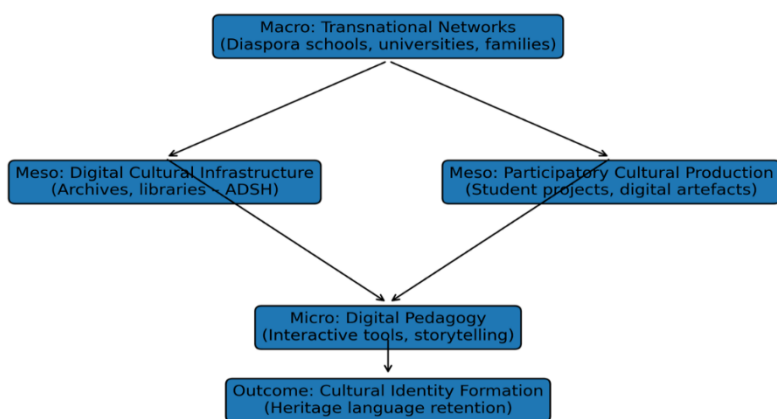
At the **micro level**, digital pedagogy refers to the *use of interactive platforms, digital storytelling tools, and collaborative learning environments* that support pupils engagement and creative expression.

At the **meso level**, digital cultural infrastructures such as *libraries, archives, and digital repositories* provide access to cultural resources and support the integration of authentic materials into educational activities.

At the **macro level**, *transnational networks connect diaspora communities with institutions in the country of origin*, enabling the circulation of cultural knowledge, educational practices, and digital resources.

The interaction among these three levels creates a dynamic cultural ecosystem that supports both heritage language retention and cultural identity formation.

Figure: Multi-Level Digital Cultural Ecosystem for Albanian Diaspora Education



This conceptual model aligns with international scholarship on participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), digital learning environments (Gee, 2007), and imagined communities in diaspora contexts (Anderson, 2006). It also highlights the *growing importance of collaboration between educators, cultural institutions, and diaspora organizations* in developing sustainable strategies for cultural preservation.

5. Conclusion

The preservation of heritage languages and cultural identity in diaspora communities represents a complex challenge that requires *innovative educational approaches and strong connections between cultural institutions and transnational networks*.

This study has demonstrated that digital technologies can play a transformative role in diaspora education by *creating interactive learning environments, expanding access to cultural resources, and enabling participatory cultural production*.

The analysis of the Finnish classroom case and the Shkodër Digital Archives illustrates how digital pedagogy and digital cultural infrastructures can complement each other in supporting cultural engagement among diaspora youth.

By proposing the concept of a Digital Cultural Ecosystem of the Albanian Diaspora, this research contributes to broader discussions on digital heritage and diaspora studies. The model highlights the importance of integrating classroom innovation, digital cultural infrastructures, and transnational collaboration in order to create sustainable pathways for cultural transmission. Future research could extend this framework by examining additional diaspora communities, evaluating the long-term impact of digital learning environments on language retention, and exploring partnerships between educational institutions and digital heritage initiatives across national borders.

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Digital interpretation of literary classics in higher education: Goethe, Kadare and Tolstoy

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Abstract: The classics of literature remain a central element of culture and ethics, whilst the digital age creates opportunities to experience and re-experience these literary works in new ways via interactive tools and platforms in higher education. This study investigates how digital approaches to these texts contribute to students' reading and critical analysis of works by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ismail Kadare, and Leo Tolstoy.

The project compares customary literary analysis with digital reading methods in a mixed-methods research design, with two groups of university students participating in the project - the first being taught through print-based texts and seminar discussion; the second group receiving instruction through digital media supported by online annotation and learning platforms. Data were collected by comparing essay evaluations, student questionnaires, and classroom observations.

In this context, the analyzes presented in the report stress that digital environments have a positive effect on student motivation, contextualization, different levels of interpretative strategies regarding classical literature, a flexible understanding of analytic processes and of the relationship between the meaning of the text and contextual historical, philosophical and cultural factors.

This study argues that digital innovation in literary studies conserves the humanistic spirit of the customary literary canon and offers a novel framework for future humanities education in the digital age by integrating classical literature in new pedagogical contexts through technology.

Keywords: *digital, pedagogy, literary, student, innovative learning.*

1. Introduction

The classics are also an important form of cultural inheritance, of moral reflection, and of articulating abiding issues across the human experience, society, and human responsibility. The works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ismail Kadare and Leo Tolstoy, for example, continue to fuel the culture many generations later. Classic readings have customarily taken the form of close readings and textual analysis in seminars in higher education. Since the advent of the internet, research on literature has become increasingly intermedial, as digital ways of engaging with texts have begun to be taught and promoted in educational contexts. Beyond simply replacing customary literary scholarship and criticism, digital means generate new ways of interpreting, contextualizing, and critically engaging with literature. (Burdick et al., 2016; Hayles, 2012)

This study examines the implications for literature instruction using digital tools, the student reading processes and strategies involved in their reading, and the humanistic quality of reading. (Rosenblatt, 1994)

Moreover, the enduring relevance of classical literature lies not only in its aesthetic value but also in its capacity to shape ethical consciousness and critical thought across generations. Through engagement with canonical texts, readers are invited to confront fundamental questions of identity, justice, and human agency, thereby reinforcing the role of literature as a formative element in intellectual and cultural development.

In parallel, the integration of digital tools in literary studies reconfigures traditional reading practices by fostering interactive, multimodal, and collaborative forms of interpretation. Such approaches not only expand the analytical possibilities available to students but also encourage a more participatory and reflective engagement with texts, bridging the gap between humanistic inquiry and contemporary technological environments.

Furthermore, the dialogue between classical literary traditions and contemporary digital practices highlights the adaptability and resilience of literary studies in the face of technological change. Rather than diminishing the authority of canonical texts, digital environments offer new frameworks through which their meanings can be revisited, reinterpreted, and made accessible to wider and more diverse audiences, thereby ensuring their continued relevance in modern educational and cultural contexts.

At the same time, this convergence invites a reconsideration of the role of the reader, positioning them not simply as recipients of established interpretations but as active participants in the construction of meaning. Navigating between close reading and digitally mediated analysis, students cultivate a hybrid

literacy that combines critical depth with technological awareness, ultimately fostering a more nuanced and inclusive engagement with literature.

Moreover, the integration of digital tools into literature education aligns with the broader transformation of higher education toward more flexible and student-centered learning environments. By incorporating digital reading practices into the curriculum, educators are able to respond to the evolving needs of contemporary students, who are increasingly accustomed to interactive and technology-mediated forms of learning. In this way, the study of literature remains both relevant and responsive to the demands of the digital age.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study draws from and combines theories and methodologies from digital humanities, reader-response theory and constructivist pedagogy. Digital humanities concerns the use of information and communication technology in the study of culture, literature and the human sciences. Reader-response theorists stress the role of readers in making meaning, and this is further elaborated by the interactive multimodal affordances of digital technologies.

Constructivist pedagogy, on the other hand, maintains that learning is an active process that can be helped through the use of digital technologies such as annotating a text and sharing its different interpretations, as well as connecting different literary texts with cultural or historical knowledge.

More importantly, it understands digital interpretation as a continuation of classical hermeneutics, as opposed to being a replacement of reading.

In this context, the intersection of digital humanities with reader response theory enables a reconceptualization of literary meaning as a dynamic and co-constructed process, shaped both by the reader's interpretive agency and the possibilities of digital environments. By integrating technological tools into the act of reading, interpretation becomes increasingly dialogic, allowing for layered, non-linear engagements with texts that reflect the complexities of contemporary cultural production and reception. Such an approach reinforces the idea that meaning is not fixed within the text itself, but emerges through the ongoing interaction between reader, text, and medium.

Furthermore, constructivist pedagogy places the learner at the center of the interpretive process, emphasizing experiential and collaborative modes of knowledge construction that are significantly enhanced by digital platforms. Through practices such as shared notes, hypertextual exploration, and the integration of interdisciplinary sources, students are encouraged to develop deeper analytical competencies and a more contextualized understanding of literary works. In this sense, digital interpretation does not undermine the

foundations of classical hermeneutics, but rather expands and enriches them, preserving the essential principles of careful reading while adapting them to the evolving conditions of the digital age.

At the same time, the theoretical synthesis presented in this study emphasizes that the inclusion of digital tools does not diminish the interpretive depth associated with humanistic research. On the contrary, it creates a layered analytical framework in which traditional hermeneutical practices coexist with innovative digital methodologies, resulting in a more comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of literary texts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study used a mixed-methods approach, gathering quantitative and qualitative data to analyze whether the digital tools were useful in analyzing literature.

3.2 Participants

Undergraduate students enrolled in literature courses were assigned to two groups.

Group A: customary instruction (print materials, seminar discussion);

Group B: digital instruction (multimedia resources, online annotation, interactive platforms);

3.3 Selected Texts

The study focuses on:

- ❖ Goethe - Faust (Goethe, 2003)
- ❖ Kadare - The Palace of Dreams (Kadare, 2005)
- ❖ Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

These works were chosen for their complexity and interpretative depth.

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through:

- ❖ comparative essay analysis
- ❖ student questionnaires
- ❖ classroom observation

Emphasis was put on interpretational depth, contextual awareness, and critical thinking.

4. Results

These results suggest that the students who used digital tools reached a deeper level of engagement with the material than those in the comparison classes. They also had opportunities to engage outside of the classroom, such as

through online discussion, collaborative annotation, and interactive tasks. In this way, students could read the literary texts more closely and reflectively, and digital technologies could be used to take a wider view than the texts themselves and place them within their cultural, historical or philosophical contexts (Hayles, 2012).

The students who worked in the digital conditions produced essays with more advanced structures of analysis, for example, comparisons, contextualization and symbolism. The use of multimedia artifacts and visual inputs (for example thematic maps, character networks) was particularly helpful to students in showing the structure of the narratives in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* and Kadare's *The Palace of Dreams*.

Students with digital experience were better able to read with interpretive flexibility, were more likely to see multiple perspectives when reading, were more likely to see intertextual connections, and were more likely to see literary issues in relation to global, philosophical, and cross-cultural issues. Such skills and attitudes are consistent with research suggesting that digital media can ease a shift away from linearity to multidimensionality in reading and interpreting (Burdick et al., 2016).

Finally, from the questionnaire data, students in the digital group did tend to report consistently higher levels of motivation, confidence about their interpretation, and clarity of complex literary concepts, suggesting that digital pedagogy is not only effective at improving reading comprehension, but also promotes a more dynamic, student-centered approach to learning.

A further aspect that emerged from the analysis is the role of multimodal engagement in enhancing students' interpretive depth. The combination of textual, visual, and interactive elements enabled students to approach literary works from multiple angles, facilitating a more holistic understanding of narrative structures and thematic developments. This multimodal interaction appears to support different learning styles, making literary analysis more inclusive and adaptable to individual student needs.

Additionally, the data suggest that students working in digital environments demonstrated greater confidence in articulating complex interpretations, particularly when engaging with abstract philosophical and ethical dimensions of the texts. The availability of supplementary resources and the possibility to revisit annotations and discussions contributed to a more sustained and reflective engagement with the material.

5. Discussion

This suggests that a digital pedagogy can provide a richer, more collaborative, and participatory learning environment for studying literature than more

customary approaches, which are more individualistic and analytical and often rely on interpretive strategies that presuppose a linear and sequential reading of a text. Through online discussion, annotation tools, and multimedia, students become active participants and collaborators in creating meaning rather than just passive consumers.

A move away from teacher-centered and toward learner-centered pedagogy promotes students' higher order analytical reading skills and reading comprehension by supporting students in interpreting symbolism, detecting multi-faceted meanings, and constructing advanced arguments. Focus on multimodal input promotes flexibility in performing the meaning-making process by activating visual, contextual, and para-textual features of a text and in getting students to read the same text from different perspectives.

The findings also show that the use of digital tools for analysis does not lend itself to heuristics to simplify the meaning of literature, but rather it deepens the consideration of a philosophical-ethical nature that early literature raises. In this sense, the act of interpretation in digital reading is an expansion of the humanistic role that reading literature has to reflect on human experience, ethics, and culture (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Additionally, the findings support new educational theories that stress participatory culture and collaborative knowledge construction. Jenkins (2009) suggests that digital environments offer a culture of participation in which learners are active participants in the process of meaning-making. Likewise, Selwyn (2016) has also documented the ways in which digital technologies have been entangled with new forms of flexible inclusive education.

Hence, the move towards the digital in the study of literature becomes a pedagogical proposition, one that performs a synthesis of the traditions of the humanities and the possibilities of the digital, whereby canonical texts continue to be encountered and thought, only now through a new and different medium.

Literary competence in contemporary education increasingly encompasses not only the ability to interpret texts, but also the ability to navigate, evaluate, and synthesize information across multiple digital platforms. This expanded notion of literacy underscores the importance of integrating digital skills into literary education without compromising the depth of critical analysis.

Furthermore, the results highlight that digital pedagogy encourages a shift from isolated interpretation to a more networked understanding of knowledge. Students become part of an interpretive community in which meaning is collectively constructed, reflecting broader transformations in the way knowledge is produced and shared in the digital age.

6. Conclusion

These results have important pedagogical implications for the use of digital modes of literary criticism in higher education. Through these modalities, classes can be made more active, engaged, and student-centered. Furthermore, this study conveys the potential of digital modes of literary criticism to prompt student engagement with interpretation, critical thinking, and analytical agility.

This study supports the premise that digital tools can lead learners to achieve a holistic understanding of literary texts in which an understanding of texts is rooted in an understanding of the historical, philosophical, and cultural contexts in which the text was created. In this sense, digital pedagogy seems to legitimize and to improve a multi-faceted consideration of literature that is appropriate for contemporary contexts of learning with technology.

The literary works of Goethe, Kadare and Tolstoy remain in the foreground of the humanistic discourse of the questions of identity, values, and society. Their use in the digital environment did not make them any less relevant but rather ensured that they remain so by being present in the digital space and easily accessible to new generations of students. This way, their contents gain a new life through the frames of the digital infrastructure.

One of the central arguments of this book is that the digital revolution in literary studies is not a replacement for customary practices, but a change of practices that allows one to include the values of the tradition as well as new opportunities for interpretation. This mixed-classroom approach provides an effective, flexible, and durable pedagogical model for digital society based humanities education.

Further research may test the long-term impact of digital pedagogy on literary literacy and the possibilities of other technologies such as artificial intelligence as tools for the analysis and interpretation of literature.

In conclusion, the integration of digital tools into literary studies represents not only a methodological advance but also a conceptual shift in the way literature is taught, experienced, and understood. By fostering interactive, collaborative, and context-rich forms of engagement, digital pedagogy ensures that classical literature continues to function as a living and evolving component of cultural and intellectual life.

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The historical evolution of Albanian writing and efforts to standardize the alphabet within religious and cultural influences

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Abstract: This article examines in detail the continuous efforts to establish a written form of the Albanian language up to the Congress of Manastir (1908), situating this process within its historical, cultural, and political context. Central to the discussion are the earliest written records of Albanian dating back to the fifteenth century, as well as the parallel use of several different alphabets, including the Latin, Greek, and Arabic scripts, which reflected religious divisions and foreign influences on the Albanian population. The article analyzes the contributions of clergy, scholars, and Albanian National Awakening figures to the efforts to create an alphabet suited to the phonetic structure of the Albanian language, as well as the role of cultural societies, printing houses, and Albanian-language schools in promoting literacy in the mother tongue. Particular attention is given to the numerous political and administrative obstacles imposed by the Ottoman Empire, which delayed the process of linguistic unification. The Congress of Manastir is presented as the culmination of these long-standing efforts, where a national consensus on the Albanian alphabet was achieved, laying a solid foundation for the development of education, literature, and Albanian national consciousness. The study aims to highlight the historical and cultural significance of this process in shaping Albanian national identity.

Keywords: *Albanian language, Albanian writing, linguistic efforts, Congress of Manastir.*

1. Introduction

To gain a better understanding of the historical diversity of the Albanian alphabet and the efforts to standardize its writing, contemporary scholars have analyzed the documents and different systems used over the centuries. In this context, the renowned scholar of Albanian literature and folklore, Robert Elsie (1950-2017), published in London his 118-page work, “*Albanian Alphabets*

- ***Borrowed and Invented***". This study provides a systematic and historical overview of the various ways in which the Albanian language was recorded in early documents up to the beginning of the 20th century. The book examines the use of the Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Cyrillic alphabets in Albanian territories and highlights the invention and use of several unique local systems for writing Albanian, reflecting the autonomous efforts of Albanian communities to preserve and represent their native language through writing. This historical and comparative approach emphasizes not only the diversity of writing forms but also their significance in affirming Albanian cultural and linguistic identity.

Since the 18th and 19th centuries, Albanians began to exhibit a growing need to write their language. These efforts, despite historical and religious limitations, became an expression of national consciousness and the desire to preserve culture and identity. Early Albanian alphabets were based on foreign writing systems - Latin, Greek, Cyrillic, and even Arabic - reflecting the cultural and religious influences of the time, as well as the creativity and innovative spirit of Albanian authors. These endeavors represented a way to assert the Albanian language, despite the barriers imposed by foreign powers, the Ottoman administration, and religious authorities, such as the Orthodox Patriarch, who often regarded efforts to write in Albanian as a threat to Greek and Russian influence.

In this context, the efforts of Albanian clerics and scholars - whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Muslim - took different forms. Catholics primarily used the Latin alphabet for schools and religious texts, Orthodox Christians often employed the Greek alphabet for translations of religious writings and materials, while Muslims developed Albanian literature in the Arabic script, known as *bejtexhinj* or "*alhamiado*". These movements demonstrate that, despite religious differences, Albanians utilized the tools available to assert their language, revealing a clear effort to build a stable linguistic and cultural identity.

Prominent figures such as Dhaskal Todhri, Jani Vellara, Naum Veqilharxhi, Kostandin Kristoforidhi, Hasan Tahsini, Rexhep Voka, and Hafiz Ali Korça, among others, contributed to the creation of primers and original alphabets for the Albanian language, aiming not only at teaching reading and writing but also at fostering unity among the religious communities and different regions of the country. Each of these authors introduced particular advances and innovations, including the adaptation of foreign letters, the creation of new symbols for Albanian sounds, and the preparation of didactic and religious texts. These efforts, although often limited in their circulation, constitute an important part of the history of the Albanian language and laid the foundation

for the standardized, unified alphabet that Albanians would later establish at the Congress of Manastir.

This article aims to document and analyze the chronology of these efforts, placing them within the historical, cultural, and religious context of the Balkans in the 18th and 19th centuries. It highlights the role of key figures and various contributors, illustrating the continuous endeavor to establish a national alphabet and a standardized written language. The article also emphasizes the tensions between religious authorities and Albanian progressives, providing a better understanding of the challenges Albanians faced in promoting their language and education.

Through this study, the importance of these efforts is underscored in preserving national identity, expanding education in the Albanian language, and affirming Albanian culture during a complex historical period. The history of the Albanian alphabet and education before the Manastir Congress is more than a linguistic story: it is a narrative of national consciousness, resistance to external influences, and the effort to build a solid cultural and educational foundation for future generations.

2. The Need and Challenges of Writing the Albanian Language

Last year, Robert Elsie (1950-2017), a specialist in Albanian literature and folklore, published in London a 118-page book entitled *Albanian Alphabets - Borrowed and Invented*. The book presents the divergent forms in which the old languages of the Balkans were recorded, based on the earliest documents up to the beginning of the 20th century. These include the adoption of the Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Cyrillic scripts, but what is most interesting is the invention of several local systems for writing Albanian.

Most of these old alphabets are now forgotten and remain unknown even to many Albanians themselves. The alphabets invented for writing Albanian date from the mid-18th century to the mid-19th century, a period during which Albanians - or at least part of their cultural elite - felt the need to write their mother tongue using a distinct and independent alphabet.

Among all the peoples that comprised the ethnic and cultural mosaic of the Ottoman Empire, Albanians were the only ones who did not have a standardized written language and, consequently, no national literature in the full sense of the term. As part of the Ottoman administration, the languages of culture, knowledge, and governance in the Albanian territories were Ottoman Turkish, Arabic, and Persian. Turkish served as the language of the state administration, Arabic as the language of Islamic scholarly literature, while Persian was used mainly in literary creativity [Osmani, 2003].

A considerable number of authors of Albanian origin wrote in these languages, among whom Suzi of Prizren, Mesihi of Prishtina, Jahja Bej Dukagjini (1496-1582), Ahmed Bej Dukagjini, Ajazi, Lutfi Pasha, Koçi Beu, and others are notable [Osmani, 1998].

Orthodox Albanians, who remained loyal to the Orthodox Church and the rigid traditions of Byzantine heritage, did not enjoy the freedom to use their native language for educational and cultural purposes. This restriction came from the Church itself, as its traditional languages - and consequently the only ones permissible for writing - were Greek in the southern regions and Slavic in the north.

The third cultural authority influencing the educational and cultural life of the Albanians was the Roman Catholic Church, which recognized only Latin and Italian as official languages. Writing in Albanian, regardless of the alphabet used, represented a symbolic act of resistance against foreign political and cultural powers that ruled or exerted influence over Albanian territories.

By the last quarter of the 18th century, around 70% of the Muslim population attended schools where instruction was conducted exclusively in Ottoman Turkish; Orthodox Albanians attended Greek-language schools, while Catholics (Jesuits and Franciscans) established schools in Shkodër, where teaching was carried out in the national language. However, due to the absence of a standardized written language, even in these institutions Ottoman Turkish, Greek, or Latin was used [Sota, 2012].

In this context, Central Albania, where the three main religious communities coexisted and intermingled, was the first region to feel the need for creating a distinct alphabet for the Albanian language, one that would be suitable and acceptable for all three religious' communities.

By 1878, when the Istanbul Commission for the Alphabet Issue was established, publications in the Albanian language were extremely rare. This situation also explains the spread of the well-known "fable" that "the Albanian's book was eaten by the cat" [Kaleshi, 2013], which symbolizes the lack and disappearance of books in the mother tongue. On the other hand, in the absence of a common alphabet, official historiography tended to regard writings in Albanian using the Latin alphabet as progressive, while those written in Arabic or Ottoman scripts were considered regressive, attributing to their authors conservative tendencies and positions opposed to national progress and development [Kaleshi, 2013].

Even today, there are tendencies to place in opposition the concepts of "school", "language", and "national identity" against the term's "cleric", "clergy", and "religious leaders". creating an artificial and often unfair division in interpreting Albanian cultural history. Robert Elsie does not include all the efforts made by Albanians to create an alphabet for writing the

Albanian language. Nevertheless, regardless of how events unfolded after the Congress of Manastir, the significance of these early efforts should not be forgotten, as they constitute an important foundation for Albanian linguistic and national consciousness.

The earliest texts or works in the Albanian language written in the Latin alphabet were primarily translations and religious texts, such as: *Formula e pagëzimit* (1452), *Meshari* (1555), *E mbsuame e krështerë* (1592), *Doktrina e Krishterë* (1618), the *Latin-Epirote Dictionary* (1635), *Çeta e profetëve* (1685), and others [Myderrizi, 1955]. These publications were permitted by the Propaganda Fide of Rome [Shuteriqi, 1979], but without any direct national purpose. Their main objective was to curb the process of Islamization and the spread of schism.

The situation was different within the framework of the Orthodox Church, which enjoyed a dominant position in the culture of the Southern Balkans and consistently opposed the use of the Albanian language in writing. For the Orthodox hierarchy, writing in Albanian was considered a “grave sin,” as it was associated with the languages of Protestants, Catholics, and even atheists [Zamputi, 1965].

Despite these oppositions, by the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a number of documents written in Albanian using the Greek alphabet appeared, indicating a growing interest in writing Albanian within Orthodox communities. These documents were mainly Orthodox religious texts that had been translated. In this context, the first efforts to translate the Bible are included, such as the translation of the *New Testament* by **Vangjel Meksi** (1822) [Hysa, 2000]. In addition to the *New Testament*, **Konstandin Kristoforidhi** translated the *Psalms* several decades later, making an important contribution to the development of written Albanian (1827-1895) [Ibid].

Texts in Albanian written in the Cyrillic alphabet, which was the alphabet of Slavic liturgy, were rarer and appeared mainly in the Orthodox communities of Western Macedonia [Ibid]. The fear that the Serbian and Greek Churches felt regarding the massive Islamization of Albanians prompted these two religious’ institutions, during the 16th-17th centuries, to engage in negotiations for the union and unification of the Orthodox rite, as well as to establish contacts with the Catholic Church, headed by the Pope. However, these efforts did not yield results, on the one hand because it was understood that such a union would primarily favor the Greek and Serbian rites, and on the other hand because, paradoxically, these developments contributed to accelerating the process of Islamization [Hysa, 2000].

Propaganda Fide, established in 1622, faced two main adversaries to the Catholic faith: the mass Islamization of the population and the spread of the

Slavic schism, which was supported by Russian Orthodox propaganda and aimed at bringing Albanians back into schism, or in other words, at Slavicizing them [*Relacione e dokumente historike për Historinë e Shqipërisë*, 1977]. In this context, it represented the Holy See's final effort to maintain its influence, using as its main tool the religious book written in the language of the people, that is, in the Albanian language.

The main goal of this policy was to facilitate the acquisition of Christian doctrine, especially for priests who did not have sufficient command of the Latin language. These papal concessions were initially utilized by the Arborea of Italy, with the publication of **Lekë Matrënga**'s work (1592). However, the dissemination of these texts remained quite limited, as they circulated primarily within clerical circles and, perhaps, among a small network of Catholic merchants from northern Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia [*Krasniqit*, 2017].

While the Catholic community directed its religious and cultural attention toward Rome, Albanian Muslims were under the Sultan's rule from the 16th century onwards. The Arabic alphabet was introduced in Albania during the 14th–15th centuries, but until the mid-17th century, no significant attempts to write Albanian in this script are known, except for the case of the Bogdana family [*Dibra*, 2022]. Its use was primarily in Muslim poetic literature (aljamiado), among the earliest authors of which was **Dervish Hasani**, who clearly demonstrated that by the 17th century significant achievements had been made in the field of Albanian Islamic culture. This new Albanian literature served as an important catalyst for the integration of Albanian culture [*Pirraku*, 1989].

In the 18th century, **Muçi Zade** is mentioned as the author of a poem dedicated to coffee (1725), which also reflects the cultural and social dimension of the time:

*"For the servants of Fatima,
For the good of Mary,
Do not leave me with the juice of bitterness,
My Lord, do not leave us without coffee"* [*Dibra*, 2022].

This tradition was later continued by other poets, such as **Nezim Frakulla** (1680-1760), **Sulejman Naibi** (c. 1771), **Hasan Zyko Kamberi** (18th century), **Muhamet Çami Kyçyku** (1784-1844), **Zenel Bastari** (1765/1770 - 1831), **Mulla Dervish Peja**, **Tahir Efendi Boshnjaku**, **Dalip Frashëri**, **Shahin Bej Frashëri**, **H. Ali Ulqinaku**, **Rexhep Voka**, and others [*Sota*, 2014]. While Catholic writings in the Latin alphabet were primarily focused on religious texts, the Albanian aljamiado literature had begun to develop its activity in secular fields as well.

The term "*aljamiado*" is usually used to refer to the "*bejtexhi literature*", but it does not encompass the entire Albanian literary output written in the Arabic script. This was not foreign literature; on the contrary, it was written in the Albanian language by Albanian authors for Albanian readers. The origin of the term "*aljamiado*" comes from the Arabic word *al-‘ajamīya*, meaning "foreign". Because Albanian was written in a foreign script, as were many other languages at the time, this did not make the language or its literature foreign. According to Osman Myderrizi, it is simply "Albanian literature in the Arabic script" [Elsie, 2017].

Eqrem Çabeji notes that the various alphabets used throughout history are nothing more than "graphic expressions". Albanian writings in the Arabic script, in a way, disrupted the dominance of traditional religious texts and opened new space for the development of Albanian literature [Elsie, 2017].

Regarding this type of Albanian literature in the Arabic script, Injac Zamputi emphasizes: "*We may call them bejte and bejtexhinj, whether evaluated positively or disparaged artistically, but their noble purpose and function in affirming Albanian national consciousness, as well as their role in the development of the culture of the Albanian community, must be acknowledged*" [Çabej, 1976].

By no means was **Nezim Frakulla** the first to compose poetry in Albanian according to Oriental styles and models, but he surpassed his predecessors by creating a complete and substantial work, through which he earned recognition as the founder of a new literary current. He himself takes pride in having elevated and enriched the Albanian language, being regarded as the first to write a *divan* in Albanian [Kaleshi, 2013].

Following him came **Sulejman Naibi** (c. 1771), the first lyrical poet to celebrate love and the beauty of women in the Albanian language:

*"Your curls, the hyacinth flowers,
You are the beauty of the garden you enter,
So it is the nightingale's right to gaze upon you.
To sing of your saffron-red lips,
To sing of the brow that never darkens,
To sing of your eyebrows embroidered like cords,
The eyelids like arrows, eyes full of light"* [Kaleshi, 2013].

The scholar Osman Myderrizi (p. 189) notes that Nezimi's poetry, "*Si bandill i djegur*" ("Like a Burned Torch"), is among the oldest erotic songs and one of the most beautiful compositions written in the Albanian language, created during years when secular themes were considered forbidden for communities of Catholic and Orthodox affiliation. Marin Sirdani (1885-1962) regarded these poems as "immoral" and unsuitable for Albanian popular culture [Sirdani, 1922].

Hasan Zyko Kamberi was among the first creators in the Albanian language to address issues of both domestic and foreign politics in the early period of the National Awakening [*Sota*, 2012]. He had a religious education in a madrasa and, naturally, wrote primarily in the Arabic script. However, his activity was not limited to religious subjects; it also encompassed secular and social themes, making him an important figure in the development of Albanian literature.

However, since Albanians did not have a long-standing tradition of writing, very few realized that their language could and should be written. A small minority understood that the alphabet was the way through which a people "remember" and live on in history. With just a set of letters (an alphabet) and some punctuation marks, they realized they could express any thought they wanted - good or bad, short or long, wise or foolish, angelic or devilish. They understood that writing was humanity's most ingenious invention, the fundamental tool for creating and transmitting culture.

But with which letters would Albanians write their language? The entire region of Epirus was under the strong influence of Greek culture. Some Albanian-speaking villages in the south, from an external perspective, appeared highly Hellenized. Nevertheless, there were also purely Albanian villages that did not know Greek but used the Greek alphabet to write in Albanian the correspondence they exchanged among themselves. This phenomenon shows that the use of an alphabet was not always indicative of the spoken language, but often a practical tool for recording Albanian in writing [*Clayer*, 2009].

In 1827, the four Gospels were published in Albanian, but written with Greek letters in Corfu. **Anastas Pykaïos**, in the first issue of his newspaper on January 6, 1860, presented Albanian as a very old dialect of Greek and claimed that Albanians should not have had any language other than Greek. He had devised an *alphabet for Albanian*, composed of standard Greek letters along with some reversed letters [*Ibid*]. The use of Albanian, which he considered an "undeveloped language", was intended to serve the Hellenization of the Albanian people.

This was also the reason why some Muslims, who wrote Albanian using the Ottoman script, perceived a change in the alphabet as a change of religion. They believed that using Latin letters would lead to abandoning Islam. In Tirana, it was rumored that in the city's patriotic club, not only was the call to prayer recited in Albanian, but the Yasin was read by a priest, and the Amen was performed by making the sign of the cross. The Albanian language and its non-Arabic alphabet were considered factors that "made one a kafir," potentially prompting people to abandon the Qur'an and, according to the fears

of the time, even leading to the severing of family ties between brothers and sisters [*Ibid*].

Konica notes that the Orthodox Albanians were afraid that the creation of any new society might harm the interests of Greece and Russia, and for this reason, they were more active in establishing the society themselves and, in this way, also influencing the alphabet. Two factions with similar positions had formed: the Slavophile faction, led by the Albanian Herakli Dino, and the Greek faction, headed by another wealthy Albanian, Gavril Pema. Both factions claimed Albania under Orthodox rule [*Konica, 2007*].

Around 1890, in Bucharest, **Koçof**⁶⁸ from Korça organized the Slavophile faction among Albanians and proposed that *they write the Albanian language using the Cyrillic alphabet* [*Konica, 2007*]. He reports that whenever news circulated about the opening of an Albanian school, rumors spread claiming it was a trap set by the "Turkish" Albanians. Konica cites, for example, the year 1888, when the millionaire Aramidh Lakshe had left a testament of half a million francs for Albanian schools. Distorted claims slandered that he had stipulated: "*If we want to become Muslims*", and his testament was rendered invalid [*Ibid*].

They also labeled Faik Konica's magazine Albania as "propaganda of tyranny," linking it to the fact that its publisher was Muslim. **Demetrio Camarda** (1821-1882), an Arbëresh priest, was persistent in fostering connections between Albanians and Latins; he did not exclude the use of the Greek alphabet and also supported political projects aiming at the unification of Greeks and Albanians. Despite these ideas and foreign influences, it seemed that the Albanians themselves were eager to create an independent alphabet. An early attempt in this direction, although still little known, is evidenced by the manuscript of **Papa Totasi**, whose alphabet retained traces of Slavo-Greek writing. Shuteriqi believes that this manuscript belongs to the period of the Balkan heresies known as "Bogomil", but very little can be said about it and its direct influence [*Shuteriqi, 2005*].

Later, we can mention the Orthodox cleric **Gregorin of Durrës - a Voskopojar** (1700-1772), who translated the Bible in 1768 using an alphabet he himself had invented; this is the only known text written in this alphabet

⁶⁸ Around 1890, in Bucharest, there is no reliable historical evidence that an Albanian named "Koçof" organized a Slavic party or proposed the use of the Cyrillic alphabet for the Albanian language. The debate on the Albanian alphabet within Albanian émigré communities focused primarily on the Latin alphabet, while proposals for the adoption of Cyrillic were not supported by Albanian National Revival figures. A documented historical figure associated with Albanian activities in Bucharest and with alphabet-related issues is *Jani Vreto*, a well-known National Revivalist from Korça, who took part in efforts to standardize the Albanian alphabet and to promote the use of the Latin script [Author's note].

[Sota, 2012]. Subsequently, **Teodor Haxhifilipi**, known as **Dhaskal Todhri** (1730-1805), created an alphabet with 53 letters, which was used for writing Albanian in Central Albania during the 18th and 19th centuries [Ibid].

Following him comes the alphabet of **Jani Vellara** (1771-1823), consisting of 30 Latin letters and several small “signs” from Greek. Vellara was the author of an 86-page manuscript containing grammatical notes and phrases in both Modern Greek and Albanian (1801) [Ibid]. Elsie also mentions the alphabets of Vezo Beu from Gjirokastër and Konstantin (Kostë) of Berat, around 1798 [Elsie, 1997].

Another important attempt was that of **Naum Veqilharxhi** (1797-1846), an idealist figure of the Albanian Nationalist Movement, who devoted himself to creating an original Albanian alphabet with the hope of uniting Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim communities on this issue. He published the first eight pages of Albanian orthography in 1844, titled “*Fort i shkurtër e i përdorshëm ëvëtar shqip, për çdo siciellë që do të mësojë të kënduarit e të shkruarit bukur shqip*”, expanding this publication to 48 pages in the following year, 1845. Both editions were printed in Bucharest [Sota, 2023].

3. Cultural, Educational, and Political Contribution of the Efforts for the Alphabet

At the end of the 1850s, in Istanbul, a society was formed to raise funds for Albanian books and schools, which was revived in 1864 by Hasan Tahsini, Ismail Qemali, Pashko Vasa, and Kristoforidhi. Tahsini devised an original alphabet to reflect the personality of the people and to strengthen the patriotic feelings of the Albanians. The alphabet was incorporated into the “*Xhemijeti Ilmije-i Arnavudije*” in 1879 and was supported by prominent figures in education and culture [Ibid].

In 1864, the renowned cleric **Hasan Tahsini** (1811-1881), in collaboration with **Ismail Qemali** (1844-1919), **Pashko Vasa** (1825-1892), and **Kostandin Kristoforidhi** (1826-1895), took the initiative to revive this national society with the aim of securing financial resources [Ibid]. **Hasan Tahsini**, the first rector of Istanbul University and the first lecturer of social and natural sciences there, devised an *original alphabet*, although it was based on the roots of various ancient alphabets. He intended for the alphabet to distinguish the Albanian language from other languages, reflecting the personality of his people and strengthening the cultural and patriotic sentiments of the Albanians.

Hasan Tahsini was a teacher of prominent figures of the time, such as Abdyl Frashëri, Naim Frashëri, Sami Frashëri, Vaso Pasha, Jani Vreto, Ismail Qemali, and Daniel Oparaku. He devised the alphabet in 1874, and it was

incorporated into the group “Xhemijeti Ilmije-i Arnavudije” [The Society of Albanian Scholars or the Albanian Scientific Assembly] in 1879 [Osmani, 1999]. The scholar Tomor Osmani highlights Tahsini’s contribution not only in creating the alphabet but also through his active participation in the meetings held between 1867 and 1879 in Istanbul regarding this matter.

Moreover, the French consul in Janina, August Dozon, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Hasan Tahsini and Kostandin Kristoforidhi were working to develop the Albanian language to the level of a written language and to spread education in the mother tongue, thereby establishing a “barrier against Hellenization”.

Being himself a cleric, **Kostandin Kristoforidhi** believed that the writing of the Albanian language should conform to both phonetic and morphological principles. For this reason, he emphasized: *“Our language cannot be written using the Arabic alphabet. The most convincing proof is the fact that those among the Albanians who have learned the Arabic language, when writing to their children, use modern Greek, which they do not know well and have learned only by associating with Greeks... yet even the Greek letters are insufficient to represent all the sounds of our language”* [Sota, 2023].

His greatest concern was that the issue of the alphabet should not be politicized and that a single alphabet should be established for all Albanians, so as not to hinder their unity.

Such efforts to develop the Albanian language were unwelcome to the Orthodox Patriarch, who in 1866 threatened anyone who read or wrote in Albanian, regardless of the alphabet they used [Wolf, 1967]. He looked with hatred at the two schools in Korçë, one for girls and one for boys, where Albanian was openly spoken, and students were encouraged to write and speak their mother tongue [Ibid].

By 1877, **Sami Bey Frashëri** obtained a firman authorizing the opening of another Albanian school in Korçë, financed by the “Drita” association [Sota, 2014]. The association published its statutes two years later (1879) along with a reading book using a self-adapted alphabet. All these publications were authorized by the Ottoman authorities. The Sultan’s firman also allowed the publication of the newspaper “Drita” in Albanian, of which twelve issues were released [Konica, 2007].

In the same year (1879), in Athens, the society “Voice of Albania” was established by **Anastas Kullurioti**, who began publishing a *newspaper* of the same name in both Albanian and Greek (1879-1880). Kullurioti was poisoned by the Greek Church [Ibid].

A modest effort in this direction had also been made by **Daut Borici** (1825-1896), who published a *primer* in Istanbul in 1861 and 1869, using Arab-Turkish letters along with his own original creations [Boriçi, 1861], following

the path previously opened by Naum and Kristoforidhi. His primer contained 37 letters: 28 from the Arabic alphabet, 2 from Ottoman Turkish, and 7 newly created by the author to meet the needs of the Albanian language. On page 32 of the primer, he wrote: "xen me shkruë shqip" ("I want to write in Albanian"), which was the main goal of his work. Borici is also the author of an "*Albanian Grammar*" and a "*Turkish-Albanian Dictionary*" [Kastrati, 1954].

The next effort was made by **Hafiz Ali Ulqinaku** (1853-1913) [*Ulqinaku, H. A. (circa 1900)*], who created a special primer. Although it was designed using the Arabic alphabet in line with the logic of the time, this primer holds unique patriotic, scientific, linguistic, and didactic value. Its purpose is expressed in the verses of the author's Mevlud:

*"In the Albanian language, my aim is to teach,
So that my brothers may benefit, even if just a little"* [Ibid].

The primer, which remained only in manuscript form for many years, contains a total of 15 sheets and 26 pages, and was first published in a monographic study in 2005. Its author also compiled three Albanian-Turkish dictionaries, totaling 1,334 pages, which hold significant lexicological, lexicographical, dialectological, and historical value for the Albanian language.

Unlike his two predecessors, **Said Najdeni** (1864-1903) compiled an alphabet based on the Latin script, which he named "*Primer of the Albanian Language - in Gheg Dialect*", and published it in Sofia in 1900 [Najdeni, 1900]. He developed this alphabet using the Istanbul alphabet as a foundation, with several modifications to adapt it to the Gheg dialect. The alphabet consisted of 36 letters, arranged vertically and horizontally, combined with letters from the French and Greek alphabets, and was accompanied by grammar exercises and reading passages. Said Najdeni belonged to the group of clerics who believed that the Latin alphabet was the most suitable for writing the Albanian language.

The same perspective was followed by **Hafiz Ali Korça** (1874-1957), who, in addition to his extensive activity encompassing over 6,733 printed pages, also published a primer constructed according to the phonetic method and divided into instructional units. The primer included several reading passages and Albanian proverbs, comprised a total of 48 pages, and served for several years as a tool for teaching reading and writing in Albanian to the general population [Korça, H. A. (1910)].

The *Albanian primer* with Arabic letters by **Rexhep Tetova (Hoxhë Voka)** (1847-1917) [*Voka, 1911*], although lacking practical usability and without widespread circulation, does not diminish its historical value. His efforts to create new letters to represent the Albanian sounds absent in the Arabic alphabet are considerable. He titled the primer "*Abeja shqip*" and published it in 1910 in Istanbul, with a print run of 10,000 copies. The primer consisted of

20 pages and was dedicated: "*To the enlightened Albanian people, so that children may write and read in their mother tongue...*" [Tetova, V. (Hoxhë Voka), 1910].

A year later, **Rexhep Voka** also published the "*Elementary Albanian Grammar*" and a religious educational text, "*Ilmihal i hollësishëm shqip*".

For the effort to write Albanian using the Arabic alphabet, the Mufti of Monastir, **Rexhep Xhudibin Nureddin**, originally from Tetova, created a special alphabet with 44 letters and published a 22-page book entitled "*Education and Learning of the Albanian Language*" [2nd edition, 1911].

Abdulhaqim Hiqmet Dogani (1880-1955), a professor of Albanian at the Normal School (Darul-mu'allimin) in Skopje and author of 16 school textbooks written in Turkish, also compiled an "*Albanian Primer with Arabic Letters*" ("*Amavutça elifba - arap harflariyla*"), and in 1946 he created another Albanian primer [Dogani, A. H. (1946)].

It should be emphasized that before the Congress of Manastir, when Albanians did not yet have a unified alphabet, some of these clerics wrote Albanian by creating their own alphabets based on the Arabic script. Other priests used the Greek alphabet (Orthodox) or the Latin alphabet (Catholic). The mere fact that they wrote in Albanian demonstrates that their language could and should be written, and that Albanians were beginning to understand the importance of having a native alphabet.

4. Conclusions

The study of the history of writing in the Albanian language up to the Congress of Manastir highlights a long and complex journey, in which various religious, cultural, and political factors influenced the development of the Albanian alphabet and writing system. For an extended period, Albanians faced the absence of a standardized written language and the control of foreign powers, which dominated education and literature according to their religious and political interests. Early efforts to write in Albanian - whether using the Latin, Arabic, Greek, or Cyrillic alphabets - demonstrate a clear desire to preserve national identity and to affirm the Albanian language as a means of communication, education, and cultural expression.

Early Albanian schools and texts, especially those with a religious character, were limited instruments but played an important role in the development of national consciousness. The first primers and dictionaries, compiled by authors such as Dhaskal Todhri, Jani Vellara, Daut Borici, Rexhep Voka, Said Najdeni, and Hafiz Ali Korça, demonstrate that even within a difficult historical context, Albanians were willing to find solutions to represent the sounds of the Albanian language and to give readers the opportunity to learn

their mother tongue. Most of these efforts were motivated by patriotic and educational aims, seeking not only to preserve the language but also to build a unified cultural and national identity.

A particular value of these works lies in the fact that they mark the beginnings of an organized effort to create a common alphabet, which later became a reality at the Congress of Manastir. The creators of the alphabet were not only figures from literature and science but also religious leaders and intellectuals who sought to find a compromise solution for all religious communities while preserving national unity. This process highlighted the importance of the alphabet as a tool not only for communication but also as a means of safeguarding against external influences and as an instrument of cultural and educational emancipation.

The study also clearly shows that the early efforts to develop an alphabet were not merely a technical matter, but a complex process with religious, political, and cultural dimensions. Orthodox, Catholic, and Muslim Albanians faced different challenges as they sought to preserve the Albanian language within the possible constraints. Many were hesitant about changing the alphabet, seeing it as a symbol of religious or political division, while others viewed it as a tool to affirm national identity and unity. For this reason, every effort to write in Albanian, regardless of the alphabet used, holds a special historical and cultural significance.

In conclusion, the history of the Albanian alphabet up to the Congress of Manastir demonstrates that language is a fundamental component of national identity, and that early efforts in writing are an integral part of the movement for the emancipation and unification of the Albanian people. From Dhaskal Todhri to Naum Veqilharxhi, from Daut Borici to Rexhep Voka and Hafiz Ali Korça, these intellectuals and clerics paved the way for the development of a written language, laying the foundation for its standardization and its affirmation in Albanian education and culture. The unified alphabet established at the Congress of Manastir is the result of a long-standing tradition of writing in Albanian and a testament to the dedication of previous generations to preserve and promote the Albanian language, culture, and national identity.

This long and complex process is not only the history of the language but also the history of national consciousness and the efforts for cultural unity, which continue to inspire Albanians in preserving and developing their language and literature. Through this journey, it becomes clear that the alphabet is not merely a set of letters, but a symbol of identity and of a people's resilience in safeguarding their language, culture, and historical heritage.

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The grammatical norm of Albanian in the age of digital communication and globalization

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Abstract: In the age of digital communication and globalization, maintaining the grammatical norm of the Albanian language poses a significant challenge for the standard language. This study investigates standard syntactic structures, analyzing word order, phrase usage, elliptical constructions, and syntactic flexibility in accordance with the grammatical norm. The analysis is based on a selected corpus of digital texts and comparisons with the standard norm, highlighting tendencies toward simplification and communicative adaptation in contemporary usage. Besides examining syntactic structures, the study addresses the challenges involved in preserving the integrity of the standard language in a global and digital context. This paper contributes to understanding linguistic changes and the development of the Albanian language under the influence of global and technological factors.

Keywords: *grammatical norm, syntax, standardization, digital communication, globalization*

1. Introduction

Technological developments of recent decades have fundamentally transformed the way human communication occurs. The Internet, social networks, instant messaging platforms, and digital media have created a new discursive space, where language is used at rapid rhythms, in short forms, and often outside the frameworks of traditional norms. In this context, the Albanian language faces multiple challenges related to the preservation and functioning of grammatical norms. The Albanian standard, codified after the Congress of Orthography of the Albanian Language, represents a fundamental reference point for the grammatical and orthographic system. However, the dynamics of digital communication and the influence of globalization—especially through English as an international language—have brought about new processes of simplification, borrowing, and syntactic restructuring. The

aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of digital communication and globalization on the grammatical norm of Albanian, with a particular focus on the syntactic level, as well as to propose reflections on the preservation and development of the standard under the new sociolinguistic conditions.

2. Literature Review

Contemporary studies on digital communication and language have demonstrated that the digital communication environment directly influences not only the style of expression but also the structure of discourse.

David Crystal (2001), in *Language and the Internet*, argues that digital discourse constitutes a hybrid form between written and spoken discourse, absorbing elements from both registers. According to him, online communication is characterized by linguistic economy, graphic abbreviations, syntactic ellipses, and the use of more direct structures.

In the same line, Susan Herring (2013), within the framework of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, emphasizes that the digital communication environment creates new pragmatic and syntactic conditions. She observes that interaction on online platforms favors shorter sentences, linear ordering of information, and reduction of complex subordinate structures. According to Herring, these features do not represent a impoverishment of language but rather a functional adaptation to the rhythm and nature of electronic communication.

Other studies have emphasized that online communication produces a reconfiguration of traditional writing norms. Digital discourse tends toward informality, personalization, and direct interaction, reducing the distance between author and receiver. In this context, syntactic changes, such as ellipses, simplification of periods, and the use of fragmented structures, are considered part of a discursive evolution, not necessarily a deviation from the grammatical system.

In Albanian linguistics, the treatment of the impact of digital communication has been more focused on lexical and orthographic aspects. Discussions have mainly concentrated on borrowings from English, phonetic and morphological adaptation of technological terms, as well as the use of graphic abbreviations and emoticons in online texts. At the normative level, the reference remains the standard codified by the Congress of Orthography of the Albanian Language and reflected in grammars and normative dictionaries published by the Academy of Sciences.

However, systematic analyses of syntactic developments in digital Albanian remain relatively limited. Attention has been directed more toward visible graphic and orthographic phenomena, whereas transformations in word order,

the use of subordinate structures, flexibility of nominal and verbal phrases, as well as calqued influences from English, have not been addressed in a thorough, corpus-based manner.

Furthermore, there is a lack of an integrated analysis linking syntactic developments with the sociolinguistic dimension of globalization and with the distinction between formal and informal registers. This theoretical and empirical gap makes a more structured approach necessary, which examines not only deviations from the norm but also the mechanisms of functional adaptation of the Albanian syntactic system in the digital environment.

Within this framework, the present study aims to fill this gap by offering an analysis oriented toward the actual use of language in digital corpora, compared with the standard norm. Relying on a descriptive-analytical approach and systematic comparisons with the normative model, this paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of Albanian syntax in the age of digital communication and globalization.

3. Methodology

This study relies on a descriptive-analytical approach, which aims to identify and interpret syntactic phenomena present in digital communication, comparing them with the grammatical norm of standard Albanian. The selective approach to empirical material was oriented toward the actual use of language in contemporary communicative contexts.

For this purpose, a corpus of digital texts was selected, including:

- posts on social networks;
- comments on online platforms;
- informal electronic exchange messages;
- media articles published on digital news portals.

The corpus represents different communication registers, from informal discourse to semi-formal media, allowing a comparative view on the level of adherence or deviation from the grammatical norm.

The selected texts were analyzed in relation to the norm described in standard Albanian grammars, especially in academic normative publications. The comparison was carried out through the identification of typical syntactic structures and forms that present deviations from the standard model.

The analysis focused on these main directions: word order and organization of sentence components; the use and structuring of nominal and verbal phrases; the appearance and function of elliptical structures; syntactic variation relative to the norm and the typology of structural deviations; and types of deviations from the grammatical norm.

This methodology allows not only the identification of current syntactic phenomena in the digital environment but also the evaluation of their impact on the coherence and stability of the standard Albanian norm.

4. The Concept of Grammatical Norm

The acquisition and application of the norm constitute one of the fundamental objectives of teaching Albanian at all educational levels. The formation of standard language competence requires not only knowledge of morphological and syntactic rules but also continuous updating with contemporary developments in linguistics and language didactics. In this sense, the professional preparation of Albanian language teachers is closely linked to the integration of theoretical achievements with contemporary pedagogical practices.

Theoretically, the standard language is defined as a supradialectal, oral, and written linguistic form, historically legitimized and institutionalized, subject to a normative system, and disseminated and controlled through educational, academic, and public media institutions. According to linguistic literature, the standard has two main functions: first, to serve as a means of communication for the entire language community within the relevant territory; second, to fulfill the requirements of formal, cultural, and scientific communication at the highest levels of civilization (Metzler, 1993).

In the case of Albanian, the process of standardization was institutionalized with the Congress of Orthography of the Albanian Language, which sanctioned the orthographic norm and consolidated the foundations of the national literary standard. This moment represents a fundamental reference point in the history of codifying standard Albanian. Furthermore, theoretical elaboration and systematization of the norm were developed in the studies of Androkli Kostallari (1973), who emphasized the importance of unification and the national function of the literary language.

The grammatical norm is defined as the system of codified rules that determine the correct use of morphological and syntactic structures in a standard language. It includes rules of inflection, selection, phrase construction, and sentence organization, as well as syntactic relations between components. In the tradition of Albanian studies, the most complete and systematic description of the grammatical norm is found in the academic publication *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe* of the Academy of Sciences of Albania (2002), which remains a fundamental reference for the morphological and syntactic structure of the standard. This publication represents the normative basis on which the analysis of correct language use is built.

Like any other natural language, Albanian is in a continuous process of change. However, linguistic change does not imply immediate disruption of the system but a gradual reorganization of its elements, maintaining the fundamental structure for a long time. This idea is also supported by international literature on language standardization, which emphasizes that the norm functions as a stabilizing mechanism in relation to variation (Metzler, 1993).

In the conditions of digital communication and globalization, the concept of grammatical norm acquires a new dimension: it must balance the preservation of structural coherence with the acceptance of new functional developments. For this reason, the study of the norm cannot remain only at the descriptive level but must also include the analysis of actual language use in different communicative contexts, assessing the relationship between the standard and current discursive practices.

4.1 Globalization and Linguistic Influence

Globalization is defined as the process of intensifying intercultural, economic, and communicative interactions on a global scale, creating an increasingly integrated space for symbolic and linguistic exchange (Crystal, 2003). In this context, interlingual contacts become more frequent and direct, affecting the structure and functioning of national languages.

Contemporary literature emphasizes that languages with global status, particularly English, exert considerable influence on other languages, both at the lexical and at the structural and discursive levels (Crystal, 2003; Heller, 2007). This influence is not limited only to the borrowing of new terms but also extends to syntactic patterns, pragmatic structures, and new forms of discourse organization.

In the case of Albanian, global influences manifest in several main directions. First, at the lexical level, direct borrowings from English are observed, especially in the field of technology and digital communication, such as online, update, status, which are often used without full morphological adaptation. Such phenomena are common in situations of intensive language contact (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

Second, at the syntactic level, calqued translations are observed, where sentence structure in Albanian follows the linear model of English. These calques may affect constituent order, pronoun usage, or the construction of nominal phrases. According to contact linguistics theories, syntactic calquing represents a deeper form of influence than lexical borrowing, as it affects the internal organization of sentence structure (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

Third, changes are observed in word order patterns, linked to the tendency toward a more rigid SVO linearization under the influence of English.

Although Albanian is characterized by relative flexibility in constituent ordering, intensive contact with English in digital communication can favor more standardized linear models (Crystal, 2003).

In this context, the influence of globalization should not be seen only as a risk to the integrity of the norm but as a dynamic process of linguistic interaction. The challenge lies in critically evaluating these developments and determining the boundaries between functional enrichment of the language and deviations that threaten the coherence of the standard system.

4.2 Analysis of Syntactic Structures in Digital Communication

The analysis examines the main syntactic tendencies in digital texts of the Albanian language, analyzing how the standard grammatical norm is adapted or transformed in different online communication contexts. The study combines concrete examples from media articles of informative portals such as NOA.al and records of communication on social platforms, observing not only the form of the message but also the syntactic structures used in practice. The selected examples reflect current trends in digital communication: news headlines on portals, phrases written for quick readability, as well as user language on social networks.

4.3 Word Order

Traditional Albanian allows relatively flexible word order; however, standard models establish SVO (Subject–Verb–Object) as the basic sentence form. In online articles of portals, word order is often used in a linear and direct way to present the main information in headlines and initial phrases, ensuring that the reader immediately receives the key message.

Examples:

- “e Albania jashtë funksionit: I gjithë shteti online është i bllokuar.” – Headline with direct order that places “e Albania” as the subject of the sentence, followed by the verb and object of the situation created. (NOA.al, 2025)
- “Gjykata rrëzon SPAK un për Lefter Kokën.” – Headline where subjects and action are directly linked with a clear syntactic structure to transmit the news without superfluous elements. (NOA.al, 2025)
- In daily news articles, this linear word order helps transmit information briefly and clearly to a broad audience, minimizing unnecessary stylistic elements.

In posts and comments on social networks, word order often creates direct and abbreviated phrasing to provide easily digestible comments for readers.

4.4 Elliptical Structures

Ellipsis, i.e., the omission of elements unnecessary for the basic meaning of the sentence, is frequently used in article headlines and digital communication. This is especially evident in article titles, where certain elements can be omitted for informational efficiency.

Examples:

- The headline “e Albania jashtë funksionit...” avoids the full expression of the phrase with an introductory clause (“Sistemi i ... është jashtë funksionit”), using only key elements for clarity. (NOA.al, 2025)
- “‘Furtuna’ Rama në Qeveri, cilët janë ministrat që i rezistuan ndryshimeve?” – article headline using ellipsis to modulate information and focus on the names of ministers. (NOA.al, 2025)
- “Durim Bami mbërrin në Shqipëri pas ekstradimit nga Dubai” – ellipsis of explanatory phrases, excluding some introductory or linking clauses for clarity. (NOA.al, 2025)
- “Rritje çmimesh në treg.” (verb “ka” missing)
- “Shihemi nesër?” (full structure “A do të shihemi...” missing)
- “Në takim tani.” (verb “Jam” missing)

Thus, there is a tendency toward the use of short and elliptical structures to summarize information without expressing everything in full grammatical form, a typical feature of digital communication.

4.5 Syntactic Simplification

Digital texts, to increase readability and meet audience expectations online, often use simple sentences and avoid the use of complex conjunctions or intricate syntactic structures.

Examples:

- “e Albania po përballet me një bllokim serioz teknik...” – Short and clear sentence presenting the situation without a complex subordinate structure. (NOA.al, 2025)
- “Në sistem nuk shfaqen data të lira për rezervime...” – Simple sentence that allows the reader to immediately understand the main fact, avoiding long subordinate combinations present in standard language. (NOA.al, 2025)
- “Protesta për pronat në Rrjoll, arrestohen sërish disa banorë” – headline combining several regular syntactic elements to provide basic information in a short sentence. (NOA.al, 2025)

This simplification contributes to clarity in writing but often reduces the use of more complex syntactic structures found in standard or academic texts.

4.6 Influence of English on Syntactic Structure

The influence of English on Albanian digital texts is not limited only to lexical borrowings but also extends to the structural level, affecting sentence syntactic organization and discourse construction. In online communication, there is a tendency toward the linear SVO model (Subject–Verb–Object), typical for English, as well as the use of technological terms in their original form without morphological or orthographic adaptation.

This tendency aligns with analyses of digital discourse, which emphasize that online communication favors direct, clear, and short structures (Crystal, 2001; Herring, 2013). In the Albanian context, the influence of English is especially noticeable in the fields of technology, social media, and digital marketing.

1. Examples from digital media portals:

- “e-Albania jashtë funksionit: i gjithë shteti online është i bllokuar.”
- “LIVE | Zhvillimet e fundit nga protesta.”
- “Platforma prezanton update-in e ri të sistemit.”

In these cases, the terms online, live, update are used without phonetic or morphological adaptation (azhurnim, përditësim), reflecting a direct interlingualization.

2. Examples from social networks:

- “Jam super excited për këtë projekt.”
- “Postova një story të re.”
- “Bëra një post për eventin.”
- “Më bëni follow.”
- “E bëra share lajmin.”

Here we see not only lexical borrowing but also syntactic integration of the English word into Albanian structure, often with minimal or hybrid inflection (“postova”, “e bëra share”).

3. Examples from informal electronic messages:

- “Ok, see you nesër.”
- “Jam shumë busy sot.”
- “Do ta bëj check më vonë.”
- “Ma dërgo linkun në chat.”

In these cases, the Albanian sentence is constructed according to the usual syntactic model, but the key semantic element is a direct borrowing.

4. Structural influence:

Beyond the lexicon, the influence of English is observed in:

- the use of a more fixed SVO order, reducing Albanian’s traditional flexibility;

- avoiding the repetition of the copula or pronouns in some literal translations;
- constructing headlines according to the English model of immediate subject focus.

Example:

- “Qeveria prezanton planin e ri” (informative linear model, typical of English news style).

The influence of English should not necessarily be seen as a deformation of the norm but as a natural process of linguistic interaction in the conditions of globalization and technology. However, uncontrolled use of borrowings and structural models may lead to:

- reduction of Albanian syntactic richness;
- creation of hybrid structures that threaten the standard norm.

This phenomenon of syntactic interlingualization, which involves not only foreign words but also order patterns approximating English, may have implications for how we conceptualize standard grammatical structure in the digital age.

5. Conclusions and Study Limitations

The grammatical norm of Albanian in the digital age faces a natural transformation process. Digital communication and globalization have influenced syntactic structures through simplification, ellipsis, and interlingual influences.

However, the analysis shows that the basic syntactic system of Albanian remains stable. The main challenge lies in balancing innovation with the preservation of the standard.

Preservation of the norm should not be perceived as resistance to change, but as a conscious process of regulation and adaptation. In this sense, the role of educational, academic, and media institutions remains essential for the sustainable development of the Albanian language in the global and digital context.

Thus, digital communication in Albanian does not represent a breaking of the syntactic norm but a functional reshaping of it in accordance with the new conditions of text production, dissemination, and processing. In line with the observations of Crystal (2001) and Herring (2013), Albanian also shows a tendency toward structural linearity, syntactic shortening, and approximation to spoken discourse, especially in fast-interaction environments such as social networks and electronic communication.

One of the main findings relates to the consolidation of linear SVO order in media headlines and public online communication. Although Albanian is

characterized by relatively high syntactic flexibility, digital texts show a tendency toward fixing the organization of sentence components. This tendency can be interpreted as a result of the need for immediate clarity and rapid processing by readers in high-information-load environments.

Ellipsis, conceptualized as a structural compacting strategy, appears as a dominant feature in informal digital communication. The absence of subjects, conjunctions, or supplementary elements functions to increase communicative efficiency. However, in public and semi-formal contexts, frequent use of reduced structures may contribute to weakening syntactic complexity. This raises questions about the long-term impact of digital practices on users' structural competence.

Syntactic simplification and the reduction of subordinate sentences represent another important tendency. The dominance of simple sentences and avoidance of complex structures creates a more direct and functional style but limits the structural richness and diversity characteristic of standard Albanian. This situation suggests an internal tension between communicative functionality and the preservation of grammatical complexity.

The influence of English, evident not only at the lexical level but also in linear sentence organization and discursive models, should be considered within the framework of globalization and interlingual interaction. Adoption of technological terms and certain English structural schemes does not necessarily constitute linguistic impoverishment; rather, it can be interpreted as a natural process of adaptation and functional expansion. However, maintaining a balance between innovation and the standard norm remains a challenge for language policy and the educational system.

Theoretically, the findings support conceptualizing digital communication as a functional register with distinct syntactic features, not merely as a deviation from the standard. This approach requires expanding empirical studies with larger corpora and cross-register analyses to more accurately assess the long-term impact of digital practices on the evolution of Albanian syntactic structure.

Preservation of the norm should not be perceived as resistance to change but as a conscious process of regulation and adaptation. In this sense, the role of educational, academic, and media institutions remains essential for the sustainable development of Albanian in a global and digital context.

This study presents several methodological limitations. First, the analyzed corpus is selective and does not fully represent the entire spectrum of digital communication in Albanian. Second, the analysis is primarily focused on the syntactic level, leaving aside a deeper treatment of the interaction between syntax, pragmatics, and sociolinguistic factors. Third, the lack of a structured and statistically balanced corpus limits the possibility of broad generalizations.

In conclusion, the observed transformations are closely related to technological, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic factors, placing Albanian syntax in a dynamic process of reshaping between norm, usage, and linguistic globalization. These developments do not necessarily represent severe deviations from the standard but require continuous critical observation to maintain the balance between linguistic dynamism and the structural integrity of standard Albanian.

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To what competences are schools directed? Disciplinary competence (subject’), or transversal (interdisciplinary) competence?

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Abstract: This research is important for teachers, parents and student’s curriculum specialists, and program designers. These discoveries help to establish an appropriate form of new curricula, with preliminary socio-cognitive preparation, I know teachers and students. provides information for parents to ensure the seriousness and awareness of the qualitative education of students. The teachers themselves are informed and receive the necessary assessment for the level of professional development of each one. The teachers of primary education classes are aware that children have developed according to their individuality, are unique in their psycho-physical development, and that they should accept them as they are. Standardized instruments will enable some preliminary teaching so that they are able to respond to the demands, needs, and interests of the student. Specialists must know how to promote the development and learning of students, the recognition and understanding of needs, the various influences on the development of learning and students.

Keywords: *questionnaire, teachers, curriculum, students*

1. Introduction

For this thesis we designed a questionnaire for teachers and their relationship with the application of the new curriculum:

Questionnaire study: 50 teachers were asked in three schools of the Shkodër district: Ndre Mjeda, Mes and Ismail Qemali.

Research question: Do teachers encourage students to think critically?

Hypothesis 1. Are there differences in the level of willingness of teachers in terms of the curriculum?

Hypothesis 2. There are no differences in the level of willingness of teachers regarding embracing the curriculum.

Significance of the research: This research is important for teachers, parents and students curriculum specialists, and program designers. These discoveries help to establish an appropriate form of new curricula, with preliminary socio-cognitive preparation, I know teachers and students. provides information for parents to ensure the seriousness and awareness of the qualitative education of students.

The teachers themselves are informed and receive the necessary assessment for the level of professional development of each one. The teachers of primary education classes are aware that children have developed according to their individuality, are unique in their psycho-physical development, and that they should accept them as they are. Standardized instruments will enable some preliminary teaching so that they are able to respond to the demands, needs, and interests of the student.

Specialists must know how to promote the development and learning of students, the recognition and understanding of needs, the various influences on the development of learning and students.

What can we offer Primary Education students? Faculties of education that prepare teachers should take into consideration new, original information from the country, design programs that rule and be wanting to take initiative and share, manage relationships and communicate, manage unforeseen situations, feel adapt to the skills and interests of the respective ages, design, and production of didactic tools appropriate that promote learning.

Number and Percentage of teachers participating in the research

Number of teachers according to gender	Years of work			Class		
	5-9	10-20	21-30	I	II	III
47 femra	10	20	17	20	17	10
3 meshkuj		2	1	1		2

The questionnaire for teachers is a test and research instrument, to see the level of willingness of teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum. The questionnaire for teachers includes indicators, which measure the professional development of the teacher in the cognitive and implementation process. A total of 10 questions were created through these indicators, such as: discernment and cognitive ability, factor analysis, style, and orientation. Each of these scales is restructured into levels of argumentative questions. The overview of this research was carried out according to the causative-comparative research approach, where the aim is to find the impact of the new

curriculum on the preparation of the lesson. Given that the structure of the study is quantitative, for the performance of statistical methods were used in the analyses.

2. Observations and results of the questionnaire:

The first question: How do you feel as a competent curriculum teacher?

This question was answered by 50 teachers, of which 13 (26%) answered, we feel burdened, 37 (74%), answered, we feel relieved.

Second question: What do you value most in this curriculum?

Out of 50 respondents, 40 of them evaluate these elements in their answers:

a) teaching student-centered; b) methodology; c) freedom in planning and implementation. The other 10 evaluated, in addition to these: the way of evaluating students based on competencies, group cooperation, subject integration that the new textbooks offer.

The third question: What obstacles or difficulties do you encounter during the realization of this curriculum?

52% affirm that they encounter difficulties in the material base and that they lack the physical conditions of the premises, lack of visual aids such as video projectors, laptops, and interactive boards.

10% of teachers encounter difficulties with the large number of students. 20% of them claim that having a large number of students do not fit the new student-centered curriculum. 8% of teachers encounter difficulties in cooperation with parents, which means they have encountered parents who do not cooperate with the teacher to get to know the student and the difficulties he has.

10% encounter difficulties in the overload of texts, and require simplification of information.

The fourth question: What do you think, why should teaching methods be adapted to the individual needs, interests and characteristics of students?

This question was asked in function of the social development of the student: which is related to the aspect of how the child interacts with other people (teachers, parents, peers and other adults) and how the interactions with other people affect his or her development. Social development helps students to know the social environment that surrounds them, the cultural environment and tradition, as well as to develop an understanding of the community. Early social behavior is significantly influenced by parents' practices for raising students, including how parents implement rules, how they provide support and encouragement to their students (MASHT, 2011).

64% thought that the teaching methods should be adapted to:

a. the nature of the student;

- b. with individual needs;
- c. interests;
- d. long-term learning;
- e. characteristics of the student in learning. 24% of them thought that teaching methods should be adapted to effective teaching. 12% think that the methods should guarantee the student's success.

Question 5. Why do learning styles differ from one student to another?

60% think that learning styles are directly related to the student's ability, their previous experiences in education and the family conditions of their upbringing. 20% think that learning styles are related to the student's background, the genetic links the student has with family members. 10% of them relate it to the mental-cultural - social level of the student. 10% of them think that learning styles are directly related to the teacher's ability to distinguish students according to their listening and visual learning ability.

Question 6. Why should teaching methods, techniques and strategies be selected in the lesson?

The teacher's attitudes towards this question result in the following answers: 30% thought that the selection of teaching methods, techniques and strategies should be done to achieve better learning results from the student. 20% thought that the selection should be made for faster learning of knowledge by the student. 10% thought that the selection depends on the subjects of knowledge that the student should acquire. 10% thought that time has evolved and the selection should be made in accordance with the new curriculum. 10% thought that the selection should be made for a more varied lesson.

10% thought that the selection it is in tune with interesting teaching and assimilable knowledge. 10% thought that the selection should be done to encourage the student's learning activity.

Question 7. Why should different learning resources be used?

Different learning resources 20% of teachers use for participation, interaction, observation as well as to fill students' curiosity. 40% use them to make learning easier in different learning areas. 20% think effective adaptation in learning according to the level of students. 10% use them to make what they learn more understandable. 10% think that different sources should be used to better promote the acquisition of concepts,

Question 8. Why should a pleasant and friendly environment be created in the classroom?

60% of them think that a pleasant environment should be created in the classroom, for the student's freedom in this environment. 20% think that the school should be dear to the students. 10% think that the environment is related to the necessary space where every student, regardless of background, feels equal to others. 10% think that they should create conditions to avoid the fear

that accompanies students when they face a new, previously unknown environment.

Question 9. Why should gifted students and those with learning difficulties be recognized and treated appropriately?

20% of them think that both types of students should be recognized and treated in the right way in order to increase their potential. 40% of them think that everyone's tendencies should be developed. 20% of them think that they should be recognized and treated properly so that they do not hinder each other in the progress of learning. 20% think that each of them should be integrated in a differentiated way, in accordance with the student's level.

Question 10. The new curricular approach that focuses on the development of student competencies requires changes in work methods and forms. Why do you think these changes are effective?

60% think that the changes are effective because they adapt to the implementation of the curriculum. 20% think that the changes are effective because they give the teacher freedom to adapt to the needs of the student. 16% think that the changes are effective because they go hand in hand with the new nature of teaching. 4% think that the changes promote interaction and interchange between teacher and student.

Question 11. How do you rate the freedom to choose content, methods, forms and conditions to achieve learning outcomes?

100% of teachers or 50 respondents affirmed that the freedom to choose content, methods, forms and conditions to achieve learning results is positive and very good. 10% of them claim that integrated teaching includes subject and interdisciplinary integration. 80% of them affirm that by integrated teaching they understand the combination of curricular fields. 10% of them claim that with integrated teaching they understand new knowledge related to knowledge obtained from different subjects that make it clearer and more practical,

Question 12. What are the principles on which the evaluation is based?

40% of them affirm that the principles on which the assessment is based are: transparency, impartiality and validity. 10% of them affirm that the principles on which the assessment is based are: monitoring the student's knowledge, skills, values, measurements, attitudes and abilities, 10% of them affirm that the principles on which the assessment is based is the level of fulfilment of the students' criteria for the realization of key competencies, 40% affirm that the principles on which the assessment is based are the tasks and tests that the student develops.

3. Conclusions

This questionnaire focused on the new curriculum, the teachers' approach to it. 74% of teachers feel relieved with this curriculum, appreciating the student-centered teaching, the methodology as well as the freedom in planning and implementation. 100% think that freedom of choice is positive. Based on this study, we think that the realization of the new curriculum requires specific tools for the development of thinking as well as to enable situations to be created through diverse methods where the socialization and emotional development of students takes place. We emphasize that 62% of teachers affirmed that the physical conditions and didactic tools required for learning with competences are missing. 20% of teachers used alternative resources in learning to fill students' curiosity, 40% to make learning easier, 20% for effective learning according to levels, 10% to make it more understandable. 64% think that the teaching methods should be adapted to the nature of the student, the needs of individuals, and the interests of the students for a more long-term learning, 60% think that the changes are effective in adapting to the new curriculum. 60% of teachers think that learning styles differ from one student to another, that learning is related to the student's ability, previous education as well as the family conditions of growth, so we emphasize the importance of prior knowledge of the student as well as the growth of cooperation with parents as well as increasing the state's care towards students from early childhood through preschool education. We affirm that 60% of the teachers were in favour of a free and pleasant environment for the student, 40% thought that the school is the environment where the tendencies of each student should be developed.

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The Macedonian minority in Albania: language, identity, and minority rights

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Abstract: The Macedonian minority in the Republic of Albania is an ethnic community with a continuous historical presence, mainly concentrated in the regions of Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo, Gora, and southeastern Albania. This article analyzes the historical development, demographic features, cultural identity, and legal status of the Macedonian minority, focusing on issues of self-identification, language use, education, and institutional standing. Although officially recognized by the Albanian state, the community faces ongoing challenges, including underrepresentation in official population censuses, limited access to education in the Macedonian language, and broader issues related to integration and minority rights protection.

Keywords: *Macedonian minority, Albania, ethnic minorities, minority rights*

1. Introduction

The Macedonian minority in the Republic of Albania (Albanian: *Maqedonasit në Shqipëri*; Macedonian: *Македонци во Албанија*) represents a small but historically significant community, primarily concentrated in the southeastern regions of the country, especially in areas near the borders with North Macedonia and Greece. The majority live in the Korçë District, particularly in the municipality of Pustec, while smaller communities are found in areas such as Vërnik in the Devoll region. Additionally, members of the Macedonian community reside in several urban centers, including Korça, Bilisht, Tirana, Durrës, Kukës, Elbasan, Pogradec and Librazhd, as well as in the regions of Golloborda and the Gora area of Kukës. Albania officially recognizes the Macedonian ethnic minority, primarily in the Mala Prespa region, specifically within the Municipality of Pustec. This recognition, however, is largely limited to a designated minority zone that includes nine villages: Tuminec, Gorna Gorica, Dolna Gorica, Globoceni, Shulin, Pustec, Leska, Zrnosko and Cerje. These villages are predominantly inhabited by ethnic Macedonians, most of whom are traditionally Orthodox Christians. Within this area, the

population has historically enjoyed access to education in their mother tongue and elements of bilingual administration. However, this recognition is not universal across the country; rather, it is primarily limited to the region of Mala Prespa, where Macedonians are granted linguistic and cultural rights within the zone.

Golo Brdo (Gollobordë), is located north of the border near the town of Debar. In contrast to the predominantly Orthodox population of Mala Prespa, the Slavic-speaking inhabitants of Golo Brdo are predominantly Muslim. This religious difference and historical differences have led to a more fluid sense of identity, with the residents navigating between Macedonian, Bulgarian and Albanian self-identification. As noted in the broader context of social representations in the region, local identity is often described in terms alignment of historical connections and local social structures (de Rapper, 2001).

Gora, is located in southern Kosovo and northeastern Albania. The Gorani population speaks a South Slavic dialect locally known as “našinski”. Although it shares linguistic features with Macedonian and Bulgarian, it is considered a distinct local language, reflecting the unique Gorani identity. The specific geographical position and relative isolation of the Balkan borderlands have contributed and continue to contribute to the preservation of distinctive social and cultural characteristics among the local population, which define its distinct identity in relation to the other Slavic-speaking groups in the region.

2. Literature Review

The Macedonian national minority in the Republic of Albania has been the subject of various historical, linguistic, and sociopolitical studies. Scholars have examined the historical presence of Macedonian-speaking communities in southeastern Albania, as well as the processes of identity formation, language maintenance and minority rights within the Albanian state.

The Macedonian community in Albania is primarily concentrated in three regions: Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo and Gora. Mala Prespa represents the most prominent cultural and institutional center of the Macedonian minority. The region consists of nine villages and the municipal center of Pustec, where Macedonians have historically exercised minority rights, particularly in the fields of education and language use. The population is predominantly Orthodox Christian, and their identity is strongly connected with the Macedonian national tradition.

In contrast, the Slavic-speaking population in the Golo Brdo region is predominantly Muslim. Due to historical, religious, and political influences, the inhabitants often navigate a complex spectrum of ethnic self-identification,

which may include Macedonian, Bulgarian, or Albanian affiliations. Anthropological research by Gilles de Rapper highlights the fluid nature of identity in border regions, where local identities are shaped by historical experiences, political contexts, and social interactions.

The Gora region, located in northeastern Albania and southern Kosovo, is inhabited by a population commonly known as the Gorani. Although many Gorani identify as a distinct ethnic group, part of the population maintains cultural and linguistic connections with the broader Macedonian linguistic space.

Research on the Macedonian minority has also focused on linguistic characteristics and dialect diversity. The dialectological work of Vidoeski (1999) provided one of the earliest systematic studies of Macedonian dialects spoken in regions such as Mala Prespa and Golo Brdo. His research contributed significantly to the understanding of linguistic diversity beyond the borders of the Republic of North Macedonia. Later studies by Friedman (2006) placed these dialects within the broader context of the Balkan linguistic area, emphasizing the interaction between Macedonian, Albanian, and other regional languages.

The Macedonian minority in Albania is characterized by a multi-confessional structure. Orthodox Macedonians are mainly concentrated in Mala Prespa and in the village of Vërnik in the Devoll region. These communities fall under the jurisdiction of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. Although the official liturgical language of the church is Albanian, efforts have been made to introduce religious services in the Macedonian language, particularly in the church of St. Archangel Michael in Pustec (Vickers, 2021). Muslim Macedonians are primarily found in Golo Brdo and Gora. While the Macedonian language is commonly used in everyday communication within these communities, religious practices in mosques are usually conducted in Albanian language.

Bilingualism represents a central feature of the sociolinguistic reality of the Macedonian minority in Albania. Members of the community generally use Macedonian within the family and local community, particularly the Prespa dialect, while Albanian is used in public institutions, administration, education, and broader social communication.

Political representation of the Macedonian minority has also been an important topic in recent studies. A significant milestone was the election of Vasil Sterjovski as a member of the Albanian Parliament, representing the Macedonian Alliance for European Integration. His parliamentary activity symbolized an important step toward the public recognition of the Macedonian community within Albania's political system.

The legal status of the Macedonian minority is primarily regulated by the Law on the Protection of National Minorities adopted in 2017. This law officially recognizes several minority groups in Albania, including the Macedonian minority, and provides a legal framework for the protection of minority languages, culture, and identity. However, the implementation of minority rights remains uneven across different regions.

Recent demographic developments have also attracted scholarly attention. The results of the 2023 Population and Housing Census conducted by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) recorded a decline in the number of individuals identifying as Macedonians compared to the previous census in 2011. These results have been contested by several Macedonian organizations, including the Macedonian Alliance for European Integration and the Macedonian Association “Ilinden” in Tirana, which argue that methodological and political factors have influenced the census outcomes.

Education plays a central role in the preservation of the Macedonian language and cultural identity. The Mala Prespa region remains the only area in Albania where education is systematically conducted in the Macedonian language. Primary and secondary education follow the Albanian national curriculum but are largely delivered through textbooks translated into Macedonian. In December 2024, a scientific conference at the University “Fan S. Noli” in Korçë marked the 80th anniversary of education in the Macedonian language in Albania, highlighting the long historical continuity of this educational tradition.

Higher education initiatives have also emerged in recent years. Macedonian language, literature, and culture are taught at the University of Tirana through a Macedonian language lectorate. In February 2025, the Macedonian Association “Ilinden” submitted an initiative to establish a similar lectorate at the University “Fan S. Noli” in Korçë, which could further strengthen academic and cultural cooperation between Albania and North Macedonia.

Finally, contemporary research also emphasizes the impact of migration and demographic change on the Macedonian minority. Many members of the community have migrated to countries such as Greece, Italy, Germany, and other European states. These migration processes, along with the growing number of mixed marriages, contribute to gradual language shift and changing patterns of cultural identity among younger generations.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary research approach in order to examine the historical development, legal status, and sociolinguistic characteristics of the Macedonian minority in Albania. The research combines

perspectives from history, sociolinguistics, and minority studies in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical continuity and contemporary dynamics of Macedonian-speaking communities, particularly in the regions of Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo, and Gora.

The Macedonian national minority is characterized by a pronounced multi-confessional nature. Orthodox Macedonians are concentrated in Mala Prespa and the village of Vrbnik (Devoll) and are affiliated with the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. Although the official liturgical language is Albanian, efforts have been made to introduce services in Macedonian, particularly in the church of “St. Archangel Michael” in Pustec, where original customs have been preserved (Vickers, 2021). Muslim Macedonians are dominant in Golo Brdo and Gora. While Macedonian is used in everyday communication, religious ceremonies in mosques are conducted in Albanian, creating a notable linguistic gap between daily and spiritual life—an uncommon pattern among Balkan Slavic-speaking minorities, where religious services often use the community’s native language. The research is based primarily on the analysis of secondary sources. These include academic publications, historical studies, demographic data, census reports, institutional documents, legal texts, and reports produced by minority organizations and cultural associations.

A historical-analytical method is applied to trace the development and continuity of Macedonian communities in southeastern Albania across different historical periods. This analysis considers the presence of Slavic-speaking populations from the medieval period through the Ottoman era (15th–19th centuries), when communities were organized under the Rum Millet system that prioritized religion over ethnicity (Malcolm, 1998). The post-1912 period, following the formation of the Albanian state, and the socialist era under Enver Hoxha are also examined. Despite restrictive policies and the 1967 religious ban, the Macedonian minority preserved significant cultural autonomy, particularly in education. After the fall of communism in 1991, there was a resurgence of ethnic consciousness and the emergence of advocacy groups such as the Macedonian Alliance for European Integration (MAEI) (Alb. Aleanca Maqedonase për Integrimin Europian, mak. Македонска Алијанса за Европска Интеграција), the “Prespa” Society, and the Macedonian Association “Ilinden” – Tirana, which document minority life through newspapers and newsletters (Sterjovski, 2021).

Despite the severe restrictions of Enver Hoxha’s regime, the Macedonian minority maintained a significant degree of cultural autonomy within the educational system. By allowing instruction in the Macedonian mother tongue, the Albanian state formally recognized the importance of the mother tongue in the development of the community.

Central to the survival and flourishing of this educational system was Professor Nikola Berovski (1923–1993). A figure of immense academic stature, Berovski originally arrived from the Republic of Macedonia but chose to make the Republic of Albania his permanent home. His presence was a cornerstone for the community, as he took upon himself the monumental task of codifying a minority curriculum within a closed state. Berovski’s contribution was primarily academic and structural. He authored an extensive bibliography of textbooks that served as the primary resources for studying the Macedonian language, literature, and history. By providing these materials, he ensured that the language did not merely survive as a spoken dialect but was elevated to a literary and academic standard for new generations. In parallel to Berovski’s efforts were the contributions of Sterjo Spasse (1914–1989), a prominent intellectual and writer born in the village of Gllloboçeni. While Spasse remains a pillar of Albanian literature, he was just as deeply defined by his unwavering devotion to his Macedonian ancestry. Spasse played a vital role in designing educational resources for the Macedonian community, focusing his efforts on Mala Prespa and Vrbnik.

The study also adopts a sociolinguistic approach to analyze language use among members of the Macedonian minority. Both Macedonian and Albanian are used daily: Macedonian within the family and in local dialectal forms, particularly the Prespa dialect, and Albanian in official, commercial, and social domains such as administration, markets, shops, cafés, and medical settings. Media support for the Macedonian language exists, for example, via news programs broadcast three times a week by Radio Korçë. Political representation is exemplified by Vasil Sterjovski, the first Macedonian member of the Albanian Parliament, who delivered the first parliamentary speech in Macedonian on March 16, 2012, affirming the linguistic and historical rights of the community.

Special attention is given to domains of everyday language use, including family communication and educational settings. Other areas considered are local administration, religious practices, and broader community interactions. This perspective allows the research to explore the dynamics of bilingualism between Macedonian and Albanian, as well as processes of language maintenance, language shift, and potential linguistic assimilation.

The study also examines the institutional and legal framework regulating minority rights in Albania. This law officially recognizes Macedonians as one of nine national minorities and allows minority languages to be used in official settings in areas where the minority makes up at least 20% of the population. In Albania, this mainly applies to the Municipality of Pustec.

Recent census data show that the number of people identifying as Macedonian has dropped sharply, from 5,512 in 2011 to 2,281 in 2023. This decrease has

been disputed by minority organizations, who argue that it may result from technical errors or external pressures, including a sudden increase in individuals identifying as Bulgarian.

Migration and demographic change continue to impact linguistic and cultural practices among the Macedonian minority. Economic migration, both within Albania and abroad (Greece, Italy, North Macedonia, Northern Europe, Canada, USA), affects the intergenerational transmission of Macedonian and Albanian. Mixed marriages and transnational family networks contribute to language shift, as the primary language of children often reflects the environment in which they are educated rather than the ancestral tongue.

The study draws on Balkan linguistics and minority studies, referencing scholars such as Gilles de Rapper, Victor A. Friedman, and Bozhidar Vidoeski (see, e.g., Vidoeski 1998). Their studies provide important theoretical and empirical insights into the linguistic diversity, identity formation, and sociopolitical position of Macedonian-speaking communities in the Balkan region. Such an approach allows the research to address not only historical and linguistic aspects, but also the broader social, political, and demographic processes shaping the contemporary position of this minority community.

4. Results

The analysis of historical, demographic, and institutional sources highlights key aspects of the Macedonian minority in Albania. The community is regionally concentrated in Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo, and Gora, with Mala Prespa serving as the main cultural and institutional center. Here, the Macedonian language remains in education and daily use, supporting cultural preservation and intergenerational transmission.

The Macedonian community generally uses their language within families and local settings, while Albanian is used in schools, administration, and broader society. Regional identities are shaped by history and religion: Orthodox Christians in Mala Prespa strongly identify as Macedonian, whereas populations in Golo Brdo and Gora have more diverse patterns of identification. Census data from 2023 show a declining Macedonian population, a trend contested by minority organizations. Migration, economic factors, mixed marriages, and exposure to Albanian environments have also influenced language use and cultural continuity, especially among younger generations.

5. Conclusions

The Macedonian minority in the Republic of Albania represents an important part of the country's multicultural and multiethnic society. Historically concentrated in the regions of Mala Prespa, Golo Brdo, and Gora, this community has preserved its linguistic and cultural identity despite significant political and social transformations.

This study has shown that the preservation of Macedonian identity in Albania is closely connected to the use of the Macedonian language, the functioning of minority education, and the existing legal framework regulating minority rights. In particular, the Mala Prespa region remains the main institutional and cultural center where education in the Macedonian language continues to play a key role in maintaining cultural traditions.

At the same time, demographic changes, migration, and debates surrounding recent census results illustrate the challenges that the community continues to face. Strengthening institutional support for minority education, language use, and cultural activities remains essential for the long-term preservation of the Macedonian minority in Albania.

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On the structure of the active lexicon in Albanian: quantitative observations on the vocabulary of the letter c

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Abstract: This study presents a quantitative investigation of the structure of the active lexicon in Albanian language, with a particular focus on the lexical items beginning with the letter C, based on empirical data gathered from a representative sample of native Albanian speaking students and pupils. The research instrument used, distributed electronically via Google Forms, clearly differentiates between lexical recognition and lexical use, allowing an assessment of both the frequency of use and the availability of words in everyday communication. The analysis shows that words are activated to different degrees: some constitute the core of the active lexicon for this letter exhibiting high frequency of use and immediate availability in communication; others are well-known but rarely used, indicating limited availability; while a considerable portion of words remains unknown or inactive, positioned at the margins of the passive lexicon or entirely outside it. Testing both recognition and use provides a detailed view of the structure of the active lexicon for this letter, highlighting the division of words into active, transitional, and passive zones and their relation to frequency and availability for use. This approach not only maps the structural organization of the active lexicon but also establishes a methodologically robust framework for further research on the lexicon in use.

Keywords: *active/passive lexicon, lexical availability, frequency of use, letter C*

1. Introduction

The lexicon constitutes one of the central components of linguistic structure, providing speakers with the resources necessary to express meaning, experience and social interaction. Through the lexicon, speakers' express

meanings, experiences and cultural perspectives. However, the speakers do not master language in the same way. The knowledge and use of words vary according to age, education background, place of residence and individual experiences. Therefore, the study of the lexicon helps us to understand not only the structure of the language but also the way it is used in everyday life. Based on this, we know the words do not all share the same status in use. Some of them are used naturally in everyday communication. These words constitute the core of the active lexicon, which is regularly mobilized in everyday communication. Others are recognized by speakers but are used less frequently and in even more limited communication contexts. Some of them remain in the area of passive vocabulary or even outside it. For this reason, the relationship between the knowledge and use of words is a central issue in lexicological studies.

Studies on the Albanian lexicon have extensively addressed its structure and development. However, empirical studies that directly investigate the distribution of Albanian lexical items according to their degree of usage are still limited. In particular, the relationship between word recognition, their use in everyday speech, and the frequency of their appearance in communication has been studied very little.

In this context, this study aims to examine the structure of the active lexicon in the Albanian language, focusing on the vocabulary of the letter C. The analysis is based on data collected through a digital instrument and aims to observe the degree of recognition and use of lexical items in everyday communication.

Recent developments in digital technologies have opened new possibilities for empirical investigations of lexical usage, enabling the collection and analyses of linguistic data through digital platforms. In doing so, the study contributes new empirical evidence on the structure of the active lexicon in Albanian and demonstrates the potential of digital tools for future linguistic research.

2. Literature Review

The study of a language's lexicon occupies an important place in contemporary linguistic research because the lexicon directly reflects the linguistic and cultural experience of a community. It is closely related to how language is organized, acquired and used by speakers in everyday communication. In contemporary linguistic literature, the lexicon is not seen as a simple inventory of words, but as an organized and dynamic system that varies according to the frequency of use, the communicative function and the degree of availability of units in the memory of speakers. According to Susan Wallace (Wallace, 2009) the lexicon is the collection of words or the internal

vocabulary that every speaker of a language has. The word itself derives from the Greek "lexis" which means "word". One of the most important differences in lexicon studies is between the active (productive) and passive (receptive) vocabulary. In the Albanian language as in every speaker's lexicon, two layers can be: a layer of active words that are well known and frequently used in everyday life and a layer of words that are not known by everyone, or even if recognized, are used less frequently. In this sense each person both an active and a passive lexical repertoire. (Thomai, 2020, fv. 298-303).

According to Andre Martinet, the active vocabulary includes those lexical units that are used with high frequency in communication, while the passive one includes words that are known but rarely used (Martinet, 1960, f. 145). Thus, the active lexicon represents not only the words a speaker knows but also those regularly used in practice. In contrast, the passive lexicon consists of words that are recognized and understood but are less commonly used in everyday communication and are often associated with specialized or context-specific situations.

Contemporary studies on lexical competence emphasize that the distinction between recognition and use constitutes a crucial dimension of lexical structure. The productive vocabulary includes words that a speaker can actively use in both speaking and writing, while receptive vocabulary consists of words that the speaker is able to recognize and understand while listening or reading, but does not necessarily use actively (Nation, 2001, pp. 24-27)(Schmitt, 2000, fv. 4-6, 142-145) Other studies have shown that the receptive vocabulary is generally broader than the productive one and the transition from passive recognition to active usage depends on frequency of use and communicative practice (Laufer, 1998, fv. 256-259).

From a functional and statistical perspective, Tullio De Mauro demonstrated that the lexicon of a language is not homogeneous, but consists layers of words that differ according to their frequency and communicative role. In his analysis of the Italian active lexicon, he distinguishes three main layers: *vocabolario fondamentale*, which includes words with very high frequency and necessary for everyday communication; *vocabolario di alto uso*, which consists of words widely used in many contexts; and *vocabolario di alta disponibilità*, which includes words that are not always used, but are easily activated in certain thematic situations (Mauro, 1980, p. 55-64). This hierarchical structure is also closely related to the distinction between active and passive lexicon in speaker's linguistic competence.

Another fundamental concept in lexicon studies is frequency of use and lexical availability. Classical studies on frequency and the functional organization of the lexicon have shown that a language's lexicon is structured around a core of widely used words and a wider periphery of lower frequency words

(Gougenheim, 1964, fv. 23–31). This approach was further developed in research on lexical availability, which analyzes the degree to which a lexical unit is ready to be activated in speaker’ memory within communicative contexts (Molina, 2004, fv. 52–55.).

Furthermore, Paul Meara proposed the lexical network model according to which the lexicon is organized as a system of connections between lexical units. In this model, each word is connected to other words through semantic, morphological and associative relations. The frequent use of a word strengthens these connections and makes it the word more stable and available in the active lexicon, while units with lower frequency of use remain in more peripheral zones of the lexical system (Meara, 2005, fv. 32–38).

Within this theoretical framework, studying the active lexicon in Albanian, particularly through analysis of recognition and use of lexical units, allows the identification of the functional core of the lexicon used in everyday communication. Although these theoretical approaches have been analyzed the structure and organization of lexicons in various languages, empirical research on the structure of the active lexicon in Albanian remains limited, making studies in this area particularly necessary.

3. Methodology

The study relies on an empirical approach and uses quantitative analysis methods to examine the structure of the active lexicon for the letter C vocabulary. The data were collected through a research instrument designed in the form of an electronic questionnaire and distributed through the Google Forms platform, a platform known to students and pupils.

The questionnaire includes a list of 232 words. The vocabulary material was collected from: *Fjalor i gjuhës së sotme shqipe*, (The Dictionary of Contemporary Albanian Language) (Group of authors, 2006),, in this dictionary the letter C has 600 words and *Fjalor drejtshkrimor* (The Orthographic Dictionary) (Ali Dhrimo, Rami Memushaj, 2015), in this dictionary the letter C has 1194 words. We have chosen these dictionaries carefully because we judge that in these updated dictionaries the lexicon of the Albanian language is represented to a satisfactory degree. Clear lexical criteria were used to construct the word list, ensuring that the selection reflected basic vocabulary that is useful in everyday communication. In the vocabulary of this letter, we have mainly included those units that we have considered as part of the active vocabulary. The categories of common nouns, adjectives, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, exclamations, particles, numerals, but also onomatopoeias or acronyms have been included. We have presented the words in alphabetical order for this letter.

The study involves 100 participants, primarily high school and university students, native speakers of Albanian. The questionnaire was distributed across several high schools in the city of Elbasan and among students at the Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of Elbasan. The selection of this sample aimed to represent speakers at a crucial stage in the development of their lexical competence.

The instrument collected socio-demographic data, including gender, age, and place of residence, and separately assessed word recognition and usage through a structured scale. The central question was: "How well do you know and use the words in the following list?" For each word, participants selected an option within two conceptually distinct domains:

a) Recognition domain:

I do not know the word

I have an unclear understanding

I know it but do not use it

b) Usage domain:

I use it rarely

I use it often

I use it always

This scaling allows a gradual representation of the transition from word recognition to actual usage, based on the principle that a word's functional value is determined not only by formal knowledge but also by its degree of integration into everyday communication and real linguistic practice.

Within this framework, the questionnaire responses were mapped onto corresponding lexical categories. The response "I use it always" corresponds to the fundamental vocabulary (*vocabolario fondamentale*), which forms the core of communication and appears with very high frequency in both spoken and written language. This category includes both functional words (prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, particles, etc.) and many lexical items (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.). In vocabulary studies, this layer aligns with high-frequency vocabulary (approximately the 2,000 most frequent words), which constitute a substantial portion of daily texts and speech. Words in this category represent a limited set of high-frequency items with broad communicative coverage.

The response "I use it often" corresponds to high-usage vocabulary (*vocabolario di alto uso*), which encompasses widely known words regularly used in communication, although not in all contexts. This category represents a broader stratum of the active lexicon that, while not forming the lexical core, remains an important part of everyday language. These lexical items are frequently used by speakers, particularly in specific thematic contexts, and represent an expansion of the active vocabulary.

The response "I use it rarely" corresponds to high-availability vocabulary (vocabolario di alta disponibilità), including items that are recognized and available for use but are activated primarily in particular stylistic or thematic contexts. Words in this category typically belong to a more restricted lexical layer, known to the speaker but used only in specific linguistic situations. These items are often associated with specialized domains or less common communicative situations and may remain at the boundary of passive vocabulary.

Responses such as "I know it / do not use it" reflect an intermediate zone, typically belonging to limited-use vocabulary (uso limitato). These words are known receptively but are not consistently integrated into spontaneous language production. The response "I have an unclear understanding" indicates partial or unstable knowledge; the speaker may have encountered the word before, but its meaning is not fully clear or retained. Finally, "I do not know it" reflects items outside the speaker's active or passive lexicon, indicating that the word is not represented in the participant's mental lexicon at any level.

This categorization aligns with general principles of lexical structure, in which frequency, degree of acquisition, and real-context usage constitute core criteria for determining a word's active or passive status. Consequently, the instrument measures not only formal recognition but also the functional structure of the speaker's lexicon, providing a robust database for reliable statistical analysis.

The questionnaire was administered electronically via Google Forms, chosen for its ease of access, standardized administration, and systematic collection of structured data, ready for statistical analysis. To avoid excessive cognitive load and maintain participants' focus, the vocabulary of the letter C was divided into three independent testing units, each containing 100 words or fewer, with an average completion time of under three minutes per unit, following the principle of cognitive segmentation. This fragmentation increases response reliability and ensures that participants complete the questionnaire fully, linking the methodology to cognitive psychology principles regarding information processing.

An important methodological aspect of this study concerns the validity of the instrument, considering the concept of ecological validity (Brunswik, 2020). This concept refers to the extent to which testing conditions reflect the real use of language by speakers. The instrument was designed not only to measure formal word knowledge but also the probability of word activation in everyday communication. In this way, the questionnaire reflects practical word use and provides a solid basis for analyzing the structure of the active lexicon,

simulating the process of word choice in communication in a controlled manner.

In accordance with ethical principles in scientific research, participation was entirely voluntary. Before completing the instrument, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and how the collected data would be used, providing their informed consent. The data were treated confidentially and anonymously, ensuring that participants' identities were not revealed at any stage of the analysis or reporting of results.

Overall, the methodological design ensures a rigorous, reliable, and ecologically valid approach to measuring active vocabulary, providing a solid foundation for the interpretation and generalization of the study's findings.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

The analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire on the vocabulary of the letter C in the Albanian language included 100 participants, of whom 75 % were female and 25 % male. The dominant age group was 15–18 years (approximately 80%), representing an early stage in word recognition and the development of active vocabulary, while 20% were students aged 19–23 years. Approximately 68% of participants lived in urban areas, showing higher lexical knowledge, particularly in high-frequency and highly available lexical categories. This suggests that daily exposure to written and spoken language through media, books, and social interactions contributes to a richer active vocabulary. Conversely, participants from rural areas (32%) tended to use fewer words consistently, frequently selecting “rarely used” or “known but not used” categories, reflecting more limited active vocabulary and lower exposure to language in different communicative contexts. This urban–rural difference highlights the role of social and educational context in the development and expansion of active vocabulary.

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Participants

Variable	Number of participants	%
Female	75	75
Male	25	25
Age 15-18	80	80
Age 19-23	20	20
Urban	68	68
Rural	32	32

The analysis shows that the lexical distribution is not homogeneous but follows a hierarchical and statistical structure, where a small number of items constitutes the most frequently used words, confirming the distinction between the core of the active lexicon and its peripheral layers. A total of 232 words from a list of 1,194 were selected for testing, distributed across the following usage categories (Table 2):

Letter C	Fjalori gjuhës së sotme shqipe 2006	Fjalor Drejtshkrimor 2915
Number of words with letter C in vocabulary	600 words	1194 words
Number of words selected from vocabulary	143 words	98 words
Total number of units for testing	232 words	

Table 2. Lexical knowledge and usage (Letter C)

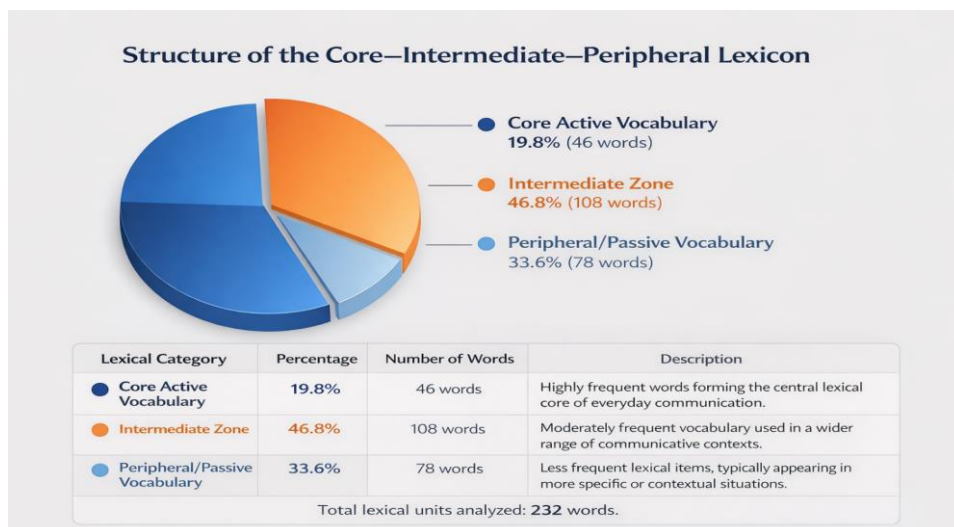
Level of Knowledge/Usage	Number of words	Percentage of participants (%)
Use always	22	9.5%
Use often	24	10.3%
Use rarely	53	22.8%
Know but do not use	55	23.7%
Unclear	43	18.5%
Do not know	35	15.1%
Total number of words	232	100%

The graphical distribution illustrates the hierarchical structure of lexical knowledge among participants. Only 9.5% of the lexical items belong to the core active vocabulary, meaning they are used consistently and automatically in everyday communication. A slightly larger proportion (10.3%) is used frequently, forming the extended active vocabulary.

The largest segments of the lexicon fall into the intermediate zone: 22.8% of the words are used rarely, while 23.7% are recognized but not actively used. This suggests that a substantial portion of the lexicon remains cognitively accessible but is not fully integrated into spontaneous speech.

At the peripheral level, 18.5% of the lexical items are considered unclear, indicating partial recognition or uncertain meaning, while 15.1% are

completely unknown to participants. These categories correspond to the passive lexicon, reflecting limited exposure or specialized usage. Overall, the distribution confirms the classical core–periphery model of vocabulary organization, where a small number of high-frequency words dominate active communication, while the majority of lexical items occupy intermediate or peripheral layers of lexical competence.



The analysis of the letter C vocabulary highlights a clear hierarchical structure of lexical competence in the participants’ active and passive lexicon.

1. Core Vocabulary (19.8%)

This segment consists of high-frequency words that participants report using always or often. In terms of the De Mauro model, these words form the nucleus of daily communication, representing the functional core of the active lexicon. These words are not only highly accessible cognitively but are also integrated into spontaneous speech, showing that they are indispensable for everyday interaction. Examples include frequently used verbs, nouns, and functional words such as *caktoj*, *caktuar(i,e)*, *ca*, and *celular* ect. This confirms classical linguistic findings that a small proportion of lexical items accounts for a disproportionate share of actual communication.

2. Intermediate Vocabulary (46.5%)

The intermediate zone consists of words that participants recognize but do not use consistently, or use only rarely. These words occupy a transitional space between core active vocabulary and peripheral passive knowledge. According to Chiari’s extension of De Mauro, this segment reflects lexical items that require contextual prompts to be activated. In practice, they may appear in

more formal, thematic, or specialized situations, or when participants consciously recall vocabulary. Examples include words like *caherë*, *celulë*, *ciklon*, and *civilizuar* etc. The large size of this zone indicates that while participants have a substantial repertoire of lexical knowledge, much of it remains potentially active rather than fully integrated into daily language use. This aligns with statistical patterns in lexicography showing that intermediate-frequency words serve as a bridge between frequent and rare words, shaping the flexibility of expressive capacity.

3. Peripheral / Passive Vocabulary (33.6%)

This category includes words that are either unclear or entirely unknown to participants. These items correspond to the peripheral layers of the lexicon, reflecting passive knowledge that is cognitively accessible but not functionally active. Many of these words are archaic, specialized, or culturally bound, which explains their limited presence in participants' spontaneous language. Examples include *cafullim*, *cimbidh*, *cingali*, and *cijat* etc. From a methodological perspective, this peripheral zone underscores the gap between recognition and use in lexical studies, illustrating that vocabulary competence is not uniformly distributed but stratified according to frequency, exposure, and contextual familiarity.

The distribution of lexical items across core, intermediate, and peripheral zones confirms a gradual, hierarchical model of lexical activation, consistent with De Mauro's functional approach and Chiari's statistical validation. The relatively large intermediate zone suggests that learners possess latent lexical potential, which could be activated through exposure, instruction, or communicative prompts. Meanwhile, the peripheral zone indicates lexical gaps, highlighting areas where targeted vocabulary development or pedagogical intervention could be most effective.

In conclusion, the results provide a quantitative and qualitative map of lexical competence for the letter C in Albanian, demonstrating how frequency, recognition, and usage intersect to form the structured landscape of active and passive vocabulary. This analysis is useful not only for linguistic research but also for designing teaching materials, assessing language proficiency, and understanding the dynamics of word activation in everyday communication.

5. Conclusions/ Limits of study

The analysis of the active lexicon for the letter C in Albanian demonstrates that lexicon is not homogeneous but follows a hierarchical structure, where a small number of units form the core of active vocabulary, while most units occupy peripheral or passive layers. Word activation is closely linked to frequency of use, exposure to written and spoken language, and social and

educational background, highlighting the importance of urban environments for the development of active lexical competence. High-frequency units' function as the core of everyday communication. Less frequent words are activated mainly in specific thematic or stylistic contexts. These units exhibit the highest lexical availability and constitute the central zone of the system (core vocabulary), whereas a larger group of words occupies an intermediate zone, widely recognized but used less frequently, mainly in specific semantic or stylistic contexts. Peripheral units are characterized by very low usage frequency, recognized by fewer speakers and remaining largely within the passive lexicon. Statistically, the distribution follows a frequency-type pattern, in which word usage gradually decreases from the core towards the periphery, meaning that the larger the word list, the fewer speakers actively use them. These findings confirm theoretical models of active and passive vocabulary (Gougenheim G., Michéa, R., Rivenc, P., & Sauvageot, A., 1964), (Mauro, 1980) (Nation, 2001); (Schmitt, 2000); (Laufer, 1998) and the lexical network organization model (Meara, 2005), showing continuity from full recognition to limited and peripheral use of lexical items.

The study has limitations mainly related to the sample size and composition, which included 100 participants, primarily adolescents and young adults, potentially limiting the generalizability of the results to the broader speaker population. Future research could expand the sample to include more diverse age groups and socio-educational backgrounds. Additionally, this analysis of letter C serves as a pilot segment for the dissertation, providing a methodological model for examining other letters and contributing to understanding the structure of the Albanian active lexicon. These results have implications for further research in lexicography, language teaching, and corpus development.

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Digitalization and Albanian language teaching in primary education in Albania (from national policies to implementation practices)

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Abstract: This study examines the use of digital technologies in teaching the Albanian language in primary education in Albania, considering national policies and current implementation practices. The aim is to analyze teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of digital tools to enhance learning quality and their professional development. Following a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative), 110 teachers from urban public, rural public, and urban private schools in Tirana were included. Among them, 100 teachers completed a structured questionnaire, while 10 participated in interviews to provide deeper insights. Results indicate that, although most teachers are familiar with digital technologies, only a small portion has received specialized training in their application for teaching the Albanian language. Teachers primarily use these tools for designing exercises, lesson planning, and developing creative student activities. Digital technology is perceived as a valuable aid for fostering professional creativity and student engagement; however, significant challenges exist, including lack of specific training, inadequate technological resources, and ethical concerns. The study emphasizes the need for continuous teacher training and policy development, as well as the integration of digital education into the Albanian language curriculum. In conclusion, digitalization presents transformative opportunities for teaching the Albanian language in primary education in Albania, provided its use is guided by clear pedagogical and ethical principles.

Keywords: *digitalization, Albanian language teaching, primary education, teachers, Albania*

1. Introduction

The current era is characterized by rapid digitalization, which is fundamentally transforming the way teaching and learning take place in schools. Digitalization in primary education has the potential to improve teaching quality, foster student creativity and engagement, and support teachers' professional development. In particular, the teaching of the Albanian language in primary schools has begun to benefit from the use of digital technologies as a means to enhance language skills, student interaction, and creativity.

The implementation of digitalization in Albanian education is closely linked to national policies, school technological resources, and teachers' capacity to integrate digital tools into their daily practice. Although many schools have started using educational platforms, software, and other digital tools, their use often remains fragmented and limited, reflecting the lack of structured training and clear guidelines on pedagogical integration of technology.

Countries and educational institutions have identified digitalization as a strategic priority for improving education quality and preparing students for the demands of the 21st century. However, in Albania, challenges remain evident: insufficient infrastructure, disparities between urban and rural schools, and varying technological competencies among teachers directly influence how digital technologies are integrated into teaching. These challenges highlight the need for a thorough assessment of current practices, teachers' perceptions, and obstacles that limit the effective use of digitalization in the learning process.

In primary education, where teachers play a crucial role in students' cognitive, emotional, and social development, the use of new technologies must be carefully planned and guided by clear pedagogical principles. This process requires a careful balance between technological innovation and the development of basic learning skills to ensure a comprehensive and high-quality learning experience. Digitalization, in this context, is not merely a supportive tool but also an element that can transform how teachers plan, organize, and assess Albanian language instruction.

In practical terms, recent studies indicate that the use of digitalization in primary education remains sporadic and often non-institutionalized, particularly in rural areas or schools with limited resources. The lack of clear policies and structured training has prevented many teachers from fully exploiting the potential of digital tools in teaching. This situation underscores the need for empirical research to document teachers' experiences, challenges, and perceptions, and to identify the most effective strategies for integrating digitalization into the Albanian language curriculum and supporting teachers' professional development.

This study aims to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the use of digital technologies in Albanian language teaching in primary education in Albania, exploring teachers’ perceptions, practices, and challenges. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, this research seeks to contribute to the development of strategies that can enhance digital integration in teaching and support teachers’ professional growth.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The vision for the education sector in Albania aims to develop an inclusive education system that effectively addresses the individual needs of all children and students. Achieving this vision requires a strong focus on inclusiveness and equality, which are essential prerequisites for ensuring that every learner receives quality education and for reducing disparities in achievement across social groups. This vision aligns with the principles of lifelong learning, covering all stages of education—from preschool to post-retirement—and encompassing various forms of learning: formal, non-formal, and informal. In addition, promoting lifelong learning opportunities is explicitly reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda, which emphasizes equitable access to quality education worldwide (UNICEF, 2021). An education system built on inclusiveness and equality not only ensures access but also enhances the quality of learning, contributing to both individual well-being and social cohesion. Quality education equips students with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate fully in society, strengthens democratic processes, and facilitates Albania’s integration into the European Union. Furthermore, education fosters essential 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, which are increasingly important in contemporary life. These skills are developed in multiple contexts—formal, non-formal, and informal—through quality teaching practices. Education thus serves both instrumental purposes, such as preparing students for the labor market and supporting economic development, and intrinsic purposes, including personal fulfillment and the cultivation of democratic citizenship values (UNICEF, 2021).

Technology plays a pivotal role in realizing these educational objectives. It represents a unique form of human activity and a key tool for developing an inclusive education system. In modern societies, people engage with technological environments daily, utilizing various tools, materials, and processes to meet their personal and professional needs. Within education, technology is not merely a tool but also a subject of study. The Technology curriculum, implemented at all pre-university levels, aims to develop students’ competencies to navigate, analyze, and contribute to a technological world.

This involves acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable students to interact with technological systems, solve problems, design and produce products, and evaluate the social and environmental impact of technology (MAS, 2017).

Empirical research highlights the positive effects of information and communication technology (ICT) on learning outcomes. Integrating ICT into teaching improves students' digital competence, enhances engagement, and supports individualized learning, preparing students for effective participation in the information society. In Albania, this commitment is reflected in the Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education (SZHAPU), which prioritizes promoting students' digital skills and integrating ICT into teaching practices. The Government Program reaffirms this focus, emphasizing that digital literacy is essential for both student achievement and the modernization of the education system (UNICEF, 2021).

Since the late 1990s, Albania has made significant strides in expanding ICT access in pre-university schools. Educational institutions have been equipped with computers and accessories, local area networks have been installed, and internet connectivity has been provided. Despite these improvements, by 2017, the computer-to-student ratio remained far below EU standards, with one computer available for every three to seven students. Additionally, about 25% of computers were non-functional, internet speeds were insufficient, and ICT access was largely confined to computer labs rather than general classrooms (UNICEF, 2021).

Another key challenge is the lack of centralized coordination. No national authority manages ICT and internet services across schools, leaving private companies to provide these services, which often do not meet educational needs. Schools also lack sufficient online resources in Albanian and platforms for interactive digital learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic (March–June 2020), the Ministry of Education and Sports (MASR) responded by creating online resources, including video lessons, while the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP) issued guidelines for distance learning, marking a significant, though temporary, shift toward digital instruction (UNICEF, 2021).

With support from UNICEF and MASR, the akademi.al platform was developed, enabling online and blended learning. Additionally, Vodafone Albania donated over 15,000 tablets and smartphones to children in need, ensuring that students without personal devices could participate in digital learning. The “21st Century Schools” program, implemented in 1,194 schools with more than 4,334 teachers and around 120,000 students aged 10–15, focuses on equipping students with critical thinking, digital, problem-solving, and coding skills. This initiative encourages interactive, innovative, and

enjoyable learning experiences that foster student engagement and creativity (UNICEF, 2021).

The Technology curriculum framework, based on MAS (2017), aligns with official documents such as the Pre-University Curriculum Framework, the core curriculum, and primary education teaching plans. It guides students in developing key competencies and technological skills, assists teachers in planning and delivering lessons, and informs parents about assessment criteria and expected learning outcomes. The subject of Technology in primary education emphasizes a balanced development of knowledge, cognitive skills, and contemporary competencies, preparing students to be active participants in a technologically advanced world (MAS, 2017).

Competences for primary education students include:

1. Understanding technology and computers: Students learn the basics of technology, computer parts, and safe usage.
2. Processing and presenting digital information: Students collect, organize, and present information using word processing, presentation software, and digital tools.
3. Expressing ideas through technical drawings and multimedia: Students learn to create simple diagrams, illustrations, and presentations to communicate ideas effectively.
4. Applying technology in practical daily life tasks: Students engage in small projects using technological tools, understanding the role of technology in everyday life.
5. Ensuring safety and responsible behavior in digital environments: Students develop awareness of online risks, including privacy, cyberbullying, and appropriate internet use (MAS, 2017; UNICEF, 2021).

Analysis of primary education in Albania, based on UNICEF (2021) and MASR SWOT assessments, focuses on five thematic areas: inclusiveness and equity, teacher development, lifelong learning competencies, digitalization of education, and management and quality assurance.

Key objectives for digitalization (A4) include:

- Expanding ICT infrastructure and ensuring proper maintenance;
- Installing wireless networks across schools;
- Increasing access to digital devices (computers, projectors, interactive boards);
- Establishing technical maintenance through student clubs and local education structures;
- Implementing school-level ICT policies to guide digital practices (UNICEF, 2021).

Persistent challenges include:

- Insufficient ICT devices: In 2020, the computer-to-student ratio was 0.2 per 12-year-old, far below EU standards;
- Limited internet coverage beyond dedicated computer labs;
- Inadequate maintenance, with 4,400 of 15,731 computers non-functional;
- Teachers’ limited preparation for integrating ICT into lessons;
- Lack of Albanian-language digital content and online educational platforms;
- Ensuring children’s safety online amid risks such as inappropriate content, cyberbullying, and exposure to harmful virtual communities (UNICEF, 2021; 2024).

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach: continuous teacher training, investments in ICT infrastructure, development of digital content in Albanian, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the curriculum is effectively implemented and learning outcomes are achieved. By overcoming these obstacles, Albania can move toward an education system that fully embraces digitalization while fostering equity, inclusiveness, and the development of 21st-century competencies.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a **mixed-methods research approach**, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data to gain an in-depth understanding of perceptions, experiences, and the potential use of ChatGPT in the primary education teaching process. The mixed-methods approach was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, combining the breadth offered by quantitative data analysis with the depth provided by qualitative insights. The study employs **two complementary research methods**:

Quantitative Study: A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 100 primary school teachers working in urban public, rural public, and urban private schools.

Qualitative Study: Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with representative teachers to explore in greater depth their individual experiences and reflections on using ChatGPT in the classroom.

The quantitative sample consisted of 100 primary school teachers from three categories of schools in Tirana:

- Urban public schools: 45 teachers
- Urban private schools: 30 teachers
- Rural public schools: 25 teachers

The selection was carried out through **purposive sampling** to cover diverse educational contexts, including urban and rural areas as well as non-public institutions.

Qualitative Sample

Ten teachers were interviewed from three different schools (4 from urban public, 4 from urban private, and 2 from rural public schools). The selection was also purposive, ensuring diversity in gender, professional background, and geographic location.

Quantitative Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of four sections:

- Demographic information
- Use of ChatGPT
- Perceptions and attitudes
- Challenges and recommendations

It was designed to be clear, structured, and easy to complete. The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended questions and was validated for content by two education experts.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide with six key questions was used to address teachers' experiences with ChatGPT, its impact on teaching, perceived benefits and challenges, and their vision for future use. Interviews were conducted with participants' consent and were transcribed for analysis.

Quantitative data were collected via physical and digital questionnaires (Google Forms) in collaboration with school administrators. Qualitative interviews were conducted face-to-face or online via Zoom, according to teachers' preferences.

The study adheres to established ethical research principles:

- Data were kept **anonymous and confidential**.
- Participation was **voluntary**.
- All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided **informed consent**.

Quantitative data were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (percentages and charts) with tools such as Excel and SPSS. Qualitative data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, identifying recurring patterns in teachers' attitudes and experiences.

Two research hypotheses were formulated to examine whether significant differences exist in primary school teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding ChatGPT use in teaching and learning, depending on the institutional context:

- **H₀ (Null Hypothesis):** There is no significant difference in primary school teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding the use of

ChatGPT to support teaching and learning, regardless of the type of school they work in (urban public, urban private, rural public).

- **H₁ (Alternative Hypothesis):** There is a significant difference in primary school teachers’ perceptions and experiences regarding the use of ChatGPT to support teaching and learning, depending on the type of school they work in.

The hypotheses were tested using quantitative data from the questionnaire. The **chi-square (χ^2) test** was applied to assess the relationship between school type and reported perceptions. Comparative analysis through percentages and charts was also used to evaluate potential differences across groups.

Results of the χ^2 test:

- χ^2 value = 0.92
- Degrees of freedom (df) = 6
- p-value = 0.988

Since the p-value is much greater than the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, there is insufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H_0). This indicates that there is no statistically significant relationship between school type and the frequency of ChatGPT use for professional purposes. These results suggest that the use of ChatGPT is not strongly influenced by the institutional context of the school. Rather, barriers or motivations for using artificial intelligence tools may depend more on other factors such as **training, technological culture, or individual teachers’ attitudes**.

4. Results / Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study in a clear, logical, and objective manner, directly aligned with the research objectives and questions. The results are reported without interpretation, with tables and figures included only to enhance clarity. All results are accurately described and referenced as appropriate. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to the objectives of the study and existing literature, highlighting theoretical, practical, and policy implications.

The quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire completed by 100 primary school teachers from three types of schools in Tirana: urban public, rural public, and urban private. The questionnaire aimed to measure the levels of ChatGPT use, purposes and frequency of use, perceptions of its impact on teaching and learning, and challenges encountered. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

The participants’ demographic information provides context for understanding their perceptions and use of ChatGPT:

- Gender: 68% female, 32% male

- Age: 25–35 years (40%), 36–45 years (35%), over 45 years (25%)
- Teaching experience: less than 5 years (22%), 5–15 years (45%), over 15 years (33%)
- AI-related training: 22% had attended formal training

Use of ChatGPT

- Source of initial information: 34% through colleagues, 26% social media, 22% professional training, 18% personal research.
- Frequency of use: 34% occasionally (about once a week), 21% regularly (several times a week), 29% rarely (1–2 times per month), 16% never.
- Purposes of use: 72% for creating questions and exercises, 60% for creative activity suggestions, 55% for lesson planning, 50% for thematic research, 44% for translations or language adaptation.
- Perceived usefulness: 42% rated responses as moderately useful, 28% as very useful, 25% as somewhat useful, 5% as not useful.

Perceptions and Attitudes

- Support for professional creativity: 36% reported strong support, 41% some support, 13% limited creativity, 10% no opinion.
- Impact on teaching materials: 49% reported improvement, 31% no change, 9% deterioration, 11% never used with students.
- Student engagement: 47% reported increased engagement, 35% no change, 10% decreased, 8% not yet used with students.
- Teachers' view of ChatGPT: 62% considered it supportive, 20% neutral, 10% concerned about role replacement, 8% undecided.
- Impact on students' critical thinking: 43% depends on use, 26% supportive, 18% potential negative impact, 13% no clear opinion.

Challenges and Recommendations

- Lack of specialized training: 64%
- Lack of necessary technological equipment: 53%
- Lack of time for use: 41%
- Technical difficulties: 36%
- Ethical concerns (e.g., plagiarism, inaccuracies): 29%
- Support for teacher training in AI: 77%
- Support for AI and ethics education in the curriculum: 62%

Perception of the Future: 48% view ChatGPT as transformative, 38% as useful with limitations, 9% see risks, 5% uncertain.

The qualitative study used semi-structured interviews with 10 primary school teachers from urban public, rural public, and urban private schools. Thematic analysis was employed to capture perceptions, experiences, and recommendations regarding ChatGPT use.

- 70% first encountered ChatGPT via colleagues or online training; 30% through self-directed research.
- Use in lesson preparation: 100% for exercises, 60% for creative activity ideas, 40% for translations or explanations.
- Impact on pedagogical creativity: 80% positive, 20% concerned about overreliance on AI.
- Student reactions: 70% positive and engaged, 30% more skeptical.
- Role of ChatGPT: 90% as support, 10% experienced overreliance.
- Main challenges: lack of training (70%), insufficient technical skills (65%), lack of equipment (50%), ethical concerns (40%), anxiety or uncertainty (30%).
- Critical thinking development: 60% concerned about uncontrolled use, 40% considered beneficial when guided.
- Integration in curricula and teacher preparation: 80% suggest AI ethics and usage training for teachers; 60% recommend student inclusion in AI education.
- Future perspective: 90% optimistic about long-term impact, 10% cautious.

The results provide a comprehensive view of primary school teachers' experiences and perceptions of ChatGPT. Both quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that its use is mainly for practical and creative purposes. Teachers generally view ChatGPT as a supportive tool that enhances the quality of teaching materials and reduces preparation workload, without replacing their professional role.

The study highlights the informal nature of initial AI knowledge acquisition, mainly through colleagues and social networks, demonstrating a need for structured institutional training. Perceived impacts on creativity and student engagement are mostly positive, while challenges include professional readiness, technological infrastructure, and ethical considerations.

These findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of deliberate and pedagogically guided AI integration in primary education (Holmes et al., 2022; Luckin et al., 2019; OECD, 2021). Integrating quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a balanced and comprehensive understanding of how ChatGPT is perceived and used in practice, highlighting both its opportunities and limitations.

In conclusion, ChatGPT is perceived as a positive and transformative tool for supporting teaching and learning in primary education, contingent upon structured support, ongoing training, and conscious pedagogical integration.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study contributes to understanding how primary school teachers in Albania perceive and use ChatGPT in teaching and learning processes. The findings indicate that, although this technology is not yet systematically integrated into the education system, it has entered the daily practice of a significant number of teachers, particularly in supportive functions such as lesson planning, material preparation, and exercise design. Positive attitudes among teachers, combined with interest in professional development in this area, provide a promising foundation for the further advancement of artificial intelligence use in primary education.

However, to fully realize the potential of ChatGPT in education, intervention from state and educational authorities is required to ensure sustainable training, ethical guidelines, and improvement of technological infrastructure in schools. The results highlight the need for an integrated approach that involves not only teacher training but also the preparation of students to use AI tools critically, creatively, and responsibly.

In this context, the study encourages the inclusion of artificial intelligence in both initial and ongoing teacher education, as well as its integration into school curricula, promoting an education system aligned with the demands of the digital society. ChatGPT and similar tools should not be seen as replacements for teachers, but as partners that can enhance and deepen the teaching and learning process when used with pedagogical awareness and within clear ethical frameworks.

While the study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size, particularly for the qualitative interviews (10 teachers), is relatively small, which may affect the generalizability of findings. The study focused exclusively on teachers in Tirana, limiting the representation of rural and regional contexts across Albania. Additionally, as the research relied on self-reported data, responses may reflect participants' subjective perceptions rather than objective measures of ChatGPT use. Future research could expand to a larger, more diverse sample and incorporate classroom observations or experimental designs to complement self-reported data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI integration in education.

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Digital communication and its impact on linguistic norms in Albanian language teaching

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate how students' digital communication affects the use of standard language in Albanian language instruction, with a special emphasis on the difficulties caused by digital language in students' academic writing and pedagogical solutions. **Methodology:** In this study, a mixed-methods approach is employed, including analysis of student assignments, classroom observations, and data collected by 53 students of different ages (19 to 24 years old). **Results** show that 68% of them expressed features of digital communication, such as abbreviations, limited punctuation, and informal syntax, in their academic writing. Even though 54% of students are aware that standard language should be used in communication, they struggle to use it in formal contexts. This study highlights that digital communication has a major effect on linguistic norm deviation, promoting the use of borrowings, abbreviations, and reduced syntactic structures. These phenomena are also reflected in students' school language, making it difficult to adhere to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. **Conclusion:** Based on these data, the study suggests pedagogical approaches that move beyond prescriptive correction and promote reflective awareness of register differences. Register-shifting exercises and parallel text analysis are two examples of activities that help learners become more proficient in using standard language across a variety of contexts. This study provides useful insights for more flexible and successful Albanian language training by striking a balance between conventional language rules and the realities of digital communication.

Keywords: *digital communication, academic writing, linguistic norms*

1. Introduction

Digital technology has brought major changes to education. In particular, artificial intelligence is influencing how universities teach, assess students and involve them in learning, encouraging a re-evaluation of both teaching

approaches and language standards (Jani & Çelaj, 2024). In this context, the present study examines how digital communication affects university students' use of standard Albanian in their academic writing, highlighting ongoing changes in language practices in higher education. It asks how habits from social media, messaging apps, and other online platforms show up in formal writing. The focus is on features such as abbreviations, reduced punctuation, informal sentence structures, and English words, and on how often these appear in students' academic work. The study not only examines students' written assignments but also assesses their knowledge of standard language rules and their use of these rules in their writing. Using text analysis, classroom observations, and student feedback, the research examines whether students break language rules because they do not know them or because they are accustomed to writing in a digital style. The aim of this study is to show how digital communication affects academic writing in Albanian, rather than viewing online language as a problem. The study treats this form of communication as a normal part of students' everyday language use that often carries over into academic contexts. Its aim is to help teachers support students in making thoughtful choices about style and language in their academic writing, rather than relying only on fixed rules or surface correction.

2. Literature review

From Online Discourse to Academic Texts: Emerging Patterns of Transfer

From online discourse to academic texts, new patterns of transfer illustrate how everyday digital communication increasingly informs the way students approach, structure, and express ideas in formal academic writing. With the advent of the internet, language change has accelerated. According to scholars, language change takes decades to develop before it is used. But history is no guide when it comes to electronic technology. In ancient times (i.e., before the internet), it would take several years for a new word to become widely used in society and for its meaning to be understood by young people and students. Today, most students' daily writing takes place on social media, messaging apps, and other digital platforms. In higher education, the growing use of artificial intelligence intensifies these changes even more by shaping how students interact with academic content and language, and by encouraging a mix of digital and formal styles (Jani & Çelaj, 2024). Students are accustomed to short forms, minimal punctuation, informal sentence structures and flexible word choices. Looking at how students communicate on social media, messaging apps, and other digital platforms, it is evident that they rely heavily on shortened forms, limited punctuation, informal sentence structures, and

flexible word choices. Over time these habits shape how words, grammatical constructions, and spelling patterns are used, often in ways that differ from language practices outside digital environments. These practices give rise to new uses of individual words, grammatical constructions, and orthographic patterns that differ from those typically observed in language used outside the electronic medium. A little change is not the same as 'no change'. This transfer may challenge established academic norms and it also demonstrates students' adaptability and their ability to repurpose familiar communicative strategies for new contexts. This process often involves a shift from 'dialogic communication'—the conversational style of digital platforms—to the 'authoritative discourse' required in formal settings (Jani & Çelaj, 2025). For example, the use of abbreviations and acronyms according to (Ardian Vehbiu, 2011, p. 47) is widely used in online communication, such as “*flm*” (faleminderit), “*prsh*” (përsëndetje), and “*ntm*” (natën e mirë) “*çpb*” (çfarë po bëjnë),” *nsr*” (nesër). As in everyday life, the frequent use of emojis, hashtags, or ellipses in the digital world helps students express their feelings and attitudes, introducing new, more lively and informal signs into texts that are usually formal. Incomplete sentences are common in messaging apps and online comments, but they sometimes show up in essays, too. However, academic writing needs clear, complete sentences and a well-organised structure. When students take part in online forums and blogs, they tend to write more energetically and pay closer attention to their audience. This helps them share their ideas clearly and engage with different viewpoints. These experiences show that while digital communication can challenge academic traditions, it also offers students new ways to develop language skills that align with modern forms of expression.

3. Manifestations of Digital Discourse in Academic Writing

Students' academic writing has increasingly been influenced by the communication forms prevalent in online environments. Language patterns developed via social media messaging apps and other online platforms transition into formal writing situations as online engagement becomes more prevalent in daily life. In contrast to academic writing requirements, researchers have noted that online communication encourages speed, brevity and informality (Crystal, 2001). This development helps explain the frequent appearance of online language elements in student writing. A prominent example of this transfer is the use of abbreviations and shortened forms. Expressions such as “*info*” instead of “information,” or Albanian short forms like “*flm*” (faleminderit) and “*prsh*” (përsëndetje), are widely accepted in informal online communication but are not appropriate in

academic texts (Vehbiu, 2011). The presence of these forms in essays indicates that students may not consistently distinguish between informal writing habits and formal academic expectations. The influence of digital discourse is also apparent in students' use of punctuation and sentence organisation. In online communication, meaning is frequently conveyed by context rather than precise punctuation, a rule that students should implement in academic writing. A lack of or incorrect punctuation can make sentences excessively long and unfocused, hindering comprehension and reducing clarity (Baron, 2008). This pattern does not necessarily reflect a lack of grammatical knowledge but rather a reliance on communicative strategies effective in digital environments. Sentence structure is similarly influenced. Students often use short, simple sentences that resemble those found in social media posts for example: *"This is an important issue. Many students use social media. This affects academic writing."* Although these sentences are grammatically correct this style restricts the development of more complex ideas and diminishes critical depth. Additionally, sentence fragments such as *"Because of digital media"* mirror patterns typical of online interaction and obscure the distinction between informal and academic registers (Crystal, 2001). Digital communication clearly affects the words students choose in their writing. It is common to see informal terms and English loanwords, such as "online," "chat" and "feedback" used in student assignments. These words often appear mixed with Albanian, for example in phrases like "bëra një research," "kjo është shumë useful për studentët" or "studimi mori feedback pozitiv." This shows how students are influenced by global trends and digital media which bring new vocabulary into everyday and academic language. While these choices reflect students' familiarity with international communication, they do not always fit the formal style that academic writing requires.

4. Awareness Without Control: The Gap Between Knowledge and Practice

One of the main findings of this study is the gap between what students know about academic language and what they can produce in their writing. Although most participants are aware that standard Albanian is expected in formal academic contexts, elements of digital language still appear frequently in their assignments. This suggests that knowing the rules of academic writing does not necessarily mean being able to apply them consistently (Hyland, 2022, pp. 45–46). When students start an academic assignment, especially under time pressure, they often do not stop to carefully consider their writing style. Instead, they use the language habits that are most familiar to them. Because

most of their everyday writing takes place online these familiar patterns naturally carry over into academic tasks. As a result digital features appear in formal writing not because students intentionally choose them, but because these forms have become routine and largely automatic (Li, Dunn, & Nini, 2022, pp. 12–14). A major reason for this lies in students’ everyday writing habits. Most students write in a digital environment where quick, brief, and informal messages are the norm. These habits soon become second nature. As a result, students often know the basic rules of academic language, but they may not have much experience using them in practice. Although many students can recognise when language is informal, they often find it difficult to re-express their ideas in a more developed or formal way. In practice, this means that students may know what not to write but remain unsure about what to write instead. This difficulty becomes more pronounced in classrooms where teaching focuses mainly on correcting mistakes rather than helping students understand how language naturally changes across different contexts and purposes. When students are not guided to see academic language as a flexible resource rather than a rigid set of rules, their ability to adapt their writing to formal settings remains limited. Overall, students are not ignoring academic norms, but are navigating between different ways of writing they use in daily life. Without explicit support in recognising and practising these differences, awareness alone is unlikely to lead to sustained control over academic language.

5. Reframing Pedagogy for a Digitally Mediated Linguistic Environment

Recent studies argue that traditional language teaching, which focuses on strict rules and correcting errors it differs from how people actually communicate online. Researchers say that as digital communication becomes more common, we need to rethink how academic language is taught, especially since many students now write mostly online (Crystal, 2001; Baron, 2008). Instead of seeing online language as simply breaking the rules, current research considers it as a distinct style that exists alongside academic language. Hyland (2022) points out that good academic writing instruction is not just about knowing the rules but also about being able to notice and use different styles of language in different situations. This indicates that rather than a lack of linguistic proficiency issues with academic writing frequently stem from a lack of opportunities to learn about these distinctions. Research shows that people often switch between different ways of speaking or writing in daily life, but schools rarely teach this directly (Li, Dunn, & Nini, 2022). Because of this, students may find it hard to adjust their digital writing habits

to fit academic settings, even if they know what is expected. Research points to the importance of teaching students to notice and understand different language style in classrooms shaped by digital communication. Studies show that comparing informal and formal texts helps students see the differences in grammar, vocabulary and how ideas are organised (Hyland, 2022). This is especially useful in digital settings where students are already good at writing for different audiences but may not have been taught academic rules directly. Instead of ignoring digital language, experts suggest that highlighting its features can help students gain better control over academic writing. Another common topic in the research is how feedback is given. Baron (2008) explains that simply correcting informal language does not lead to lasting improvement because it does not address why students make certain language choices. Instead, giving feedback that explains how language works in different situations helps students understand and apply what they learn. This matches the idea that language skills depend on context, not just fixed rules.

In Albanian-language research, Vehbiu (2011; 2014) also argues that digital communication shows how language is changing and becoming more global, not that it is getting worse. Based on this view, teaching should help students use different types of language, instead of strictly separating what is 'correct' from what is 'incorrect.' This supports a teaching approach that accepts digital language as part of students' everyday experience, while still valuing standard language in academic work. Researchers suggest that teaching in digital environments should focus on students' weaknesses and use methods that build awareness of different language styles, provide context-based feedback, and help students understand how language works in society. These studies offer a framework for examining how digital communication affects academic writing, especially as technology in education changes rapidly.

6. Methodology

In this study, a mixed-methods research design was used to explore how digital communication affects students' use of standard Albanian in academic writing. This approach allows for both quantitative analysis of language features and qualitative insights into students' writing, classroom interactions and teaching methods.

Participants: The study included 53 university students enrolled in Albanian language courses. They were between 19 and 24 years old, which is typical for university students. All participants regularly used digital communication, such as social media, messaging apps, and online platforms, in both their academic and social lives.

Data Collection: Data came from three main sources.

1. Written Assignments

Researchers analyzed a collection of student essays and coursework to find language features linked to digital communication. They looked for things like abbreviations, inconsistent punctuation, informal sentence structures, English loanwords, and sentence fragments. The goal was to see how digital writing habits appeared in academic work.

2. Classroom Observations and Learning Activities

Students were observed during writing activities such as guided drafting, peer review and text revision. They focused on moments when students switched between informal and formal language, such as comparing digital messages to academic writing, rewriting informal texts, and discussing language choices as a group. Notes were taken on how digital habits manifested and how students responded to feedback and instruction.

3. Student Self-Reports

After writing activities, students wrote short reflections about their understanding of standard language rules and the difficulties they faced using them in academic writing. These reflections helped connect students’ language awareness to their actual writing habits.

4. Result

The graphic below provides a comparative overview of students’ academic writing practices and their awareness of standard language norms.

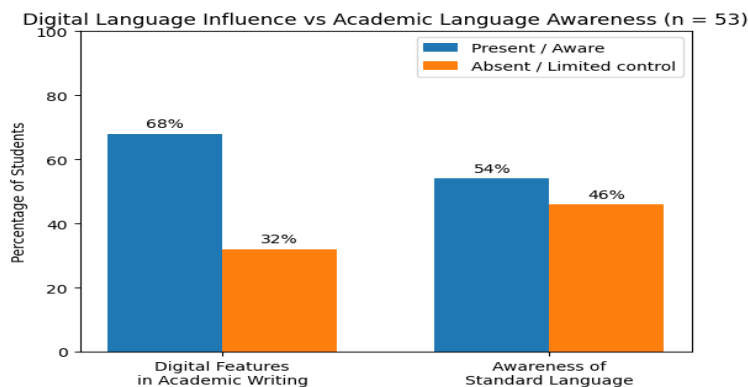


Figure 1. presents digital language influence versus academic language awareness.

The figure 1 compares how students write in academic settings with their understanding of standard language norms. The first set of bars shows that 68% of students incorporate features of digital communication into their academic writing, such as informal sentence structures, reduced punctuation,

or abbreviations. Only 32% of students avoid these features in their work. This shows that habits from digital communication are common and often appear in formal academic writing. The second set of bars shows students' awareness of standard language expectations. While 54% of students report knowing that academic writing should use standard Albanian, 46% are either unaware of this or have difficulty using it consistently. Taken together, these results indicate that digital communication has a stronger effect on academic writing than students' ability to adhere to formal language rules.

Overall, the diagram indicates a gap between what students know about academic language and how they write. This evidence suggests that digital writing habits are automatic and often take over, even when students understand the rules of formal writing.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings, **graphic 1 synthesises the observed relationship** between digital communication practices, habit formation, and academic writing outcomes.

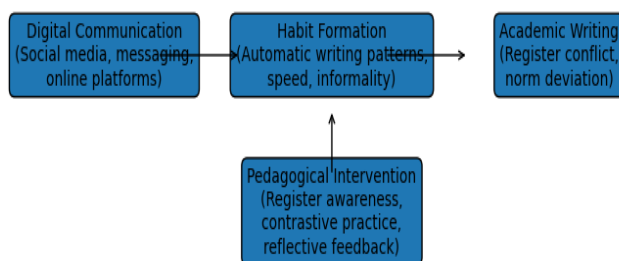


Figure 2 explains an extended conceptual model of digital communication, habit formation, and academic writing

Digital Communication

Students' everyday writing takes place mainly in digital environments (social media, messaging, online platforms), where speed, brevity, and informality are normalised.

Habit Formation

Repeated exposure to these environments leads to the development of **automatic writing habits**. Linguistic features such as abbreviations, simplified syntax, reduced punctuation, and informal lexical choices become routine and largely unconscious.

Academic Writing

When students engage in formal academic writing, these habitual patterns transfer into their texts, resulting in **register conflict** and deviations from standard language norms.

Pedagogical Intervention (Disruptive Loop)

The lower box represents targeted teaching practices—such as register-awareness activities, contrastive analysis between informal and academic texts, and reflective feedback—which intervene at the level of habit formation. Rather than simply correcting errors, these strategies aim to **interrupt automatic patterns** and support controlled, context-appropriate language use.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how students’ everyday digital communication influences their academic writing in Albanian. An analysis of students’ written assignments, classroom behaviour and personal reflections indicates that habits formed through digital communication often manifest in formal academic work. While many students know that standard language is expected in academic contexts they find it difficult to apply these rules consistently because informal writing patterns have become automatic. This suggests that the main challenge is not a lack of understanding but difficulty managing different writing styles. Instead of viewing digital language as negative, the study shows the importance of teaching students to recognise and adjust their language according to context. Supporting students in making conscious language choices can help them develop stronger academic writing skills while acknowledging the realities of modern communication.

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Student experience as a key factor in quality assurance of higher education programmes

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Abstract: This study presents an empirical analysis of student experience and students’ perceptions of the quality of Bachelor’s and Master’s degree programmes in the field of teacher education and the preparation of leaders for pre-university education. The analysis is based on data collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. The study involves students enrolled in these programmes, grouped by year of study, providing a comprehensive overview of programme implementation and the teaching–learning process.

The research instrument focuses on several key dimensions of student experience, including the clarity of programme objectives, the alignment of course content with intended learning outcomes and competencies, academic staff support and communication, as well as the main challenges encountered during the study process.

Data analysis indicates that students generally hold positive perceptions regarding the academic quality of the programmes and the commitment of the teaching staff, highlighting the crucial role of academic staff in fostering a supportive learning environment.

However, the findings also identify areas that require further improvement, particularly with regard to strengthening the practical component of the programmes, balancing academic workload, and enhancing the alignment between study programmes and labour market demands. Students’ suggestions emphasize the need for increased professional practice opportunities and the wider use of active and student-centred teaching methods.

The study provides evidence to support institutional decision-making and the continuous improvement of study programmes in higher education.

Keywords: *student experience; quality; higher education; study programme*

1. Introduction

In the current era of higher education, how students experience their programs is a big deal. It shows how good the programs and schools are. Universities are focusing more on student-centered approaches. They want to do more than just teach students; they also want to create a supportive environment that helps students develop academically, professionally, and personally (Kuh, 2009). In this case, it is especially important to understand how students feel about their academic experience. This information can help improve teaching and the way the school is run.

Student experience is a complex concept that includes several parts, such as the quality of teaching, relationships with teachers, how the school is organized, the content and structure of the classes, and opportunities for practical and professional development. Vincent Tinto (2012) says that students' academic and social engagement and integration are essential factors for their success and persistence within the higher education system. Other studies show that when students have a positive experience, it helps them stay motivated and do well in school. But when students face challenges in these areas, it can have a negative effect on their well-being and performance.

In this context, the present study aims to analyze the student experience within a study programme, focusing on three main aspects: (i) the evaluation of the quality of the academic experience from the students' perspective, (ii) the alignment between course content and programme objectives, and (iii) the identification of key challenges and areas for improvement. Through the use of a structured research instrument, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of students' perceptions and to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of study programmes.

The significance of this study lies in its provision of empirical data that can serve as a foundation for interventions at both the program and institutional levels. In this way, the study contributes to advancing an integrated and student-centered approach, in line with contemporary quality assurance standards in higher education (ENQA, 2015).

2. Literature review

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education is putting more and more focus on the student experience as a key part of designing, delivering, and continuously improving programs. The student experience isn't just seen as something that happens at the end, but as a key factor in deciding how well learning opportunities, teaching quality, and support services are evaluated and improved. In this case, continuous QA processes depend a lot on

stakeholder feedback, especially from students. This feedback helps collect data, create evaluation questions, and make decisions based on evidence. This makes everyone responsible for quality (Jamieson, 2022). Curriculum design is also a big part of the student experience, influenced by different levels of factors, like external QA frameworks. All of these things together shape how well programs meet their goals (Ramdass & Mokgohloa, 2023).

Stakeholders like students, teachers, and QA practitioners in different places and fields agree that it's key to have clear program goals that match up with the learning outcomes (ILOs) and skills we want to teach. Students' perceptions of quality are linked to how well program objectives are explained and aligned with course content and expected competencies. When it comes to this, having all the learning outcomes, teaching activities, learning materials, and assessments lined up and working together is a big deal because it helps students see how good the academic quality is and how good the staff is at their jobs (Huynh et al., 2024). Studies have shown that when teachers clearly connect what they teach with what they assess, students report being more engaged and satisfied with the program (Birtwistle et al., 2016).

Studies of QA practice show that constructive alignment does two things. It makes expectations clear for students and supports teaching methods that adapt to students' needs. When teachers align their teaching methods with clearly defined learning outcomes, they create learning environments that are more coherent and transparent. This, in turn, leads to improved learning experiences and outcomes (Davey et al., 2019). But even with these advances, there are still some major challenges. On the one hand, there's this big dream of having education that's all about the student and the things they want to get out of it. But on the other hand, there's the day-to-day reality of trying to make that happen. And when we look at the challenges, we see things like too much work, problems with how the curriculum is set up, and not enough resources. In this framework, the role of academic staff is key to shaping the student experience. Studies have shown that how students feel about teaching quality, how easy it is to talk with their teachers, and how well teachers are at teaching can have a big impact on how happy and engaged students are. This, in turn, can affect how well students do on tests and quizzes (OECD, 2023). Also, using digital tools and formal feedback systems to collect student feedback has been linked to improvements in teaching, assessment, and resource allocation (Staring et al., 2022). These mechanisms make the feedback loop between students and institutions stronger, which makes QA systems more responsive and accountable.

A recurring theme across the literature is the need to strengthen the practical and practice-based components of study programmes. Students frequently emphasize the importance of experiential learning opportunities that bridge

the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional application. This aligns with broader research advocating for applied and experiential learning as essential for enhancing employability and professional readiness, particularly in fields such as healthcare, pharmacy, and other practice-oriented disciplines (Davey et al., 2019). Students' evaluations are crucial determinants of course effectiveness when framed as customer feedback, utilised in the process of quality assurance (Blaj-Ward, L. (2014). In their study, Gora et al (2019) used a Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach to provide empirical evidence of the impact of quality assurance in higher education on students' knowledge, skills, competencies, and employability in the context of sustainability. As the demand for quality education increases in an extremely competitive world, quality assurance is the key to effective education in the case of higher education institutions where there is increased mobility of students, teaching staff, programmes particularly in global networks (Huo, 2012). Overall, the literature provides convergent evidence that a high-quality student experience depends on the interplay between well-designed curricula, effective teaching practices, meaningful feedback systems, and opportunities for practical engagement.

3. Methodology

The present study employs a descriptive research approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative analysis, with the objective of evaluating the student experience within the study program. A total of 232 students participated in the study. The data were collected through the administration of a structured questionnaire, which included both closed-ended questions (using rating scales) and open-ended inquiries, with the objective of capturing students' perceptions and experiences. Quantitative analysis was conducted through the calculation of frequencies and percentages for each indicator, while qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying the main categories of challenges and students' suggestions. This integrated approach facilitated a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, integrating statistical insights with contextual interpretation of the student experience.

4. Analysis of Findings

4.1 Students' evaluation of the quality of their academic experience in the study programme

The data from the questionnaire indicate that a dominant proportion of students evaluate their academic experience positively, with approximately 60–70% rating their experience with academic staff as "very positive" and 20–30% as "positive." A smaller proportion, approximately 5–10%, report neutral perceptions, while negative evaluations are minimal or nearly negligible. These findings suggest that the student–staff relationships are satisfactory and that the learning environment is generally supportive.

However, the qualitative analysis of responses reveals several recurring issues that affect the student experience, including the perceived high academic workload and pressure to meet requirements, sporadic instances of non-motivational communication from academic staff, and a lack of continuity in the delivery of some courses. These findings suggest that, despite the generally positive evaluation, there are challenges at the level of pedagogical practice and the organization of the teaching process.

Overall, the quality of the student experience appears positive in its human and relational dimension (academic staff), but it requires further improvement in the pedagogical and organizational dimensions, particularly in terms of motivational communication, student support, and ensuring consistency in teaching delivery.

4.2 Students' perceptions of the alignment between course content and programme objectives

The majority of students reported a high degree of congruence between the course content and the objectives of their program, with approximately 65–75% designating it as "fully aligned" and 20–30% labeling it as "largely aligned," while a smaller proportion, around 5–10%, considered the alignment to be "moderate." These findings suggest a high degree of coherence in the curricular structure and a satisfactory alignment between program design and the intended learning outcomes.

However, the qualitative analysis of comments highlights several recurring issues, including a lack of clarity in the treatment of certain topics, the need for a stronger practical component, and difficulties in accessing or interpreting learning materials. These findings suggest that, despite formal alignment, there are gaps at the level of didactic implementation.

In this context, it can be concluded that the curricular structure is generally appropriate; however, it requires targeted interventions in:

- strengthening the practical and applied components,
- improving the didactic design of courses, and
- ensuring greater clarity in the articulation of content and intended learning outcomes.

4.3 Key Challenges Affecting Student Experience and Areas for Improvement in Higher Education

The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire reveals a range of challenges that directly affect the quality of the student experience. These challenges manifest similarly in all student responses and can be grouped into four main categories: academic workload and time management, institutional organization, the practical component and its link to the labor market, and resources and the use of technology.

Firstly, with regard to academic workload and time management, a significant proportion of students report experiencing challenges in coping with the volume of assignments and academic requirements. The responses indicate a clear perception of stress and continuous pressure, which affect not only academic performance but also students' mental well-being. Moreover, challenges in achieving equilibrium between academic obligations and personal commitments are discernible, underscoring the necessity for a reexamination of workload distribution and scheduling.

Secondly, with respect to institutional organization, students identify issues related to schedule management, a lack of continuity in the delivery of certain courses, and challenges associated with infrastructure and transportation. These factors point to deficiencies in institutional coordination and the operational planning of the teaching process, which have a detrimental effect on the overall student experience.

Another salient dimension pertains to the practical component and orientation towards the labor market. Students have repeatedly emphasized the necessity for more practical and applied activities, underscoring a discrepancy between the theoretical content of their education and the real demands of the profession. Furthermore, a sense of uncertainty regarding employment emerges, which is directly linked to the lack of exposure to real professional situations during their studies.

Finally, with regard to resources and technology, students report a lack of practical tools and the necessary infrastructure for the effective delivery of teaching. Furthermore, there is a clear need for a broader and more structured use of technology in the learning process, including equipment such as computers, projectors, and supportive digital platforms.

In light of these challenges, students' suggestions are mostly about making the practical part of study programs stronger, improving how teachers communicate and how supportive the staff is, giving students more chances to prepare for their careers and get guidance on that, and making technology a bigger part of the teaching.

The above findings indicate that the challenges affecting the student experience are not merely individual but have a distinctly structural and

systemic nature. They are closely related to the organization of the study programme, the implementation of pedagogical practices, and the level of institutional support.

In this context, improving the student experience requires an integrated approach at both programme and institutional levels, including: revising academic workload and its distribution, strengthening the practical component and its connection to the labor market, improving institutional organization, and investing in supportive resources and technologies. Such a systemic intervention would contribute to enhancing the quality of teaching and improving learning outcomes, making the student experience more sustainable and better oriented toward professional development.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study indicate that the student experience within the study programme is generally evaluated as positive, particularly in relation to academic staff and the supportive learning environment. Furthermore, a good alignment is observed between course content and programme objectives, reflecting a coherent and well-structured curriculum.

However, the findings also highlight several key challenges that affect the quality of the student experience, related to academic workload, institutional organization, the lack of a practical component, and limitations in resources and technology. These challenges are primarily structural and pedagogical in nature, reflecting the need for interventions at both programme and institutional levels.

In this context, improving the student experience requires an integrated approach that includes balancing academic workload, strengthening the practical dimension, improving organizational and pedagogical communication, and investing in technology and supportive resources.

In conclusion, although the programme provides a solid qualitative foundation, there is a need to optimize pedagogical and organizational implementation in order to ensure a more effective student experience that is better oriented toward professional development.

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Phraseological expressions as part of the didactic apparatus in Albanian language textbooks for grades 6-9 in Kosovo

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Abstract: The reflection of phraseology, in various forms and dimensions, has been given a certain place in Albanian language textbooks since the beginning of primary education in Kosovo. The aim of this study is the analysis of the inclusion and importance of phraseological units in Albanian language textbooks for grades 6-9 in Kosovo, published by "Dukagjini", "Albas" and "Pegi" publishing houses during the years 2021-2025. The analysis is focused on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the use of phraseological units in these textbooks. The study is based on a combination of didactic and linguistic methods and perspectives of the analyzed materials.

Keywords: *phraseological units, Albanian language, school, textbook, didactic equipment.*

1. Introduction

Phraseology, as a special layer of the language lexicon, constitutes a great asset for the entire language system. As is known, phraseological units carry historically embedded meanings. In the educational context, especially in the lower secondary education cycle, the treatment of phraseology takes on special value, since students are in the phase of shaping language skills, critical thinking and communicative competences. Albanian language textbooks, conceived as basic tools of the learning process, must integrate linguistic elements in a functional and didactic manner, including phraseological expressions. Albanian language school tests for grades 6-9 in Kosovo constitute an important corpus for examining the way in which the phraseology of the language is presented; how it is explained and how it is practiced by students. These texts, both basic textbooks and workbooks, not only carry the teaching content, but also aim to contain the didactic apparatus that guides the way of learning and teaching. Therefore, the analysis of phraseological units in these texts is essential to understand how much the

phraseology of the language is included in the process of students' language education.

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to analyze the inclusion, function and didactic value of phraseological units in Albanian language textbooks for grades 6-9 in Kosovo, in textbooks published during the years 2021-2025. This study, by combining the linguistic and didactic approaches, aims to contribute to improving the quality of textbooks and the teaching process of the Albanian language in grades 6-9 in Kosovo.

3. The process of drafting Albanian language texts

The development of a textbook (teaching text) is a complex process that involves the combination of several essential elements. In this case, this process is closely related to the development of communication competence (linguistic competence). In this sense, the textbook is not simply a collection of knowledge, but a didactic tool designed to achieve clear and structured objectives in accordance with the age of the students, their cognitive level and the requirements of the curriculum. For this reason, the development of a textbook depends on several factors, which must be harmonized in a professional and functional manner. In Albanian language texts for grades 6-9 of lower secondary education in Kosovo, among others, one of the tasks of the author/authors is the inclusion of phraseological units in accordance with the subject curriculum due to the fact that it represents not only linguistic, but also cultural, pedagogical and cognitive importance for students in the first place, but also for the education system in general.

As is known, the phraseology of the Albanian language constitutes a stable layer of the linguistic system, which preserves the traditions, mentality and way of conceiving the world by its speakers. Regarding the administrative documentation with which the process of drafting textbooks for pre-university education in Kosovo is planned and determined, such as: the Curricular Framework of Pre-university Education; the Core Curriculum; the Subject Curriculum; the Curriculums for Grades 1-12 and the Standards for Textbooks, when we come to the part of the Albanian language, especially phraseology, it occupies a significant place in these documents, but, practically, in Albanian language textbooks (6-9), phraseology continues to be treated inadequately and mainly only some of its theoretical aspects.

4. Phraseology in Albanian language textbooks for grades 6-9 in Kosovo

Explanations for phraseology to a certain extent can be found in Albanian language textbooks since the beginning of primary education, but this time we have chosen Albanian language textbooks for grades 6-9 as the object of study. Therefore, in the teaching materials under review, we find the concept of phraseological units as early as the text "Albanian Language 6", by the publishing house "Dukagjini". Thus, in the teaching unit: *Figurative and Phraseological Expressions* (Rugova et. al, 2024:65-66), the authors have tried to provide explanations and examples regarding phraseology, emphasizing that: "*Sometimes various figurative expressions have become common parts of the language. They have a different meaning from the first meaning of the words that make up that expression*". In relation to this statement, they have provided the following examples: *Ia nxori bishtin* (exaggerated), *marr vesh* (understand); *play the game* (move), *hoqa të zinj të e ullirit* (I had difficulty doing a job, etc.). Meanwhile, in the book "Workbook", i.e. in the section dealing with exercises on phraseology, a low number of requirements for students are presented. Thus, in the task: *Tell the meaning of these phraseological expressions* (e.g.: *nuk më zihet vend vend ; ia hodha një sy ; s'ia kapi radakja ; ia nxori bishtin ; u këmbëve*), *nxënësit jepu këmbëve*), students are required to find the meanings of the phraseological expressions given in the text, but they are not required to delve into further analysis. Furthermore, in the same text, five other requirements are also presented that deal with the explanation of phraseological units and their use in sentences, e.g.: in cases where the phraseological unit has metaphorical, onomatopoeic, comparative and hyperbolic value). However, in addition to such requirements, in this text we do not see any explanations or other requirements, for example, for phraseological synonyms and antonyms, etc., just as the necessary explanations are not given for some of the features of phraseological units, such as semantic equivalence with a word, and consequently the section on exercises for them is also missing.

To see the differences and similarities in the use of phraseology, we also examined the text "*Albanian Language 6*", published by "Pegi" (Gjokutaj, et al. 2021), which serves as an alternative text in some schools in Kosovo. In the chapter that talks about lexicology, precisely on pages 211-212 of this text, the teaching unit "*The Word and its Meanings*" is presented, in which (the word, its form and meaning) are explained, but nothing is said about phraseology as an important part of the language. The same was done in the exercise text "*Workbook*" (*Albanian Language 6*) of the same publishing

house. *(For this class, MAST has approved for use only the Albanian language textbooks of the publishing houses “Dukagjini” and “Albas”).

Materials on phraseology, in various sizes and forms, are also reflected in the Albanian language textbooks for the seventh grade (Paçarizi & Selmani, 2025). In the wake of this, on page 102 of the “Dukagjini” text, the teaching unit: *Figurative language and direct language is given*, in which case some explanations are offered about figurative language, direct language and their functional aspects, but little is said specifically about phraseology as part of the language lexicon. Consequently, in accordance with the material given in the basic book, exercises are also reflected (Paçarizi, 2025:32-33).

When we are in the seventh grade, we also considered the Albanian language text of the publishing house “Albas” (the Basic Book), (Petro et al., 2024) as well as the Workbook (Elezi et al., 2025). On p.11 of the basic book, within the teaching unit *Non-literary narrative text* (Petro et al., 2024:11) the students were asked to explain the meaning of the phraseological expression *isha styri me flethi* (See task no. 1. *Analyze the language of the text*). So, the task is asked as follows: “Stop at the phraseological expression *isha styri me flethi*. In the phraseological dictionary of the Albanian language, find similar synonymous expressions and replace them in the text. Then, try replacing this expression with a single word. Which one do you like best? Why do you think the author uses phraseological expressions. Find other expressions or cases of the use of literary figures that you know” (Petro et al., 2024:22). Similar to the above request, the following task was given: “stop at the phraseological expression *I am trying with all my heart and soul*. In the phraseological dictionary of the Albanian language, find similar, synonymous expressions and replace them in the text. Then, try replacing this expression with a single word. Which one do you like best? Why do you think the author uses phraseological expressions. Find other expressions or cases of using literary figures that you know”. The phraseology of the language, but without stopping at its other explanatory and interpretative elements, but only in the form of requests for students, also takes place in other parts of this text. Thus, on p.65 another task is given: “*the need to have friends has accompanied man since the beginning of humanity, turning good friendship into a virtue. For this virtue, the Albanian people have created many phraseological expressions and proverbs. Find some of them and read them in class*” (Petro et al., 2024:65). In the following parts of this text, especially in the chapter dealing with lexicology, dictionaries, their types and usage are discussed. Within the framework of this teaching unit, phraseological dictionaries are also mentioned as special dictionaries”, but no other necessary explanations are given regarding phraseology as an integral part of the Albanian vocabulary. Meanwhile, in the text *Gjuhë shqipe 7* (Workbook), (Elezi et al., 2025:4-7),

the part of the exercises is mainly in harmony with the subject presented in the basic text.

Part of the research is also the textbook " *Albanian Language 8*" (Gjokutaj et al., 2024:191) of the publishing house "Pegi". Thus, on page 191 of this text, in the teaching unit *Words with emotional coloring*, in terms of phraseology, the authors of this book seem to have considered it sufficient to only state that among words with emotional coloring there can also be phraseological expressions. They have given examples such as: *Iu knaq zemra; I ra shpirti në paje; U thye indifirenca*, etc. Meanwhile, in other parts of this text, the phraseology part has not been addressed. When we are in the exercise text " *Albanian Language 8*" (*Workbook*), (Gjokutaj et al., 2021:55), specifically on p. 55, task no. 1, students are asked to underline the words with emotional coloring. A similar request is also made in task no. 2. As part of these exercises, here and there, attempts are made to recognize phraseological units, especially in explanations as part of the didactic apparatus or in another special section. In the text, sometimes requests of the type are also presented, such as: " *Build sentences with direct and figurative meanings of the following words (e.g. bird, cat).* ", or: " *In the following fragment, underline the words or groups of words that express figurative meaning* " (Gjokutaj et al., 2021:56). From the research undertaken, it is noted that in other Albanian language textbooks for the eighth grade, whether in the "Dukagjin" or the "Albas" textbook, the phraseology part of the language is not addressed, neither specifically, nor within the framework of the parts that deal with the lexicon of the language. Regarding the textbook "Albanian Language 9" (Basic Book) and "Albanian Language 9" (Workbook), it should be noted that in Kosovo schools, textbooks from three different publishers ("Dukagjini", "Albas" and "Pegi") are in use. From the analysis made, it is noted that only in the textbook "Albanian Language 9" (Workbook) of the publishing house "Pegi" (Jonollari et al., 2022:66), precisely on page 66, some exercises on the *Albanian language lexicon and its richness are reflected*, but no requirement is given that in one way or another it would be related to phraseology as an important part of the Albanian lexicon. Meanwhile, in the texts of other publishers ("Dukagjini" and "Albas") the phraseology of the language is not treated.

5. Analysis of results

1. "Dukagjini"

- ✓ The book "Albanian Language 6" has a relatively clear introduction, some explanations for figurative and phraseological expressions and some concrete examples (e.g. *ia nxori bishtin ; hoqa të zinj të e ullirit ; marr vesh*);

- ✓ The workbook contains a number of tasks, but most of them are reproductions of the materials of the basic text (students are mainly required only to indicate the meaning of phraseological units, without further analysis!);
- ✓ There is no semantic analysis, structural comparisons, synonyms/antonyms, or cultural context of the use of phraseological units;
- ✓ In most cases, the material that deals with the proper analysis and use of phraseology in different usage contexts is missing.

2. “Pegi”

- ✓ The grade 6 text does not address the phraseology section.
- ✓ Grade 8: Phraseology finds satisfactory treatment in the teaching unit "*Words with Emotional Coloration*".
- ✓ Grade 9 (Workbook) has exercises for vocabulary, but not for phraseology.
- ✓ Assessment: With the exception of the text Gjuha shqipe 8, in the other texts of this publisher, a low level of treatment of phraseological units is noted.

3. “Albas”

- ✓ The Albanian language text for grade 7 presents a relatively clear theoretical concept regarding phraseology. Meanwhile, in the textbooks for grades 8-9, the phraseology section is almost not reflected.
- ✓ Phraseology in grade 7 textbooks often comes with labels like: "beautiful expressions" or "emotionally colored words".
- ✓ A few structured practical exercises are provided for the semantic analysis of phraseology, a part of which is also foreseen in the Curriculum Framework.
- ✓ Assessment: In general, in the texts of this publisher, fragmentary treatment and non-unified terminology for phraseology are observed.

Generalizations

- ✓ About 80% of Albanian language textbooks for grades 6-9 in Kosovo, published during 2021-2025, do not provide a clear and comprehensive definition of phraseology;
- ✓ Only about 20% of the exercises are related to phraseology;
- ✓ Nearly 50% of the examples (exercises) are presented randomly, without any methodological connection to the teaching of the subject of phraseology;

None of the analyzed texts present phraseological synonyms and antonyms. Meanwhile, only 11% of the texts have tasks on the use of phraseology in contexts of use.

From the analysis conducted, it is noted that the use of phraseology in the higher grades is to a lesser extent compared to the lower grades.

6. Conclusions

From the analysis made in Albanian language textbooks (grades 6-9), several shortcomings are noted, which are related to both the concept of phraseology as a linguistic unit and its definition, as well as the extent of representation of this linguistic subject in these texts. Another deficiency in them is the lack of reflection of the types of phraseological units, these deficiencies are present in the basic texts, but also in the exercise section (Workbooks). The analyzed texts are not so rich in terms of discovering the values of phraseological units, especially during the various analyses in the given texts. A separate problem is also the terminological difference regarding phraseological units in textbooks. Thus, they are presented as: "popular expressions", "emotionally colored words", "beautiful expressions", "phraseological units", "phraseological expressions". Therefore, it would be most necessary that in all Albanian language textbooks, but also in all school discourse, terminological uniformity be achieved (we propose it to be: phraseological units!) .

We agree with the definition given to phraseology in contemporary studies in the field of Albanian, in which it is emphasized that "a phraseological unit is a linguistic unit with an independent meaning, composed of two or more denoting words, with stable limbs and construction, formed historically and over a long period of time, which has the value of a single word, is reproduced in discourse as ready-made and functions in the language as an indivisible unit" (Thomai, 1981:268). Therefore, this explanation, albeit in a slightly more simplified way, should also take its place in school textbooks... "but, here it is not only about the terminological definition. The main thing is that today's concept of phraseology extends to all the knowledge that is given in school for this category, both in theory and in practice (in examples and exercises), so that students can acquire the main features of phraseological units, such as: their structural diversity, unified meaning, figurative meaning, the embedded order of the limbs, etc. (Jashari, 1989:68-71).

Likewise, the very small, even negligible, place that phraseology occupies in school textbooks continues to remain unresolved, especially due to the fact that the opportunities provided by the subject (especially that of literature) in reflecting the phraseology of the language in all its dimensions have not been adequately utilized. Therefore, we recommend that when reviewing,

supplementing or even drafting new school textbooks in the future, care be taken so that the phraseology of the language, especially popular phraseology, is reflected adequately, because this part of the language system is indeed important to be acquired by students, whether in their written or spoken discourse.

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Teaching postmodern literature in the 21st-century classroom: Reshaping critical thinking and student engagement

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Abstract: Teaching postmodern literature in higher education presents both challenges and transformative opportunities. Characterized by fragmentation, metafiction, intertextuality, and skepticism toward grand narratives—a concept central to Jean-François Lyotard—postmodern texts disrupt conventional reading strategies and demand active interpretive participation from students. This paper explores how such formal and thematic complexity can be pedagogically harnessed to foster advanced critical thinking skills and deeper student engagement. Drawing on selected works by Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, and Margaret Atwood, the study examines classroom practices that encourage students to question narrative authority, challenge fixed meanings, and recognize the constructed nature of knowledge. Through strategies such as dialogic discussion, comparative intertextual analysis, and reflective writing, postmodern literature becomes a powerful tool for developing analytical autonomy and interpretive flexibility. In an era shaped by digital media, information overload, and competing truths, the interpretive demands of postmodern fiction mirror the cognitive skills required in contemporary society. The paper argues that teaching postmodern literature is not merely an exploration of a literary movement, but a pedagogical approach that prepares students to navigate complexity, ambiguity, and multiplicity in both academic and real-world contexts. Ultimately, the postmodern classroom becomes a space where uncertainty stimulates intellectual growth rather than confusion.

Keywords: *Postmodern Literature; higher education; critical thinking; student engagement; metafiction*

1. Teaching postmodern literature in the 21st-century classroom: Reshaping critical thinking and student engagement

The teaching of literature in contemporary higher education has increasingly adapted to the evolving intellectual and cultural conditions of the twenty-first century. Among the various literary movements studied in university curricula, postmodern literature presents distinctive pedagogical challenges as well as significant educational opportunities. Unlike realist or modernist narratives, which often emphasize coherent plot structures and stable interpretations, postmodern texts frequently employ fragmentation, metafiction, intertextuality, and narrative experimentation. These features disrupt traditional reading practices and require students to adopt more active and critical interpretive strategies. In the context of modern education, students are immersed in digital environments characterized by hypertextual reading, rapid information exchange, and multiple perspectives. Consequently, the interpretive demands of postmodern literature reflect the cognitive conditions under which contemporary learners process information. Postmodern fiction often questions the reliability of narrative authority and exposes the constructed nature of meaning, encouraging readers to engage critically with texts and their broader cultural implications. According to Lyotard (1979), the postmodern condition is defined by "incredulity toward metanarratives," referring to a skepticism toward universal explanations of knowledge and history. This philosophical perspective has profound implications for literary interpretation, as it challenges the assumption that texts convey stable or singular meanings. Instead, readers must navigate ambiguity, multiple interpretations, and narrative discontinuity. This paper argues that teaching postmodern literature can significantly enhance students' critical thinking abilities, interpretive autonomy, and intellectual engagement. By analyzing selected works by authors such as Pynchon, DeLillo, and Atwood, the study explores pedagogical strategies that help students understand narrative complexity and develop advanced analytical skills. Ultimately, the integration of postmodern texts into literature courses enables educators to cultivate a classroom environment in which questioning, interpretation, and intellectual exploration are central components of the learning process.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly discussions of postmodern literature often emphasize its experimental narrative structures and its critique of traditional literary conventions. Hutcheon (1988) argues that postmodern fiction frequently combines historical reflection with self-conscious narrative techniques, creating what she terms historiographic metafiction. Such texts simultaneously question historical representation and reveal the constructed

nature of narrative discourse. Similarly, McHale (1987) suggests that the primary distinction between modernist and postmodernist fiction lies in their dominant philosophical concerns. While modernist literature tends to focus on epistemological questions about how reality can be known, postmodern literature shifts attention toward ontological questions, exploring multiple realities and destabilizing narrative boundaries. In educational contexts, literary scholars have also explored the relationship between complex literary texts and the development of critical literacy. Critical literacy involves the ability to analyze texts within broader cultural and ideological frameworks, recognizing how language and narrative shape perceptions of reality. Postmodern literature, with its emphasis on self-reflexivity and narrative experimentation, offers valuable opportunities for developing such analytical skills. Furthermore, dialogic approaches to teaching literature have gained increasing attention in contemporary pedagogical research. Inspired by Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, these approaches emphasize collaborative interpretation and classroom discussion as central components of literary analysis. Through dialogue, students actively negotiate meaning and engage with diverse perspectives, thereby strengthening both critical thinking and interpretive flexibility.

Theoretical framework

Postmodernism and the nature of knowledge

Postmodern theory challenges the assumption that knowledge is stable, objective, or universally valid. Lyotard (1979) describes postmodern knowledge as fragmented and decentralized, no longer supported by overarching ideological frameworks. Instead, knowledge emerges through localized discourses and diverse perspectives.

Deconstruction and the instability of meaning

Derrida's (1976) concept of deconstruction further destabilizes traditional assumptions about textual interpretation. According to Derrida, language operates through systems of difference, meaning that words derive significance from their relationships with other words rather than from fixed definitions. Consequently, texts often contain internal contradictions that undermine their apparent coherence. In literary studies, deconstruction encourages readers to explore how texts produce multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings. Postmodern narratives frequently highlight this instability by incorporating metafictional techniques that expose the process of storytelling itself. Foucault (1972) offers another influential perspective on knowledge by examining the relationship between discourse and power. In his view, systems of knowledge are shaped by institutional practices and social

structures. Narratives therefore function not only as forms of storytelling but also as mechanisms through which societies construct and maintain particular versions of truth. Postmodern literature often reflects these theoretical insights by presenting fragmented narratives that challenge traditional notions of authority and authenticity. Through such texts, students learn to examine how narratives influence perceptions of history, identity, and cultural values.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative pedagogical approach grounded in reflective teaching practice and classroom observation in undergraduate literature courses. The research focuses on how students respond to postmodern texts when guided through structured interpretive activities. Participants consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in literature courses within the Faculty of Education. These students were primarily studying English language and literature and were introduced to postmodern literary theory as part of their curriculum. Several instructional strategies were implemented to facilitate engagement with complex literary texts. First, dialogic classroom discussions encouraged students to explore multiple interpretations and question narrative assumptions. Second, comparative textual analysis enabled students to examine connections between postmodern works and earlier literary traditions. Third, reflective writing assignments allowed students to articulate their interpretive processes and evaluate their own analytical development. In addition, multimodal teaching resources, including film adaptations and digital materials, were incorporated to contextualize literary texts within broader cultural and historical frameworks. Student engagement was evaluated through classroom participation, written assignments, and reflective feedback. The findings suggest that postmodern literature can significantly enhance student engagement when supported by effective pedagogical guidance. Initially, many students expressed uncertainty when confronted with fragmented narratives or ambiguous conclusions. However, as classroom discussions progressed and theoretical concepts were introduced, students began to interpret these features as deliberate narrative strategies rather than obstacles to comprehension. Dialogic discussion proved particularly effective in fostering collaborative interpretation. Students discovered that multiple perspectives could coexist within a single text, reinforcing the idea that literary meaning is constructed through interaction between readers and narratives. Furthermore, engagement with postmodern literature contributed to the development of critical media literacy. By analyzing how narratives shape perceptions of truth and authority, students became more aware of similar processes within digital media and public discourse. Consequently, literary

study extended beyond textual analysis and encouraged broader intellectual awareness. All in all, teaching postmodern literature in the twenty-first-century classroom offers significant pedagogical benefits for both educators and students. Through engagement with complex narrative forms, students develop interpretive autonomy, analytical flexibility, and critical awareness of how meaning is constructed within texts and cultural discourses. In an era characterized by digital communication, rapid information exchange, and competing narratives, these interpretive skills are increasingly essential. Postmodern literature provides a valuable educational framework in which students can practice navigating ambiguity, evaluating diverse perspectives, and constructing informed interpretations. Although postmodern texts may initially appear challenging, carefully structured teaching strategies can transform interpretive uncertainty into intellectual curiosity. As a result, the postmodern classroom becomes a dynamic environment that encourages critical inquiry, collaborative interpretation, and deeper engagement with literature and culture.

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Rethinking Student Assessment: From Measurement to Learning-Oriented Evaluation

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Abstract: This paper examines student assessment as a central pedagogical practice that shapes learning, rather than as a technical process limited to measuring achievement. The purpose of the study is to explore how learning-oriented approaches to assessment influence students’ engagement, motivation, and responsibility for learning. The research is based on a qualitative classroom-based approach, combining systematic observation of teaching practices, reflective accounts from teachers, and structured feedback from students. The findings suggest that when assessment is integrated into everyday teaching through clear criteria, continuous feedback, and reflective learning practices, students develop greater awareness of learning goals, stronger engagement in learning processes, and increased confidence in their abilities. Assessment is no longer experienced primarily as external judgment, but as guidance that supports learning development. Based on these results, the paper recommends a shift away from assessment models dominated by grading and performance control toward formative and developmental approaches that place learning at the centre of evaluation. The expected contribution of this study lies in offering a pedagogically grounded understanding of student assessment as a learning-oriented process, supporting sustainable learning development, learner autonomy, and quality educational practice.

Keywords: *student assessment, learning-oriented evaluation, formative assessment, learning process, educational practice*

1. Introduction

Contemporary education is undergoing profound transformations shaped by digitalization, innovation, and rapidly changing social expectations. Within this context, assessment remains one of the most influential factors determining how students learn and how teachers teach. Traditionally,

assessment has been viewed mainly as a tool for measuring achievement through grades and examinations. However, recent pedagogical developments emphasize that assessment should function as an integral part of learning, supporting reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement. The growing use of digital technologies in education has further expanded opportunities for more interactive, personalized, and learner-centered forms of evaluation, challenging conventional models that focus primarily on final results.

Despite these developments, a significant gap persists between learning-oriented assessment theories and everyday classroom practice. In many educational settings, assessment continues to be dominated by summative approaches that prioritize performance measurement over learning development. This often leads students to perceive assessment as external judgment rather than as meaningful guidance. The research problem addressed in this study, therefore, concerns the need to rethink assessment as a pedagogical process that actively supports student engagement, motivation, and responsibility for learning. The main objectives of the study are to explore how formative and feedback-based assessment practices are implemented in real classroom contexts and to analyze their impact on students' learning experiences and attitudes.

Rethinking assessment is essential for preparing learners to become autonomous, reflective, and adaptable individuals capable of lifelong learning. By focusing on assessment as a learning-oriented process, the study contributes to current debates on educational quality, innovation, and student-centered pedagogy. Its findings aim to offer practical insights into how assessment practices can be transformed to better support meaningful learning in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

2. Literature Review

For many decades, assessment in education has been primarily conceptualized as a process of measuring student achievement. Traditional assessment systems have largely been based on psychometric models that prioritize reliability, standardization, and grading. Within this paradigm, assessment functions mainly as a mechanism for classification and certification rather than as a tool for supporting learning. However, research has increasingly challenged this narrow perspective, emphasizing that assessment is not merely a neutral measurement process but a powerful pedagogical practice that directly shapes how students learn (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

One of the most influential contributions to this reconceptualization is the work on formative assessment. Black and Wiliam (1998) demonstrated that when assessment is used formatively, through feedback, clarification of

learning intentions, and active student involvement, it can significantly improve learning outcomes. Similarly, Sadler (1989) argued that effective assessment requires three essential conditions: clear standards, opportunities for learners to compare their performance with those standards, and guidance on how to close the gap. These ideas form the theoretical foundation of learning-oriented assessment, which views assessment tasks as opportunities for learning rather than as final judgments (Carless, 2007).

Feedback has been widely recognized as the central mechanism through which assessment supports learning. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), effective feedback must answer three key questions: *Where am I going? How am I going? Where to next?* Their research highlights that feedback is most powerful when it focuses on strategies for improvement rather than on grades or personal evaluation. Shute (2008) similarly emphasized that formative feedback is most effective when it is timely, specific, and oriented toward actionable improvement.

More recent research has expanded the focus from teacher feedback to the concept of feedback literacy. Carless and Boud (2018) argue that students must develop the capacity to understand, interpret, and use feedback in order for assessment to have a real impact on learning. This perspective aligns with broader theories of self-regulated learning, which emphasize the importance of student reflection, self-assessment, and metacognitive awareness (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Panadero, 2017).

Digitalization has introduced new opportunities for implementing formative and learning-oriented assessment practices. Technology-enhanced learning environments allow for more frequent feedback, interactive assessment tasks, and personalized learning pathways. However, research also warns that digital tools can reinforce traditional measurement-oriented models if they are used primarily for automated grading rather than for supporting dialogue and reflection (Gikandi et al., 2011).

Taken together, the literature clearly indicates that assessment is most effective when it is embedded in everyday teaching, oriented toward improvement, and actively involves students in the evaluation process. Nevertheless, many classrooms continue to be dominated by summative and grade-focused practices. This gap between theory and practice forms the main rationale for the present study.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodological approach in order to explore how learning-oriented assessment practices are implemented and experienced in authentic classroom environments. A qualitative approach was considered

most appropriate because the research objectives focus on understanding pedagogical processes, perceptions, and experiences rather than on measuring outcomes numerically. The study seeks to examine how assessment practices influence student engagement, motivation, and responsibility for learning, which requires an in-depth exploration of classroom interactions and participant perspectives. The methodological choice is therefore fully aligned with the exploratory and interpretative nature of the research.

The research is designed as a descriptive classroom-based case study. This design was selected because it allows detailed examination of assessment practices within their natural educational context. Rather than testing hypotheses or applying experimental interventions, the study aims to observe and interpret how formative and feedback-oriented assessment approaches operate in everyday teaching. The case study design supports the aims of the research by enabling systematic observation of real classroom situations over a defined period of time, providing a coherent framework for understanding assessment as an ongoing pedagogical process.

The study involved 10 teachers and 120 students from secondary education institutions. A purposive sampling strategy was applied. Teachers were selected based on their prior participation in professional training sessions focused on formative and learning-oriented assessment. These training sessions addressed issues such as effective feedback, communication of assessment criteria, and strategies for integrating assessment into daily teaching practice. Only teachers who had completed this training and expressed willingness to apply learning-oriented assessment approaches in their classrooms were invited to participate in the study.

Student participants were drawn from the classes taught by the selected teachers. All students enrolled in these classes were invited to take part, resulting in a sample of 120 students representing diverse academic abilities and backgrounds. This sampling approach ensured that the study focused on classroom environments where teachers shared a basic understanding of formative assessment principles, making it possible to examine how such practices were enacted and experienced in real instructional settings. The sample size was considered appropriate for a qualitative case study, as it allowed for rich, in-depth data collection while maintaining analytical manageability.

Data were collected using three main qualitative instruments: systematic classroom observations, teacher reflective accounts, and structured student reflections. Classroom observations were conducted in all participating classes using an observation protocol designed specifically for this study. The protocol focused on key dimensions of learning-oriented assessment, including the communication of learning objectives, the use of assessment

criteria, the forms of feedback provided, and the involvement of students in assessment-related activities. Each classroom was observed three to four times during the semester, allowing the researcher to capture both consistency and gradual changes in assessment practices over time. The observation protocol was organized around predefined analytical categories, such as: (a) communication of learning objectives, (b) explanation of assessment criteria, (c) types of feedback provided, (d) opportunities for student self-assessment, and (e) levels of student engagement during assessment-related activities.

Teachers were asked to maintain brief reflective journals throughout the research period. In these journals, they documented the assessment strategies they implemented, the challenges they encountered, and their perceptions of student responses. These reflective accounts provided valuable insight into teachers' reasoning, decision-making processes, and their evolving understanding of assessment practices. In parallel, students were invited to produce short written reflections at different stages of the semester, describing their experiences with feedback, assessment, and learning processes. Student reflections were collected at three key moments of the semester: at the beginning, mid-term, and end, in order to trace possible changes in students' perceptions of assessment over time. These reflections were gathered as qualitative narratives rather than as structured questionnaires, allowing students to express their perspectives freely and authentically.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Observation notes, teacher reflections, and student narratives were systematically reviewed, coded, and categorized to identify recurring patterns and themes related to learning-oriented assessment. The analysis focused on themes such as clarity of assessment criteria, perceived usefulness of feedback, levels of student engagement, and the development of learner autonomy. Data triangulation was applied by comparing information from different sources, teachers, students, and classroom observations, in order to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This analytical approach enabled a nuanced and context-sensitive interpretation of how assessment practices were implemented and experienced in the participating classrooms.

Ethical standards were carefully respected throughout the research process. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. All participants were fully informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided informed consent prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and both teachers and students had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained: no personal or identifiable information was included in the research data or reports. The study was conducted in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines, ensuring responsible and respectful treatment of all participants.

4. Findings and Discussion

Findings

The findings of the study are presented in direct relation to the research objectives, focusing on how learning-oriented assessment practices were implemented and experienced in classroom contexts. Data collected from classroom observations, teacher reflective accounts, and student written reflections revealed several consistent and interconnected patterns.

First, classroom observations indicated that teachers who had participated in formative assessment training gradually integrated assessment more explicitly into their everyday teaching practices. In most observed lessons, teachers began activities by clearly communicating learning objectives and success criteria. Students were regularly informed about what was expected from them and how their work would be assessed. This practice created a greater sense of transparency and structure in classroom learning. Both teachers and students described this clarity as helpful for guiding learning and understanding expectations, reflecting the importance of explicit criteria in formative assessment processes (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1989).

Second, the use of feedback emerged as a central element of classroom assessment. Classroom observations and teacher reflections indicated that feedback was provided continuously throughout learning activities, rather than being limited to tests or final assignments. Teachers frequently used verbal comments, guiding questions, and brief written notes to help students recognize their strengths and identify areas for improvement. Student reflections consistently emphasized that such feedback enabled them to understand their mistakes, revise their work, and feel more confident in their learning. For example, one student noted: *“When the teacher explains exactly what I need to improve, I feel more confident, and I know what to work on next.”* Similar comments appeared across many reflections, suggesting that students experienced feedback primarily as constructive guidance rather than as criticism. Feedback was perceived as most effective when it was specific, task-focused, and oriented toward improvement rather than toward grades, a finding that corresponds with established research on formative feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008).

Third, students reported increased engagement and motivation when the assessment was clearly connected to ongoing learning processes. Across student reflections, learners emphasized that opportunities to revise their work based on feedback made them feel more involved and responsible for their progress. When assessment criteria were explained in advance and revisited throughout lessons, students expressed a stronger sense of direction and

purpose. These findings suggest that learning-oriented assessment practices encourage greater learner autonomy and self-regulation (Carless, 2007; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

Finally, both teachers and students emphasized the importance of reflection within the assessment process. Teacher journals frequently described how involving students in self-assessment and peer feedback promoted active participation and deeper understanding. Students similarly noted that reflecting on their own learning helped them become more aware of their strengths and areas needing improvement. This pattern is consistent with contemporary perspectives on feedback literacy, which stress that students must learn to interpret and use feedback effectively in order to benefit from it (Carless & Boud, 2018; Panadero, 2017).

Taken together, the qualitative data indicate that when assessment was implemented as a continuous, formative, and feedback-based process, it was experienced less as an external judgment and more as meaningful guidance that supported learning development.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the central argument that assessment practices play a crucial role in shaping how students experience learning. The consistent emphasis on clear criteria, ongoing feedback, and opportunities for reflection supports previous research suggesting that formative assessment enhances engagement, understanding, and learner autonomy. The results align closely with the view that assessment is most effective when it is embedded in everyday teaching and used to guide improvement rather than merely to measure performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Wiliam, 2011).

The increased clarity of learning goals reported by students reflects theoretical perspectives that emphasize the importance of transparent assessment criteria. When students understand what is expected of them, they are more likely to take an active role in their learning and to monitor their own progress. This finding corresponds with established literature highlighting the role of explicit criteria and success indicators in promoting self-regulated learning (Sadler, 1989; Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

The positive impact of feedback identified in this study is also consistent with previous research emphasizing feedback as one of the most powerful influences on learning. Teacher reflections and student narratives demonstrated that timely, specific, and constructive feedback helped students recognize errors, adjust their strategies, and gain confidence in their abilities. The study therefore reinforces the argument that feedback should be understood not as a final comment on performance but as an ongoing dialogue that supports learning development (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008).

Furthermore, the findings illustrate the importance of student involvement in assessment processes. Opportunities for self-assessment and reflection appeared to strengthen students' sense of responsibility for their own progress. This supports contemporary educational perspectives that view assessment as a collaborative process between teachers and learners rather than as a one-directional evaluative activity (Carless, 2007). The emphasis on student reflection and the active use of feedback also resonates with the concept of feedback literacy, which highlights the need for learners to develop the skills necessary to interpret and act upon feedback effectively (Carless & Boud, 2018).

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that professional development plays a crucial role in transforming assessment practices. The fact that participating teachers had been involved in training sessions on formative assessment was an important factor in the successful implementation of learning-oriented approaches. This observation is consistent with research arguing that sustainable assessment reform requires changes in teacher beliefs, knowledge, and classroom culture (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

These findings are particularly relevant for the Albanian educational context, where assessment practices continue to be largely dominated by summative grading and standardized evaluation procedures. The study suggests that introducing more formative and learning-oriented approaches could contribute to a gradual shift in classroom culture, helping both teachers and students to view assessment as a tool for learning rather than as a mechanism of control. Such a shift would represent an important step toward aligning local assessment practices with contemporary international trends in education.

In terms of policy implications, the study indicates that educational systems should reconsider assessment models dominated by grading and high-stakes testing. The qualitative evidence from this research suggests that such models may limit student engagement and reduce opportunities for meaningful learning. Instead, greater emphasis should be placed on formative, process-oriented assessment practices that encourage reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement. This shift is particularly important in the context of digital and innovative learning environments, where technology can be used to support ongoing assessment and personalized feedback (Gikandi et al., 2011).

While the findings are context-specific and based on a limited sample, they provide valuable insights into how assessment can be transformed into a more supportive and developmental process. The study contributes to ongoing debates about educational innovation by demonstrating that rethinking assessment is essential for creating learning environments capable of preparing students for the demands of a digital and rapidly changing society.

5. Conclusions and Limitations of the Study

Conclusions

This study set out to explore how learning-oriented assessment practices influence student engagement, motivation, and responsibility for learning within authentic classroom contexts. The qualitative findings demonstrate that when assessment is integrated into everyday teaching through clear criteria, continuous feedback, and reflective practices, it becomes a meaningful pedagogical process that actively supports learning development. Students in the study consistently reported that transparent expectations, constructive feedback, and opportunities for reflection helped them better understand learning goals, become more confident, and take greater responsibility for their own progress.

These conclusions are grounded in qualitative evidence derived from classroom observations and participant reflections, which provided detailed insight into how assessment practices were experienced on a daily basis. Teachers similarly observed that formative assessment strategies encouraged more active participation, deeper engagement, and more purposeful learning behaviors.

The study contributes to the field by offering context-based evidence that assessment can function as a developmental and learning-oriented process rather than merely as a mechanism for grading and control. The results reinforce the importance of feedback, clarity of expectations, and student involvement as essential components of effective assessment practice. They also highlight the central role of teacher professional development in enabling meaningful changes in classroom assessment. By demonstrating how assessment can shift from a culture focused on performance measurement to a culture focused on learning, the study provides valuable insights for educators and institutions seeking to promote more innovative and student-centered approaches to evaluation.

The implications of this study are particularly relevant in the context of contemporary educational transformation. As education systems increasingly emphasize digitalization, innovation, and lifelong learning, assessment practices must evolve accordingly. Learning-oriented assessment offers a framework that aligns with these demands by supporting learner autonomy, reflection, and continuous improvement. The study therefore underscores the need to rethink traditional assessment models and to prioritize approaches that place learning at the center of evaluation and pedagogical decision-making.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted with a relatively small sample of 10 teachers and 120 students within specific educational contexts. As a qualitative case study, the findings are context-dependent and cannot be generalized to all educational settings. The primary aim of the study was to provide an in-depth understanding of assessment practices rather than to produce broadly generalizable conclusions.

Second, the study relied on qualitative data drawn from observations and participant reflections. While these sources provided rich and meaningful insights, they are inherently interpretative and may be influenced by participants’ personal perceptions and experiences. Although triangulation of different data sources was used to strengthen credibility, the findings reflect the specific perspectives of the teachers and students involved.

Third, the research was limited to one academic semester. Assessment practices and their impact on learning often develop gradually, and a longer-term investigation might reveal additional dimensions of how learning-oriented assessment influences students and teachers over time.

Directions for Future Research

Future research could build on this study by involving larger and more diverse samples across different educational levels and institutional contexts. Longitudinal qualitative studies would be particularly valuable for examining how learning-oriented assessment practices evolve and how they affect learner autonomy and engagement over extended periods. Further investigation could also explore in greater depth how digital tools and innovative technologies can be integrated into formative assessment processes in ways that genuinely support reflection, feedback, and meaningful learning.

Overall, while the study has certain limitations, it provides important qualitative evidence that rethinking assessment as a learning-oriented process can contribute to more engaging, supportive, and effective educational practice. The findings highlight the potential of assessment to become a central driver of learning development when it is designed and implemented with pedagogical purpose and student growth in mind.

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From isolated CLIL lessons to Thematic Units: Rethinking CLIL Pedagogical Practices in Albanian EFL Classrooms

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Abstract: In 2014, the Albanian curricular framework experienced significant changes, introducing a competence-driven focus across all subjects in primary and secondary education and emphasizing the 21st-century skills. In this context, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), as an innovative educational approach that blends subject matter with language learning, has been included in EFL textbooks, often in the form of individual, subject-based lessons placed at the end of modules. While these lessons provide valuable opportunities for integrating content and language, their isolated nature raises questions about their potential to promote continuous academic and linguistic development. This paper examines how CLIL is currently implemented in three EFL textbooks used in Albanian lower-secondary education (Grades 6, 7 and 9), with particular attention to the thematic focus, continuity, and pedagogical coherence of the CLIL lessons included. Through qualitative content analysis, the study shows that CLIL is mainly treated as a separate instructional addition rather than as a coherent learning process, limiting opportunities for progression, recycling, and deeper cognitive engagement. Drawing on CLIL theory, particularly Coyle, Hood, and Marsh’s (2010) emphasis on thematic development and teacher ownership, this paper argues that CLIL effectiveness depends less on isolated lessons and more on how content and language are developed over time. Recognizing that teachers cannot easily modify textbooks, this study shifts the focus from materials to pedagogy, emphasizing the role of teachers as designers of thematic units adapted to local contexts, contributing to the improvement of linguistic and academic competences in Albanian EFL classrooms.

Keywords: CLIL, thematic units, academic and linguistic competences, Albanian EFL context, teacher pedagogy

1. Introduction

In recent decades the world has undergone rapid social, technological, and educational transformations that have reshaped the aims and practices of language education. Digitalization, globalization, and increased mobility have increased the demand for learners who can use languages flexibly, think critically, and apply knowledge across disciplines. In this context, CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has emerged as an “innovative foreign language teaching method” (European Commission, 1989) in which an “additional language” (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010) is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. By integrating subject content with language instruction, CLIL supports the development of academic knowledge, communicative competence, and higher-order thinking skills, preparing learners for participation in multilingual digital societies (Gabillon, 2020).

In the European language teaching context, CLIL has been closely linked to educational innovation, competence-based curricula, and the promotion of plurilingual and pluricultural citizenship (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). In Albania, these priorities were reinforced through curricular changes introduced in 2014, which emphasized key competences, learner autonomy, critical thinking, and 21st-century skills at all school levels. The integration of CLIL into English as a foreign Language (EFL) curricula and textbooks reflects an attempt to respond to these developments by moving beyond traditional, language-only instruction toward more meaningful and interdisciplinary learning experiences. However, while policy frameworks and curricular documents promote innovation, the implementation of these principles into classroom practice remains uneven.

In Albanian lower-secondary EFL textbooks and teaching materials, CLIL appears mainly in the form of isolated, end-of-unit lessons that introduce content-related topics through English. Although such lessons give learners the opportunity to use English naturally while studying subject content, their fragmented nature limits opportunities for continuous engagement, knowledge transfer, and the systematic development of academic language. From a theoretical perspective, CLIL is not intended to function as an occasional instructional addition, but as a coherent learning process in which content, language and cognition develop progressively over time (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010). This gap between CLIL theory and classroom practice constitutes the main problem addressed in this study.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to examine how CLIL is currently implemented in Albanian lower-secondary EFL textbooks, with particular attention to the pedagogical role of isolated CLIL lessons. Second, drawing on CLIL theory, the study aims to explore the potential of

CLIL thematic units as a more coherent and pedagogically effective alternative which are argued to offer richer opportunities for academic and language development, deeper cognitive engagement and meaningful integration of content and language.

By critically examining current CLIL practices and proposing a shift toward thematic unit design, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on contemporary approaches in foreign language pedagogy. CLIL thematic units support interdisciplinary learning, digital resource integration and the development of transferable competences that are essential for today’s digital society. In this way, the study shows how innovative pedagogical approaches can be strengthened to meet in a better way the demands of the evolving educational system in the Albanian context.

2. Theoretical Framework

Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) is an educational approach that integrates language learning and disciplinary content learning. The term CLIL was coined by European language experts and educators within the European educational setting in the 1990s (Marsh, D. 2002; Beacco, Bouquet, & Porquier; Coyle, 2008; Coyle, Hood, and Marsh, 2010; Cross 2016) the period when multilingualism and language education become a crucial issue in the European context. CLIL moves away from the traditional divide between language and content. Instead, it weaves them together, allowing students to master their subject matter while naturally building the academic fluency to express it. It is neither a new form of language teaching nor a new form of subject teaching, but an “innovative fusion” of both, grounded in principles of integration, convergence, and learner-centered pedagogy (Coyle et al., 2010).

However, the literature also indicates that CLIL’s flexibility is frequently misunderstood. While CLIL can be adapted to diverse educational contexts, its theoretical foundations require, rigor, transparency, and principled planning in practice (Coyle et al., 2010). Without such grounding, CLIL risks being reduced to superficial practices that merely use a foreign language as a medium of instruction without achieving meaningful integration. The gap between theoretical principles and classroom implementation is particularly visible in settings where CLIL takes the form of occasional instructional activities rather than being integrated into a coherent, long-term curricular framework.

A central theoretical foundation of CLIL is the 4Cs Framework, which conceptualizes integrated learning through the interconnected dimensions of Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture (Coyle et al., 2010). Within

this framework, content learning provides the thematic and disciplinary focus; communication refers to language use and development; cognition involves the development of both lower- and higher-order thinking skills; and culture integrates intercultural awareness and identity recognition. For these dimensions to function meaningfully, they must be carefully interconnected and developed over time. Effective CLIL, therefore, depends on thoughtful and systematic planning that ensures progression, coherence between objectives and classroom practices, and ongoing reflection on learners' academic and language development. From this perspective, isolated CLIL lessons, often detached from broader thematic or curricular sequences, pose a significant pedagogical limitation. While such lessons may address content-related topics, they do not allow for gradual cognitive development, systematic language progression, or meaningful cultural exploration.

Beyond general integration, CLIL approach offers a more detailed conceptualization of language development through the Language Triptych: language of learning, language for learning, and language through learning (Coyle et al., 2010; Cinganotto et al., 2019). In a CLIL classroom, language is far more than a list of words, it is the living bridge between a student's inner thoughts and the outside world, developing naturally as they learn to debate, collaborate, and express the complex ideas they are discovering. The guidelines on CLIL approach emphasize that effective language development in CLIL requires planned scaffolding, recycling, and the progression across tasks and lessons (Cinganotto, Benedeti, & Guida 2019). But, it is difficult to achieve these processes within isolated lessons, where language tasks are addressed only at a surface level and without opportunities for reinforcement or expansion. Learners may be exposed to academic language without being supported in developing functional control over it. This theoretical insight is particularly relevant to the present study, as it draws attention to how fragmented CLIL practices may undermine one of the approach's core objectives, the systematic development of academic and disciplinary language competence.

CLIL is strongly rooted in constructivist and socio-cultural perspectives of learning, which view knowledge as something learners actively construct rather than passively receive (Coyle et al., 2010). From this point of view, learning is understood as a process that involves cognitive engagement, meaningful interaction, and tasks that require continuous intellectual effort. The cognitive development is attained through carefully sequenced learning experiences, which are often organized around themes or units that allow students to revisit and deepen their understanding of key concepts from different angles over time. When CLIL is reduced to isolated lessons, however, the focus often shifts toward short-term task competition rather than

continuous conceptual growth. This raises important questions about whether fragmented practices can strongly support deeper learning and long-term cognitive development.

Taken together, the reviewed literature shows that CLIL is most effective when implemented through coherent, unit-based planning rather than sporadic or additive practices. CLIL thematic units, defined as sequences of interconnected lessons organized around a shared theme, are explicitly recommended in the CLIL “Tool Kit” as a means of ensuring progression across content, language, and culture (Coyle et al., 2010). Thematic units allow teachers to align learning outcomes, scaffold language systematically, and design tasks that build on one another over time. They also create space for interdisciplinary connections, digital resource integration, and culturally meaningful content, aligning CLIL with boarder goals of innovation in foreign language education (Cinganotto et al., 2019). Despite their strong theoretical support, however, thematic units remain underrepresented in many textbook-driven or teaching program implementations, particularly in Albanian lower-secondary EFL context.

Grounded in CLIL theory, the 4Cs Framework, and the Language Triptych, the present study adopts a conceptual perspective that views CLIL as an integrated pedagogical approach requiring continuity and progression. This framework informs both the analytical focus of the study, examining isolated CLIL lessons in Albanian EFL textbooks, and the interpretative lens through which these practices are evaluated. By critically engaging with established CLIL theory, the study aims to emphasize the gap between theoretical principles and pedagogical practice, and to argue for a shift toward CLIL thematic units as a more coherent and theoretically based model. In doing so, it positions thematic unit design not as an optional enhancement, but as a necessary condition for realizing the educational potential of CLIL in foreign language classroom.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design based on document and content analysis. The choice of a qualitative approach is directly aligned with the research objectives, which aim to examine how CLIL is pedagogically implemented in Albanian lower-secondary EFL textbooks and to evaluate the extent to which CLIL lessons function as isolated instructional units or as components of coherent thematic development. Considering that the study seeks to explore curricular structure, pedagogical integration, cognitive demands, and language scaffolding rather than to measure numerical frequency or test hypotheses, qualitative analysis was considered the most

appropriate methodological approach. Document analysis enables systematic examination of instructional materials while allowing for in-depth interpretation in relation to established theoretical frameworks. This design supports the study’s goal of critically evaluating CLIL implementation against the principles of the 4Cs Framework and the Language Triptych (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

The study focuses on three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) textbooks currently used in Albanian lower-secondary education:

- Eyes Open 1 (Grade 6)
- Eyes Open 2 (Grade 7)
- Eyes Open 4 (Grade 9)

These textbooks were selected through purposive sampling, as they are officially approved and widely implemented in Albanian public schools. Each textbook contains a designated CLIL section positioned at the end of the book and a total of 24 (8 lessons per each textbook) CLIL lessons were identified. All CLIL lessons included in the designated sections were analyzed to ensure transparency and avoid selective bias. For purposes of detailed qualitative illustration, two representative lessons per grade (six in total) are discussed in depth in the findings section. These examples were selected because they reflect recurring structural and pedagogical patterns observed across the corpus.

The primary instrument for data collection was a theory-driven analytical framework derived from established CLIL literature, specifically:

1. The 4Cs Framework (Content, Communication, Cognition, Culture)
2. The Language Triptych (language of learning, language for learning, language through learning)

These theoretical models were transformed into a structured analytical grid used to examine each CLIL lesson. The analytical criteria included:

- a) Degree of integration between content and language
- b) Nature and progression of language scaffolding
- c) Cognitive demands of tasks (lower- vs higher-order thinking skills)
- d) Evidence of cultural or interdisciplinary connections
- e) Presence or absence of thematic continuity within the textbook structure
- f) Structural positioning of CLIL lessons in relation to the main modules

The procedure involved systematic reading and examination of each CLIL lesson across the three grade level and there were taken notes using the analytical grid to ensure consistency across cases. Structural features (placement, sequencing, lesson organization) were documented alongside pedagogical characteristics (task types, language support, cognitive complexity).

Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis with a theory-guided coding approach. Rather than generating categories inductively, the analysis was informed by predefined theoretical constructs derived from CLIL literature. Each lesson was examined according to the established criteria of:

1. Content integration
2. Language development (based on the Language Triptych)
3. Cognitive engagement
4. Cultural/interdisciplinary dimension
5. Curricular coherence and thematic continuity

Patterns were then compared across grades to identify recurring tendencies in CLIL implementation. Cross-case analysis allowed for identification of systemic design features, particularly regarding the structural placement of CLIL lessons and their degree of pedagogical integration. The analysis focused not only on the characteristics of individual lessons but also on patterns of progression within and across grade levels, allowing for an evaluation of whether CLIL functioned as a sustained curricular pathway or merely as an episodic instructional addition.

This study is based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available educational materials and does not involve human participants. Therefore, issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were not applicable. Nevertheless, academic integrity and responsible scholarship were maintained throughout the research process. All textbook materials were analyzed objectively and in accordance with ethical standards of educational research.

4. Findings and Discussions

The analysis of the three textbooks (Eyes Open 1, Eyes Open 2, and Eyes Open 4) identified a total of 24 CLIL lessons, eight in each grade level (Grades 6, 7, and 9). A consistent pattern emerged across these lessons in terms of both structural organization and pedagogical design. In all three textbooks, CLIL lessons are grouped in a separate section at the end of the book. Although teachers are encouraged to use these lessons after each module, they are not included into the thematic development of the main units. In other words, they sit alongside the planned modules rather than within them involving no clear conceptual or linguistic continuity with these modules. For instance, in Grade 7, the CLIL lesson “The Bauhaus Movement” appears without any connection to the theme explored in the previous module entitled “At home”. What is more, in Grade 9, the CLIL lesson “Passive Houses” is immediately followed by the next CLIL lesson “Copyright”, shifting abruptly from sustainable architecture to intellectual property law showing that this transition between

topics is sharp, with no thematic bridge or cumulative development. According to the 4Cs Framework (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010), effective CLIL depends on sustained interaction between content, communication, cognition, and culture over time. However, the placement of these lessons at the end of the book reflects episodic insertion rather than continuous integration. This reveals a noticeable gap between theoretical expectations and textbook implementation.

At the level of individual lessons, the CLIL units are rich in disciplinary content. The topics are diverse, subject-specific, and age-appropriate. For example, in Grade 6, “Vertebrates” introduces biological classification and anatomical terms such as gills, scales, and lungs. Also in Grade 6, “Outdoor Sports” categorizes activities by environment and introduces relevant equipment vocabulary. In Grade 7, “The Bauhaus Movement” explores architectural principles such as simplicity and functionality, while “Functional Zones” presents key concepts from urban geography, including CBD and industrial zones. In Grade 9, “Passive Houses” addresses sustainable design and energy efficiency, whereas “Copyright” introduces legal concepts such as intellectual property and fair use. Each lesson successfully combines subject content with English through informational texts, visuals, diagrams, and structured comprehension tasks. However, this integration remains confined to individual lessons. There is no evidence that concepts introduced in one CLIL lesson are revisited, expanded, or connected to subsequent ones. While integration occurs within lessons, it does not extend across the curriculum. As a result, CLIL operates effectively at the micro-level but lacks coherence at the macro-level.

When examined through the Language Triptych framework, a clear pattern emerges. Across all grades, the lessons consistently introduce subject-specific vocabulary (language of learning). Examples include scientific terms such as gills, scales, and lungs in Grade 6; urban planning vocabulary such as CBD and residential zone in Grade 7; technical and legal expressions such as solar orientation, energy efficiency, copyright, and fair use in Grade 9. Vocabulary is typically reinforced through labeling, matching, short-answer tasks, and diagram completion. These activities help students understand key terminology and concepts. However, support for language for learning, the functional language needed to explain, compare, argue, or evaluate, is limited. For instance, in “Passive Houses”, students label diagrams and answer factual questions but receive little guidance on constructing extended explanations about sustainability. In “Copyright”, learners verify statements but are not scaffolded toward structured argumentation or case-based discussion. Opportunities for language through learning, language that develops through deeper cognitive engagement, are also rare. Extended writing, debate, inquiry-

based tasks, and project work are rarely present. Consequently, language development remains largely focused on vocabulary rather than academic discourse. This suggests that while CLIL lessons expose learners to subject content in English, they do not consistently support sustained academic language growth, a core objective of CLIL theory.

In terms of cognitive engagement, most tasks across grades emphasize lower-order thinking skills such as identification, categorization, and factual recall. Typical activities include matching animal groups and labeling diagrams in "Vertebrates" (Grade 6); categorizing sports by environment in "Outdoor Sports" (Grade 6); identifying features of "Bauhaus architecture" (Grade 7); completing tables on urban zones (Grade 7); labeling architectural diagrams in "Passive Houses" (Grade 9); and determining the accuracy of statements in "Copyright" (Grade 9). Although some topics, particularly "Passive Houses" and "Copyright," naturally lend themselves to higher-order thinking (such as evaluating environmental sustainability or discussing ethical issues), these possibilities are not fully developed through task design. Higher-order thinking tasks, sustained inquiry, or progressive conceptual exploration are limited. Each lesson tends to function independently, with cognitive engagement restarting rather than building upon previous learning.

From a theoretical perspective, this contrasts with constructivist and socio-cultural foundations of CLIL, which emphasize ongoing intellectual challenge and progressive cognitive development (Coyle et al., 2010).

The most striking pattern across all 24 lessons is the lack of thematic continuity. Across grades, topics do not build on one another, vocabulary is not systematically recycled, and concepts are not extended or deepened across lessons. This leads to an evident finding that no sustained developmental progression is evident. For example, in Grade 7, "The Bauhaus Movement" (architecture and design) is followed by "Functional Zones" (urban geography), with no conceptual bridge between them. In Grade 9, "Passive Houses" is immediately followed by "Copyright", shifting from environmental sustainability to intellectual property without thematic linkage. This fragmentation suggests that CLIL is implemented as a collection of subject-based inserts rather than as a thematically sequenced model. While integration occurs within individual lessons, it does not develop across time. The sustained interaction between content, communication, cognition, and culture envisioned by the 4Cs framework is therefore only partially realized.

Taken together, the findings reveal a consistent pattern across grades:

- ❖ CLIL lessons are structurally separated from core modules.
- ❖ They demonstrate strong disciplinary authenticity at the lesson level.
- ❖ Language development focuses primarily on vocabulary.
- ❖ Cognitive demands are predominantly lower-order.

❖ Thematic and curricular progression is limited.

The textbooks succeed in introducing interdisciplinary content through English. However, they stop short of operationalizing CLIL as a sustained, coherent pedagogical framework. Instead, CLIL functions largely as an episodic instructional addition.

This gap between theoretical intent and classroom design provides the foundation for reconsidering CLIL implementation through the development of structured thematic units that promote continuity, progression, and deeper integration over time.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study aims to examine how CLIL is currently implemented in Albanian lower-secondary EFL textbooks and to explore whether it functions as a coherent pedagogical model or as a series of isolated lessons. The analysis of 24 CLIL units across Grades 6, 7, and 9 shows that CLIL is clearly present in the textbooks, but it is implemented primarily as a separate instructional component rather than as a sustained, integrated learning pathway.

At the level of individual lessons, the textbooks demonstrate strong disciplinary authenticity. Students are introduced to meaningful subject content and relevant terminology, and they engage with interdisciplinary topics through English. However, this integration remains confined within individual lessons. The absence of thematic continuity, systematic language scaffolding, and cumulative cognitive progression limits the potential of CLIL to fully support the development of academic and linguistic competences over time.

When viewed through the lens of the 4Cs Framework and the Language Triptych, the findings suggest that the core principles of CLIL, particularly sustained interaction between content, communication, cognition, and culture, are only partially realized. Language development tends to focus primarily on vocabulary rather than academic discourse, and cognitive engagement often remains at a lower-order level. Most importantly, the structural separation of CLIL lessons from the main modules prevents the development of coherent thematic connections across grades.

The contribution of this study lies in highlighting this gap between theoretical principles and textbook implementation within the Albanian EFL context. Rather than questioning the value of CLIL itself, the findings reaffirm its potential and suggest that its effectiveness depends less on the presence of isolated lessons and more on how learning is structured over time. In this sense, the study supports a shift from viewing CLIL as an “add-on” component

toward designing thematic units that promote continuity, progression, and deeper integration of content and language.

These findings carry important pedagogical implications. While textbooks provide a structural framework, teachers play a crucial role as curriculum designers who can reorganize and adapt materials into thematic sequences. Strengthening teacher’s role in planning CLIL thematic units may therefore represent a practical and context-sensitive pathway toward enhancing academic and linguistic development in Albanian EFL classrooms.

At the same time, this study has certain limitations. First, it is based exclusively on textbook analysis and does not include classroom observations, teacher interviews, or learner data. As a result, the findings reflect the design of materials rather than how CLIL is enacted in practice. It is possible that teachers supplement or adapt these lessons in ways that were not captured in this analysis. Second, the study focuses on three textbooks used in lower-secondary education; therefore, the conclusions cannot be generalized to all educational levels or instructional contexts in Albania. Finally, as a qualitative study guided by predefined theoretical constructs, the analysis emphasizes alignment with CLIL theory and may not account for alternative interpretations of integration.

Future research could extend this work by examining how teachers implement CLIL lessons in real classroom settings, how students experience and perceive these lessons, and how thematic unit design influences measurable academic and linguistic outcomes. Comparative studies across schools or regions could also provide deeper insight into contextual variations in CLIL practice.

In conclusion, CLIL in the analyzed textbooks demonstrates strong potential but limited structural coherence. Recognizing this distinction is not a critique of innovation, but an invitation to refine it. By moving from isolated lessons toward thoughtfully designed thematic units, CLIL can more fully realize its promise as an integrated, progressive, and transformative approach to foreign language education in Albania.

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Speaking Spanish as a Third Language: Challenges and Innovative Teaching Solutions

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Abstract: Foreign language learners are frequently challenged by the complexity of speech production, which requires the simultaneous integration of grammatical, syntactic, phonetic, and pragmatic knowledge. Producing intelligible and natural-sounding speech requires not only formal accuracy, but it also involves coordinating multiple language levels in real time to convey a clear and intentional message. Achieving a level of speech that approaches native-like fluency therefore remains a persistent difficulty.

The purpose of this study is to identify recurring problems in the oral production of L3 Spanish and to explore innovative ways of addressing them. The research is based on a case study of Slovak university students with Slovak as their L1 and English as their L2, focusing on Spanish as a commonly studied L3 in Slovakia. The study draws on classroom observations and audio recordings of learners' oral production across CEFR levels A1 to C1. The results reveal long-term, recurring difficulties. Based on these, the paper aims to propose technology-enhanced pedagogical approaches to improve spoken Spanish at the university level. The study contributes to current discussions on innovative foreign language teaching and offers concrete suggestions for enhancing oral competence in multilingual learners.

Keywords: *L3, speech production, foreign language learning.*

1. Introduction

Teaching a language is a difficult task, especially when it comes to university students who study the language as their major. Because of the growing popularity of languages as such and particularly Spanish getting more and more attention because of the media, in Slovakia, the interest to integrate Spanish as a second foreign language at lower grades rises. As a result, the number of students who pick this language to study at the university level is

growing as well, including programmes such as teacher training and translation studies. At this level, it is crucial to provide the students with sufficient support and effective approach. The students who aim to become teachers or translators are expected to reach high proficiency in the language. Ideally, they should become as close to a native speaker as possible. Mastering the grammar and vocabulary on the one hand, nuances of a language, idioms, or different registers on the other. To prepare future teachers for the labour market and their future profession, the most efficient and fitting methods should be applied, producing well rounded educated graduates.

The current generation of students differs from the previous one thanks to their direct contact with the virtual world, to which they have been exposed for years. The coronavirus pandemic has also had a strong impact, further binding this generation to the digital world. Gadušová, Hašková, and Havettová (2021) offer an authentic observation in the time of the pandemic: “Although the school closures initially caused a disruption in education, over time they also prompted examples of innovation in education. There are some signals suggesting the crisis can have a lasting impact on the trajectory of learning innovation and digitisation.” They correctly predicted new digital learning possibilities and growing dependency on the Internet. Thus, the need to incorporate digital technologies into teaching cannot be denied. Teachers should have a broad overview of various older and newer teaching methods and trends so that they can use them to the benefit of their students, adapt to their needs, and constantly watch for innovative ways to teach. Furthermore, teachers cannot use methods and resources blindly - they should observe the students, analyse their pace, needs, and problems to pick purposeful methods out of their repertoire and to constantly search for additional ways to improve students' progress. “It is important for pupils to be able to structure their own knowledge, which can be helped by working with a variety of activating methods and motivating elements to engage them.” (Stranovská, Szabó, 2024, p. 420) There is a growing need for knowledge of technologies that have a wide range of uses in the classroom. As teachers, we ought to constantly implement innovation to the teaching process and adapt not only to new technologies, but also to new challenges and problems in society. The positive contribution of implementing technology is highlighted by many current researches (Du et al., 2025, Raman et al., 2026, Huang et al., 2026, Andujar & Buchner, 2019).

The lack of socializing in recent years provoked by the rise in popularity of social media adds to the growing social anxiety and a lack of the speaking practice among students. The generation affected by the pandemics of the coronavirus is now challenged to prepare for the labour market, studying at the university level. Even at class, the students are challenged by insufficient

speaking practice time, social awkwardness, and prioritizing other skills than speaking.

The study is focused on Slovak university students aiming to become teachers of Spanish language and literature. In some cases, students who decide to enrol to the Teacher training program come with zero knowledge of the language and in the short time of five years they need to gain sufficient proficiency in the language as well as plenty of other skills to become a full-fledged teacher of Spanish. This, of course, is no easy task for students already proficient in the language as well. The level of students who enroll to the program is therefore diverse: from the complete beginners, those who studied Spanish as the third language in lower levels of education or even graduates from bilingual institutes. Therefore, the issues this study mentions are those occurring at all levels of proficiency and the suggestions offered are those that may be incorporated to any stage of studies.

2. Theoretical Framework

Among skills to master, speaking stands as particularly challenging. Because speaking is a productive skill, naturally, the effort required is much higher as in other skills, with several different aspects to be aware of at once. The production of speech tends to be considered the most difficult skill by many students. Generally, the language classes lack the space for conversations, often grammar is prioritised due to time insufficiency. Speaking is not a skill that seemingly cannot be practiced on one's own.

The current research (Zhang et al., 2025, Du et al., 2025, Sabat, 2024) tends to be focused mainly on fluency (ability to communicate well and without hesitation) or accuracy (ability to communicate correctly, precisely and without errors) in speaking or on separate language levels in speaking. Therefore, we observe the need to focus on incorporating all of these aspects at once, without artificial separation of target aspect, which, though useful in research, is not possible in real speech production. In speech, everything happens at once in real time.

According to the research by Du et al. (2025), the major issues are the “[...] language anxiety, limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge, pronunciation difficulties, lack of speaking practice, and cultural barriers, with language anxiety emerging as the primary challenge due to students' fear of making mistakes and feeling self-conscious in class.” Therefore, overcoming them by focusing on fluency is desired. With developing communication as a goal, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aims to enhance fluency while on accuracy there is much less importance placed, so it serves this purpose well.

Some authors such as Lastičová (2024) call for turning the focus back to grammar, mainly at the university level and teaching students specializing in languages, namely translation studies and teaching study programmes. The reasoning is that the communication has to be well grounded and the accuracy is essential for future teachers or translators. Mareková and Beňuš (2024, p. 517) propose that "[...] in more enrolcognitively complex tasks speakers prioritize accurate speech formulation to effectively convey the message and to achieve communicative goals.", which might be a more well-rounded approach.

According to Harmer (2007), there should be a different approach to feedback during oral work, depending on the focus of the activity during the class - whether the class work concentrates on fluency or accuracy and the needs of the students. Agreeing with his words, we consider it important to inform students, especially university students, about the way of providing feedback and corrections. It is a great difference to correct only grave errors or every error, moreover, it depends on what types of errors interest the teacher the most. There had been students that believed some of their aspects of speech (e.g. pronunciation of a particular sound, word, etc.) are flawless, only to discover that the teacher just never pinpointed the error because they did not consider it important. Sometimes, the issue lies in inability to give feedback in the right time as well as the lack of time to comment on students' progress. Teachers usually comment only on the total impression of the students' speech, unable to offer a deeper analysis immediately after hearing the speech in real time. In a class, this is the usual pattern. Errors in pronunciation are corrected only if they hinder the understanding, grammatical and syntactic errors are overlooked for the fluency. However, a deeper analysis of speech is sometimes needed. Teachers cannot provide a complex and deep analysis in class, even though students would undoubtedly benefit from it. This type of feedback is as important as the overall impression feedback, however, it is much more demanding on the teacher - it requires a lot of time, effort, and expertise.

Spanish pronunciation in the Slovak classes is not receiving much attention, being L3 in the majority of cases and the pronunciation being closer to Slovak compared to other languages - especially English that has a wide variety of sounds and patterns non-existent in Slovak. The vocals nor consonants do not differ much, with a few exceptions. The most obvious difference is the stress which is causing various issues. Stress in Spanish carries meaning, so the errors produced by its incorrect placement tend to be grave. Kopecký and Štúr (2014) state that in Romance languages, students are prone to be careless with its placement which partially obstructs the understanding of their oral production. However, it is necessary to work on this aspect as well.

Because of the lack of time during classes, teachers have to sacrifice some aspects to practice others. That is why regular preparation, self-study, intrinsic motivation, and the ability of self-evaluation are particularly important. Today, the lack of study materials is no longer an issue, on the contrary, there seems to be an overflow of different materials as well as methods to teach or study a language. Students may benefit from new technologies and resources never seen before. Therefore, teachers need to know about them and mindfully include innovations when necessary.

3. Methodology

The aim of this research is to provide purposeful suggestions to address recurring problems in learning Spanish language based on a longitudinal case study (2024-2026). The research adopts a case study approach as it allows an in-depth examination of the selected sample over an extended time frame. The sample is composed by Slovak university students of the Teacher training program of Spanish language and literature as well as the Translation studies program during their bachelor studies. The student's age at the beginning of this study was between 18 and 23. The mother tongue is Slovak. At the beginning, the levels of their Spanish were diverse, ranging from graduates from Spanish bilingual schools to students who began learning Spanish only after entering the program, on CEFR scale from A1 to C1.

The study consisted of continuous observations and repeated recordings of the students' oral production. Qualitative analysis focused on changes in fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, syntax, grammar and overall communicative ability was performed to identify both individual progress and persistent difficulties that remained stable despite instruction. Building on these results, using the literary review method, several approaches were selected as a countermeasure to the identified problems in oral production of the students.

4. Results

4.1 Identified recurring issues

Out of the recurring problems found in students' oral production, a few were selected depending on their gravity and persistence. Among them, the anxiety and reluctance of risk-taking was rather strong, especially in some subjects, at times causing a total paralysis and interruption or discontinuation of the speech.

The major identified issue is connected to the separating language levels. While studying language, students always focus on and practice only one level of language (i.e. only grammar, pronunciation, meaning), which is necessary

up to a certain point. As a result of carrying on with this approach and getting used to it, they fail to connect them in language production. Focusing only on one aspect of speech often results in others taking a toll.

Another particular issue for Spanish language learners lies in the pronunciation, which is often overlooked. Incorrectly placed stress, unnaturally placed pauses, or hypercorrect slow pronunciation were the most prominent.

In addition, interference of English or other languages (i.e. Italian) that causes the confusion of similar words as well as the influence of the mother tongue in grammatical or syntactic patterns were observed.

Based on the feedback from students, they feel that their practice time is insufficient to integrate their expressive and interpretational skills at a satisfactory level.

4.2 Suggested approaches

Firstly, we would like to emphasise the many advantages that are brought to the learning process only by the existence and access to the internet. Teachers can easily prepare recommended materials available to students via online platforms such as Google Classroom. To a certain extent, the Edupage portal, which is already in use in Slovak primary and secondary schools, works in this way. However, it does not offer as wide a range of functions as the above-mentioned platform, which not only offer the possibility of quickly transferring various types of content, but also work in reverse, allowing students to submit assignments or seminar papers, with the option of creating a shared document. Considering speaking, students may submit their recordings, videos, or podcasts to the teacher. This way, it creates the space and time for teachers to analyse their speech from a greater variety of aspects than in a classroom, provided that the teacher is willing to make the effort. Shared platforms provide real time space to encourage students to share materials or experiences in addition to boosting motivation and collaborative learning.

Listening should be the base to build on seeking correct pronunciation. Without a real example, learners would not be able to replicate a native speaker's speech. Of course, comprehension of the content is also immensely important and is considered an essential part in cultivating not only speaking, but all productive skills. (Ficzere, Haringa, Weiss, 2024, p. 319) Based on listening, various methods for improving oral production have gained publicity and are compatible with the use of new technology, thus can be considered innovative.

Shadowing is a technique that has been developed in the past, first used in training interpreters, but then continuously spread to the language learning

sphere. "In shadowing, learners process aural input to reproduce what they hear simultaneously, which requires the coordination of several cognitive processes." (Hamada, 2019, p. 388) This technique is widely used for improving pronunciation while also "[...] can scaffold the internalization of linguistic examples and rules." (Goto, 2023, p. 178), making it suitable for a wide variety of proficiency levels, even complete beginners. The process consists of listening to handpicked recordings with the task of "[...] simultaneously replicate what they hear without written scripts." (Hamada, 2019, p. 387) This creates the need to remember what is heard, facilitating not only mastering pronunciation, but also acquiring language patterns as well. According to Goto (2023) "Shadowing is a form of deliberate practice that helps learners accumulate declarative knowledge, such as vocabulary and grammar. Learners can understand and be ready to effectively use the language in real communication after practicing shadowing." Therefore, it could be one of the efficient ways to practice more than one language level at once, resolving at least partially one of the major problems of our students. Individual practice of shadowing might be applied using mobile technology. The study of Foote and McDonough (2017, pp. 34-56) consisted of students equipped with an iPod and headphones who listened to natural speech pieces with scripts provided. Using a free app designed for musicians they could listen to the pieces and simultaneously use the shadowing technique and record themselves. By this method, they had the opportunity to listen to their own speech and compare it to the original speakers or to even play them over their recordings (ibid, pp. 40-41). It was documented that "[...] the participants significantly improved in their ability to imitate a speech model, and also improved in terms of comprehensibility and fluency." (ibid, p. 48) This approach enables students to analyse their own speech even without extensive knowledge of phonetics and suprasegmental features, making it an efficient way to support self-study and self-evaluation.

Speaking about shadowing, we ought to mention mirroring as well. Mirroring is a highly adaptive method of studying. Today, many applications offer free resources that support this approach. While mirroring and shadowing may have similarities, essentially, they differ in several aspects. Mirroring does not occur at the same time as the original utterance but follows it with a short delay. It is based on a model chosen by the learner and requires attention to both verbal and non-verbal elements in order to convey the original speaker's intentions and emotional expression. (Foote, McDonough, 2017) It involves a visual impetus, which is followed using the whole body, therefore it might be more challenging. It involves non-verbal imitation, which naturally is a part of language as well, making it an ideal tool to practice public speaking. It is

also more time consuming, requiring practice time and applying more aspects of speech.

Another popular and utilizable approach is gamification. It is “[...] the integration of game elements into education [...] promotes active learning and engagement, with interactive activities involving vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice, and language production.” (Wulantari et al., 2024, p. 2847) We are currently seeing a huge increase in educational apps focused on foreign languages, as well as increased interest in them from students. They contribute to the development of learning autonomy. We often observe that students also learn at home with the help of some of these apps, especially vocabulary, but many students intentionally work on their pronunciation and on grammar as well. For example, the Duolingo app, which offers learning in a large number of languages, has become extremely popular. Though, this advantage also becomes a disadvantage, as quantity often prevails over quality of content. After running a trial on the app in several languages, it became clear that at this point, the versions for languages other than English are not on par with the quality. Less common languages contain (sometimes significant) errors, and there is a risk that students will adopt these. We would therefore recommend apps that specialize in only one language or that have been verified in advance. Many have already incorporated AI, which can provide services such as real-life chat or even oral production correction. They are affordable and can be used anywhere, moreover, they require only a personal mobile device which, today, every student possesses. Many students already own smart watches that support Duolingo and other educational apps that we can use to support self-study. It is beneficial to encourage students to surround themselves with the language at home by offering them a sufficient quality and quantity of suitable materials. Additionally, it is necessary to mention that gamification is not limited to only mobile applications, it has a wide variety of uses and is compatible with a range of technologies.

One of such technologies is virtual reality. Virtual reality has an advantage for providing tailored, interactive and personal experience in a safe environment, motivating students to speak without anxiety removing the stress factor which is the fear of failure. It adapts gamification features to the learning process, simulating full cultural immersion. One of the greatest features is the immediate feedback which, according to Chen (2022) helps students to self-correct with more efficiency and speed, enhancing the accuracy of speech. The research by Raman et al. (2026) shows that applying VR into the language learning process enhances the students' engagement, creating affective connections to the virtual environment and its characters and supporting intrinsic motivation it promotes risk-taking in speech production. Raman et al. (2026, p. 6) adds that “During VR sessions, learners were observed leaning

forward, gesturing naturally, rehearsing utterances aloud, and coordinating speech with physical movement.”, which shows its great benefits. Some of the obvious disadvantages to this approach are the need of corresponding technical devices, teaching programs with intentional and tailored pedagogical design, and prepared teachers that could manage this kind of technical experience.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention the widely spread and rapidly evolving Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI is today able to provide personalized individual coaching of pronunciation, grammar, or overall speech, either in designated applications run by AI or even in tools such as GhatGPT, Gemini, NotebookLM, etc. It can analyse by itself an existing recording or, if being uncomfortable to give the recording of their own voice to AI, the option of providing only the transcripts is also possible. That way, it will not be able to correct or give suggestions on the pronunciation, but it can focus on grammatical and syntactic mistakes. If provided by a model in the form of a text in another language, reference picture, video, etc. it can also detect mistakes in meaning. It can pinpoint regularly occurring patterns that are not visible to the teacher or the student themselves.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

The present study examined recurring difficulties in the oral production of L3 Spanish among Slovak university students of the Teacher Training programme and explored ways of addressing them through the use of technology. A few approaches were selected and offered with various suggestions for their use either in class or as a tool that enhances self-study and self-evaluation.

The study is limited by its case-study design and relatively small, specific sample, which does not allow for generalisations, but serves as a base for further research. In future, the sample could be expanded and there could be incorporated the quantitative method as well. Despite these limitations, the findings contribute to current discussions on innovative approaches in foreign language teaching. The selected approaches could serve as for teachers to familiarise with current new technologies and possibilities to improve the language learning process.

In conclusion, however, the innovation in education should not focus solely on technological progress or the latest methods, but first and foremost on the student and on ensuring that they benefit from these innovations.

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The Role of the Teacher in Differentiated Instruction

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Abstract: This study presents the teacher's role in differentiated teaching. The study explores how differentiated work is organized, how it is planned, how much it is used in tests and in homework and classwork. On the other hand, it presents the impact that differentiated work has on students' motivation and how much they value this type of teaching.

The completed topic aims at the use of differentiated teaching in schools, which means that in one class the teacher must teach students who have different capacities and ways of learning. Besides this, it aims to understand how much the student values and understands that differentiated teaching affects his personal development.

The study was based on qualitative and quantitative data, namely interviews and questionnaires. The focus was on students and teachers, both from schools, where a conclusion will be reached about how much differentiated teaching is implemented by teachers and how much this affects the improvement of students' quality.

From this study it resulted that: the teacher does not always use differentiated work; tests include questions for all levels; homework is sometimes differentiated; differentiated assignment when given is checked by the teacher; the methods the teacher uses in differentiated work are worksheets and additional materials; differentiated work is practiced with all students or with a part of them, according to the teachers' wishes.

Through this study it is aimed that: the student should not be simply a listener, but be encouraged and for his ability and capacity to stand out; through the use of differentiated teaching, the quality of students' learning should increase; with the motivation they receive precisely in the ability they have, to help them in creating their personality. Also to encourage them in choosing a more secure future.

Keywords: *differentiated instruction, teacher's role, motivation, strategies*

1. Introduction

Differentiated teaching is described as a dynamic pedagogical approach that aims to adapt the content, process and products of learning to the heterogeneity of students (Tomlinson, 2005; Perrenoud, 1997). Our study consolidates this position, seeing differentiation not simply as a technique, but as a way of thinking and pedagogical practice that places the student at the center of the process.

2. Literature Review

Differentiation is understood as an effort to allow students with different abilities, interests and preparations to achieve common or partially common objectives through different paths (Raymond, 1987; Meirieu, 1987). Based on the Theories of multiple intelligences (Gardner), learning styles (Kolb), visual-auditory-kinesthetic profiling and developmental factors (Piaget) reasons are offered why and how learning should be framed (Armstrong, 1999; Kolb, 1984).

Reasons and aims of differentiation: The need for inclusion and universal success: Differentiation aims to make learning attainable for everyone, combating school failure and encouraging the maximal development of students' potential (MEQ, 2003; Tardif & Van Neste, 2001). Taking diversity into account: individual differences (prior knowledge, pace, learning styles), social and cultural require adaptation of teaching practices.

What should be differentiated? We have identified four main elements: Structures — class organization (groups, sub-groups, individual work, modulation within/between cycles). Processes — teaching strategies (cooperative learning, project pedagogy, debates, problem work). Contents — level and breadth of material; selection of alternative materials. Products — methods of assessment and expression of learning (project, presentation, creative work). These four elements are interconnected and require synchronization by the teacher.

How and when to differentiate? Differentiation begins in planning: identifying universal objectives and personalized ones; assessing prior knowledge; using level sheets and observation for diagnosis. Implementation can be simultaneous (students are separated and work on different activities at the same time) or sequential (different stages within the lesson); it can be minimal or maximal in intensity.

But what is the teacher's role? The teacher is a key actor: organizer, motivator, communicator, assessor and model. Knowing the students, clarity of instructions, use of different strategies and continuous monitoring are criteria

of the "effective" teacher in differentiation. Creativity and pedagogical tactics: encouraging creativity, using different languages (verbal, visual, kinesthetic) and communication tactics directly affect the success of differentiated interventions.

For differentiated teaching methods and techniques also play a key role. Certainly, here we mention student-centered methods: discussion, work in small groups, expert groups, role play, project, case study, experiment, observation, film, dialogue circles — all suitable to implement elements of differentiation and to encourage reflection, application and transfer of knowledge.

Equally important is classroom management and practical implementation. Classroom management is required to be structured: rules, procedures, a clear role of teacher and students, orientation for diversification with time and resources even though we face some practical challenges such as large class size, limited time for planning, lack of additional materials, etc.

We think that differentiated teaching motivates students because Motivation and assessment are very important. Motivation increases when students understand the purpose, have autonomy, choice opportunities and receive frequent feedback; formative assessment and rubrics are essential for continuous adaptation.

3. Methodology

The study was based on qualitative and quantitative data, namely interviews and questionnaires, carried out with teachers and students of the two schools. The study sample consists of: school teachers and students. The sample size for the questionnaires and interviews is presented as follows: Sample of schools (random selection): the schools “Jan Kukuzeli” in Durrës and “Muharrem Dollaku” in Shijak were taken. In each parallel of the respective cycles of both schools, 5 students were randomly chosen to whom the questionnaire was given to be filled out. Also, 7 students were randomly selected and interviewed directly.

Table 1. Sample of teachers and students by schools for the questionnaire and for the interview.

School	Jan Kukuzeli	Muharrem Dollaku
No of students for the questionnaires	60	40

No of students for the interview	4	3
No of teachers	3	2

Data collection

In both schools taken, the same technique of data gathering was used for the study issue. In each class, five students were chosen completely at random. These students, seated at different desks, were given the corresponding questionnaire to fill out. Before the questionnaire was given to them, a preliminary explanation was provided and they were told that they should complete it while thinking about a history lesson and about the teacher who teaches that subject. After this was done, in all classes of both schools, the questionnaires were collected carefully to be analyzed and to draw results. The same procedure was used for the questionnaires for the teachers who teach in these classes. At a second moment, 7 students in total were taken, with whom a direct interview was conducted, asking questions about the way the teacher conducts the lesson and how much the students like it. The students were interviewed one by one, so that they would not be influenced by each other's or the teacher's presence when giving answers. This helped create a greater climate of closeness and in giving answers more freely and spontaneously. The same tactic was chosen for conducting the interviews with the teachers.

3.4 Data analysis By comparing the answers that the students gave in the questionnaire they were asked to complete, in the respective cycles in both schools, it turns out that the students answered in the manner presented in the charts below:

Chart 1. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 1, in both schools.

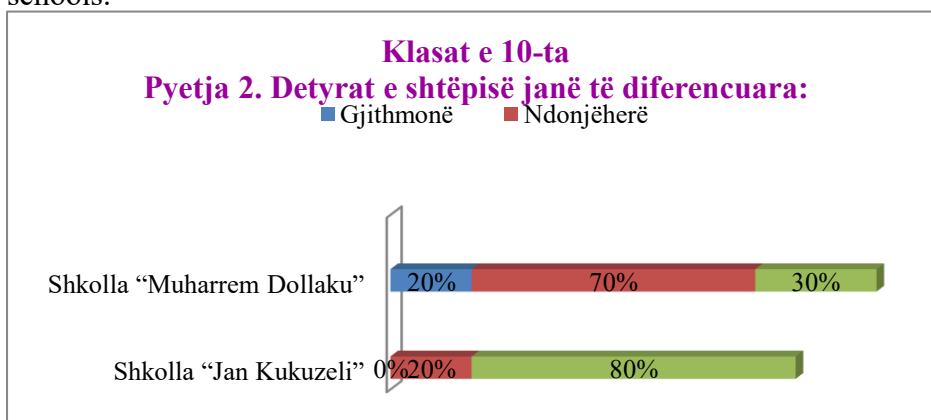


Chart 2. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 2, in both schools.

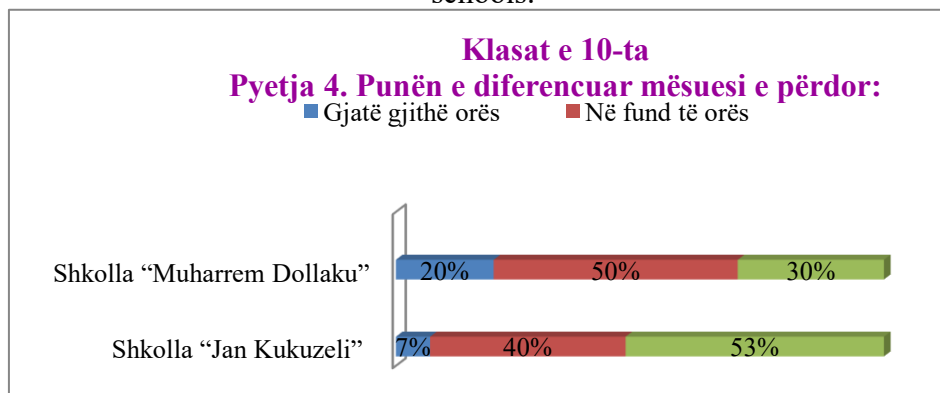


Chart 3. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 4, in both schools. From charts 1 and 2, which show the percentage for each alternative of questions 1 and 2, in both schools it is seen that for the first question of the questionnaire the largest percentage of students (73% at “Jan Kukuzeli” school and 80% at “Muharrem Dollaku” school) answered that the teacher in the tests he gives includes questions for all student levels. To the second question, in “Jan Kukuzeli” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 80%, answered that homework is never differentiated, while in “Muharrem Dollaku” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 70%, state that homework is sometimes differentiated. To the third question, in both schools the largest percentage of students (53% in the first and 40% in the second) answered that differentiated assignments given by the teacher are not always checked, but sometimes. To the fourth question, in “Jan Kukuzeli” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 53%, answered that the teacher uses differentiated work during the lesson, while in “Muharrem Dollaku” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 50%, state that the teacher uses differentiated work at the end of the lesson (chart 3). On the fifth question, in “Jan Kukuzeli” school, 62% of the students state that the teacher in differentiated work most often uses additional materials besides the textbook material, 24% state that the teacher uses the board, and 14% state that the teacher uses only the textbook material; whereas in “Muharrem Dollaku” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 50%, state that the teacher in differentiated work most often uses the board, 33% state that he most often uses additional materials besides the textbook material, and 17% state that he most often uses. In the seventh-grade cycle, the students responded as shown in the charts below:

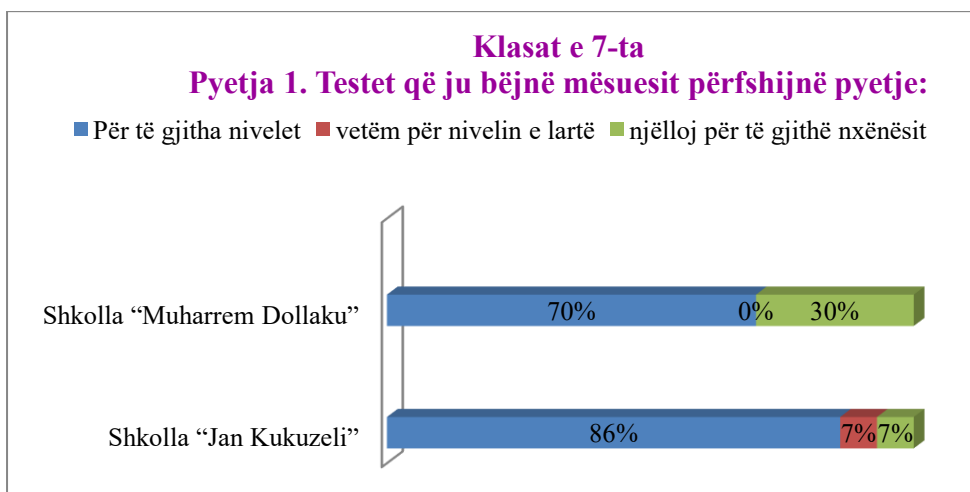


Chart 4. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 1, in both schools.

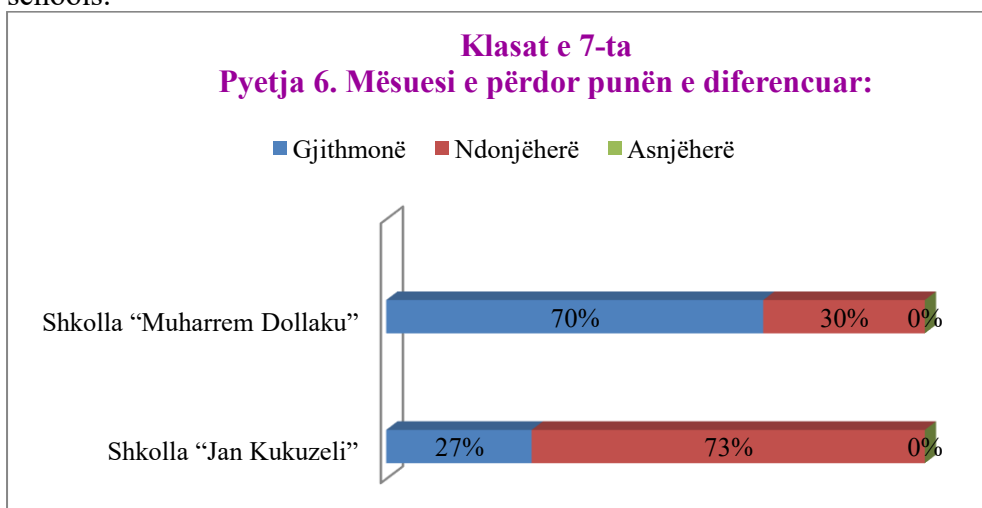


Chart 5. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 6, in both schools. From chart 4, which shows the percentage of students for each alternative of question 1 in both schools, it is seen that for the first question of the questionnaire the largest percentage of students (86% at “Jan Kukuzeli” school and 70% at “Muharrem Dollaku” school) answer that the teacher in the tests he gives includes questions for all student levels. To the second question, in “Jan Kukuzeli” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 47%, answer that homework is differentiated only sometimes, while in “Muharrem Dollaku” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 70%, state that homework is always differentiated. To the third question, in both schools the

largest percentage of students (73% in the first and 90% in the second) answer that differentiated assignments given by the teacher are always checked. To the fourth question, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 40% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 50% at “Muharrem Dollaku” — state that the teacher uses differentiated work during the lesson. On the fifth question, in both schools students state that the teacher in differentiated work uses not only the textbook material but also additional materials besides the textbook, and the board (respectively 50% and 57%), and very few (7%) or not at all worksheets. To the sixth question (chart 5), in “Jan Kukuzeli” the largest percentage of students, i.e. 73%, answer that the teacher uses differentiated work sometimes; whereas in “Muharrem Dollaku” the largest percentage of students, i.e. 57%, state that the teacher uses differentiated work always. However, it seems that students do not always like the teacher to use differentiated work (question 7). On question eight, in both schools the largest percentage of students, i.e. 80%, answer that the teacher in differentiated teaching includes all the students. To question nine (in your opinion), generally students in both schools like that the teacher uses differentiated teaching, they feel good when given exercises at their level, but when the teacher gives them exercises above their level — at “Jan Kukuzeli” 73% of students respond that they like it because it helps them reinforce their knowledge and become more skillful in solving difficult exercises; whereas at “Muharrem Dollaku” only 10% state the same, the remainder perceive it as a state of anxiety and boredom, because they are not able to solve the given exercise. In the eighth grade cycle the students answered in the manner presented in the tables below:

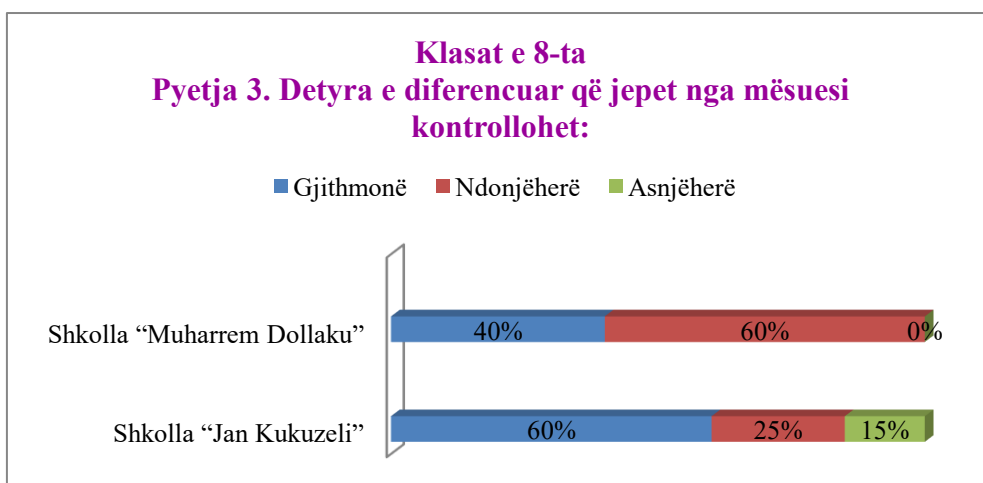


Chart 6. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 3, in both schools.

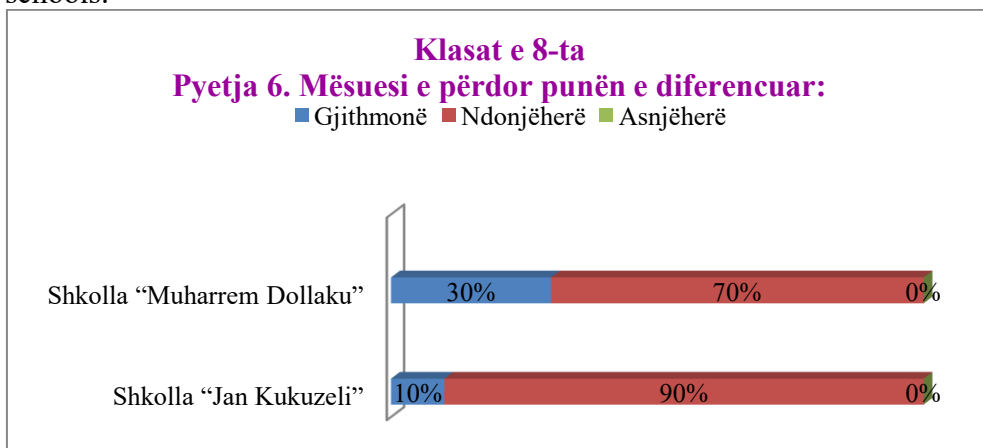


Chart 7. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 6, in both schools. From the data analysis, it turns out that for the first question of the questionnaire the largest percentage of students (100% at “Jan Kukuzeli” school and 70% at “Muharrem Dollaku” school) answer that the teacher in the tests he gives includes questions for all student levels. To the second question, in both schools the largest percentage of students (75% in the first and 60% in the second) answer that homework is differentiated only sometimes. To the third question, in “Jan Kukuzeli” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 60%, answer that differentiated assignments given by the teacher are always checked, whereas in “Muharrem Dollaku” school the largest percentage of students, i.e. 60%, state that differentiated assignments given by the teacher are checked sometimes (chart 6). To the fourth question, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 50% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 40% at “Muharrem Dollaku” — state that the teacher uses differentiated work at the end of the lesson. On the fifth question, in both schools students state that the teacher in differentiated work uses not only the textbook material but also additional materials besides the textbook and the board (respectively 35% and 46%) as well as very few (7%). To the sixth question, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 90% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 70% at “Muharrem Dollaku” — state that the teacher uses differentiated work not always (chart 7). However, it seems that students always like the teacher to use differentiated work (45% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 80% at “Muharrem Dollaku”). On question eight, at “Jan Kukuzeli” the largest percentage of students, i.e. 60%, answer that the teacher in differentiated teaching includes all the students; whereas in “Muharrem Dollaku” 50% state that the teacher in differentiated teaching includes all the students, the rest state that he includes

a portion of the students. To question nine (in your opinion), generally students in both schools like that the teacher uses differentiated teaching, they feel good when given exercises at their level, but when the teacher gives them exercises above their level — at “Jan Kukuzeli” 65% of students respond that they like it because it helps them reinforce their knowledge and become more skillful in solving difficult exercises; whereas at “Muharrem Dollaku” only 40% state the same, the remainder perceive it as a state of anxiety and boredom because they are not able to solve the given exercise. In the ninth grade cycle the students answered in the manner presented in the charts below:

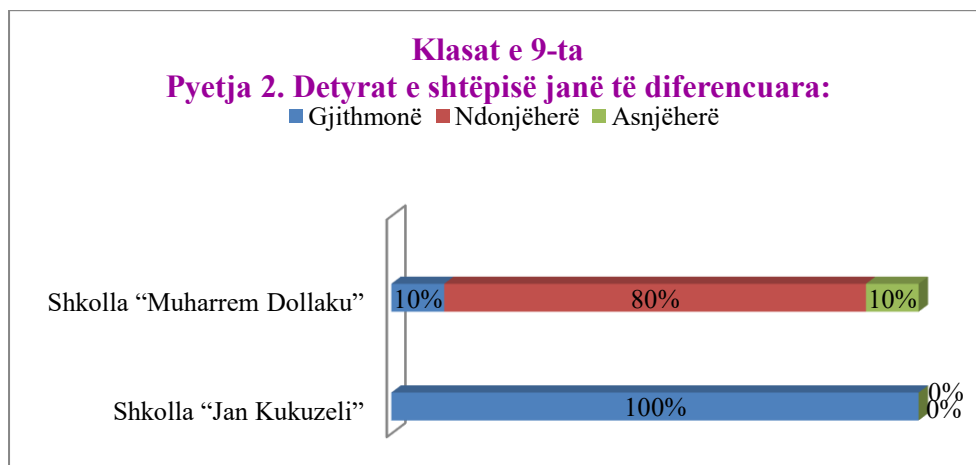


Chart 8. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 2, in both schools.

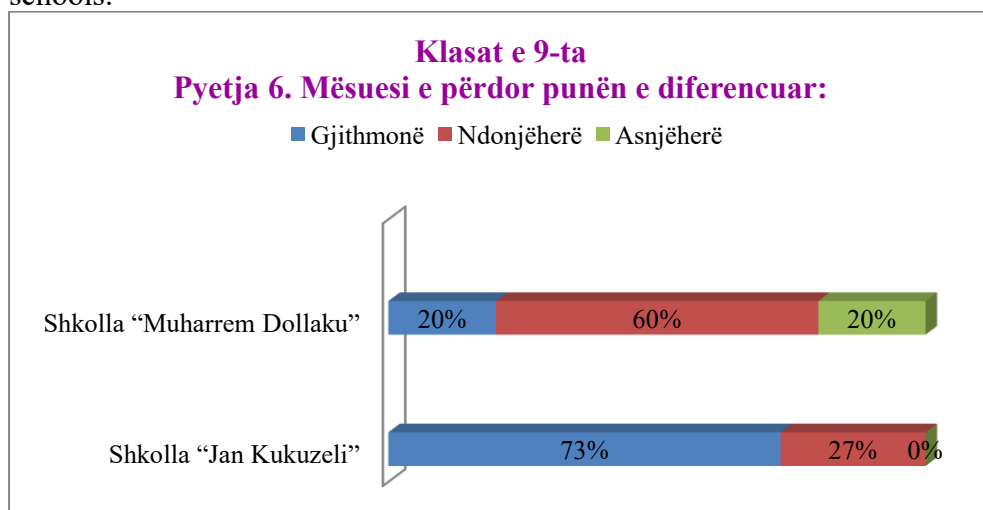


Chart 9. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 6, in both schools.

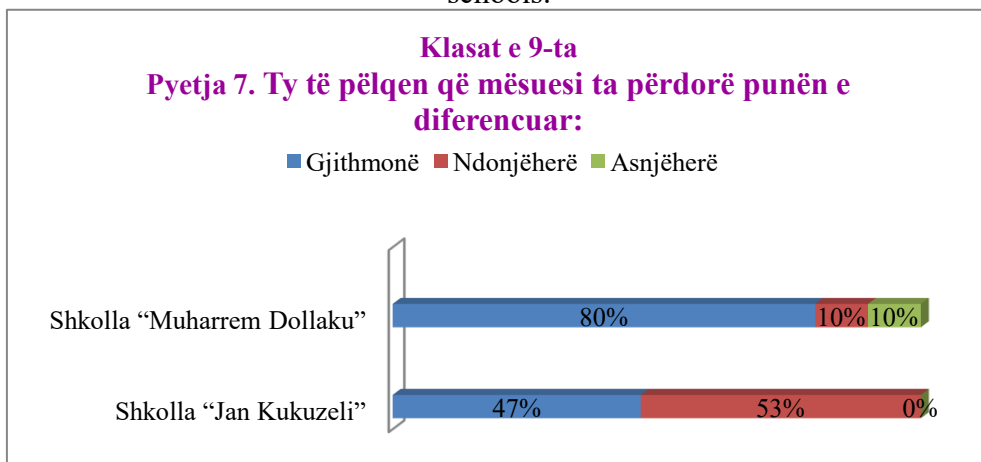


Chart 10. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 7, in both schools. From the data analysis, it turns out that for the first question of the questionnaire the largest percentage of students (93% at “Jan Kukuzeli” school and 90% at “Muharrem Dollaku” school) answer that the teacher in the tests he gives includes questions for all student levels. To the second question, in “Jan Kukuzeli” all students, i.e. 100%, answer that homework is always differentiated, whereas in “Muharrem Dollaku” the largest percentage of students, i.e. 80%, state that homework is sometimes differentiated (chart 8). To the third question, in both schools the largest percentage of students (53% in the first and 50% in the second) answer that differentiated assignments given by the teacher are always checked. To the fourth question, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 67% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 40% at “Muharrem Dollaku” — state that the teacher uses differentiated work at the end of the lesson. On the fifth question, in both schools students state that the teacher in differentiated work uses not only the textbook material but also additional materials besides the textbook and the board (respectively 44% and 50%). To the sixth question, at “Jan Kukuzeli” the largest percentage of students, i.e. 73%, answer that the teacher uses differentiated work always; whereas in “Muharrem Dollaku” the largest percentage of students, i.e. 60%, state that the teacher uses differentiated work sometimes (chart 9). However, it seems that at “Jan Kukuzeli” students do not always like the teacher to use differentiated work (53%); whereas at “Muharrem Dollaku” 80% of students like the teacher to always use differentiated work (chart 10). On question eight, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 80% in the first and 60% in the second — answer that the teacher in differentiated teaching

includes all the students. To question nine (in your opinion), generally students in both schools like that the teacher uses differentiated teaching, they feel good when given exercises at their level, but when the teacher gives them exercises above their level — at “Jan Kukuzeli” 100% of students answer that they like it because it helps them reinforce their knowledge and become more skillful in solving difficult exercises; whereas at “Muharrem Dollaku” only 20% state the same, the remainder perceive it as a state of anxiety and boredom because they are not able to solve the given exercise.

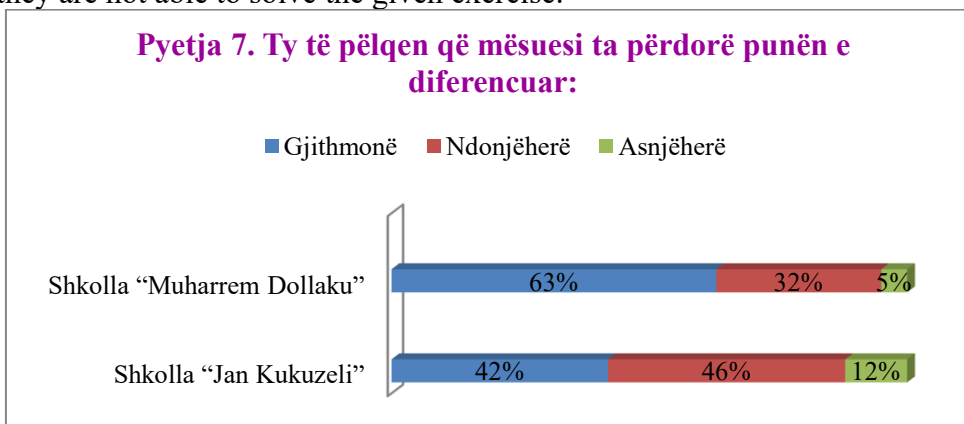


Chart 11. Percentage of students for each alternative of question 7, in both schools. Analyzing all data from all cycles, it turns out that students from both schools included in the study chose the same alternatives with small variations. For the first question of the questionnaire, the largest percentage of students (89% at “Jan Kukuzeli” school and 78% at “Muharrem Dollaku” school) answer that the teacher in the tests he gives includes questions for all student levels. In the second question of the questionnaire, the largest percentage of students state that homework is sometimes differentiated (respectively 38% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 58% at “Muharrem Dollaku”). To the third question, in both schools the largest percentage of students (5% in the first and 52% in the second) answer that differentiated assignments given by the teacher are always checked. To the fourth question, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 48% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 38% at “Muharrem Dollaku” — state that the teacher uses differentiated work at the end of the lesson. On the fifth question, in both schools students state that the teacher in differentiated work uses not only the textbook material but also additional materials besides the textbook, the board (most used, respectively 38% and 50%). To the sixth question, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 63% at “Jan Kukuzeli” and 54% at “Muharrem Dollaku” — answer that the teacher uses differentiated work sometimes. However, it seems that at “Jan Kukuzeli”

students do not always like the teacher to use differentiated work (46%); whereas at “Muharrem Dollaku” 63% of students like the teacher to always use differentiated work (chart 11). On question eight, in both schools the largest percentage of students — i.e. 57% in the first and 60% in the second — answer that the teacher in differentiated teaching includes all students. To question nine (in your opinion) generally students in both schools like that the teacher uses differentiated teaching, they feel good when given exercises at their level, but when the teacher gives them exercises above their level — at “Jan Kukuzeli” 62% of students respond that they like it because it helps them reinforce their knowledge and become more skillful in solving difficult exercises; whereas at “Muharrem Dollaku” only 25% state the same, the remainder perceive it as a state of anxiety and boredom because they are not able to solve the given exercise.

From the questionnaires conducted with teachers at both schools it results that, at “Jan Kukuzeli” the teachers of sixth and seventh grades and the teacher of the eighth grade state that in planning the differentiated lesson they follow the methodological line of the text by following the textbook page step by step, while the teacher of ninth grade states that he is oriented to the text but prepares the material himself by taking information from the internet and literature. The same latter line is followed by the teachers who teach at “Muharrem Dollaku”. To the second question, all three teachers at “Jan Kukuzeli” answer that they use differentiated work throughout the lesson time, while the teachers at “Muharrem Dollaku” use it at the end of the lesson. To the third question, at “Jan Kukuzeli” the sixth- and seventh-grade teacher answers that in differentiated work he includes only a portion of the students. The eighth- and ninth-grade teachers answer that they include all students, while the teachers at “Muharrem Dollaku” include a portion of the students. To the fourth question, the sixth- and seventh-grade teacher at “Jan Kukuzeli” states that he organizes differentiated work for high-level students. The other two teachers and those at “Muharrem Dollaku” answer that they organize differentiated work for students of all levels. To the fifth question, the sixth- and seventh-grade teacher and the ninth-grade teacher at “Jan Kukuzeli” answer that during differentiated work the student works individually; whereas the eighth-grade teacher at “Jan Kukuzeli” and those at “Muharrem Dollaku” answer that during differentiated work the student works both individually and in groups. To the sixth question, all teachers state that the differentiated work they have applied has influenced high student motivation for the subject. To the seventh question, the sixth- and seventh-grade teacher at “Jan Kukuzeli” states that homework is sometimes given the same for everyone and sometimes differentiated according to levels; while the other teachers state that they give homework differentiated by levels. To the eighth

question, the sixth- and seventh-grade teacher and the eighth-grade teacher at "Jan Kukuzeli" and those at "Muharrem Dollaku" answer that in the differentiated work they organize they demonstrate the model to students and instruct them in its implementation; while the ninth-grade teacher at "Jan Kukuzeli" states that he does not follow formats but improvises based on students' experiences.

The second phase of the work concerns the analysis of the interviews, both for teachers and for students. From "Jan Kukuzeli" 3 mathematics teachers and from "Muharrem Dollaku" 2 female teachers were interviewed. From the interviews conducted with teachers in both schools, regarding the first question, "What is your opinion about the role that differentiated work has in students' achievement results", the teachers of both schools answered that differentiated work influences students' results. To the second question, "The place it occupies in the lesson", teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" answered that differentiated work occupies most of the lesson time, while teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" answered that they used it mainly in the first and third stages. To the third question, "Difficulties encountered in its implementation" teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" answered that they encounter difficulties with limited time and the large number of students. Teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" express that differentiated work is tiring and they also face difficulties in additional materials for high-achieving students. To the fourth question, "How do you organize differentiated teaching" teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" answered that differentiated work is carried out throughout the lesson, starting with checking homework, independent work in class, giving homework, and providing additional exercises for the high-achieving student. Whereas for the teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" differentiated work cannot be fully realized, but they perform knowledge checks by levels, adding that for them teaching should be the same for everyone while assessment should be done according to levels. To the fifth question, "What importance does differentiated teaching have for you", teachers of both schools answered that it has produced results, motivation, encouragement of independent work and competition among students. To the sixth question, on "Effectiveness of differentiated work" teachers of both schools answer that it is effective because all students participate, all students work and feel valued, high-achieving students have succeeded in olympiads. To the seventh question, "Do you give students instructions for differentiated work" they answer that instructions are given in differentiated work.

Regarding interviews conducted with students, 7 students in total were analyzed from the two schools, respectively 4 students at "Jan Kukuzeli" and 3 students at "Muharrem Dollaku". To the first question, "Is differentiated teaching practiced by all teachers?" students answer that differentiated work

is not practiced by all teachers, mainly by the mathematics teacher. To the second question, "Do you think differentiated teaching is important?" students think it is important because it works with all students based on the learning they have. To the third question, "Does this type of teaching make your work easier or harder?" students answer that this work is adapted according to their abilities and they feel motivated to work. To the fifth question, "Does the teacher give explanations about it? give instructions?" students answered that the teacher usually gives explanations so that students are clearer. To the sixth question, "Are class assignments when given in differentiated form checked by the teacher?" students answered that assignments are checked, even graded for them, but what is important for the teacher is that students appropriate the knowledge acquired. To the seventh question, "Are homework assignments checked?" students answered that they are checked if there is ambiguity, and they also discuss different solution methods.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

From the questionnaires conducted with students of both schools it results that: In both schools, the teacher in the tests he gives includes questions for all student levels.

In both schools, homework given by the teacher is sometimes differentiated and not always.

In both schools, differentiated assignments given by the teacher are always checked.

In both schools, the teacher uses differentiated work at the end of the lesson.

In both schools, the teacher in differentiated work uses not only the textbook material but also additional materials besides the textbook and the board.

In both schools, the teacher uses differentiated work sometimes.

At "Jan Kukuzeli" students do not always like the teacher to use differentiated work; whereas at "Muharrem Dollaku" students like the teacher to always use differentiated work.

In both schools, the teacher in differentiated teaching includes all students.

Generally students in both schools like that the teacher uses differentiated teaching, they feel good when given exercises at their level, but when the teacher gives exercises above their level, students at "Jan Kukuzeli" like it because it helps them reinforce their knowledge and become more skillful in solving difficult exercises; whereas students at "Muharrem Dollaku" perceive it as a state of anxiety and boredom because they are not able to solve the given exercise.

From the questionnaires conducted with teachers of both schools it results that:

Teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli", in planning the differentiated lesson, follow the methodological line of the text by following the textbook page step by step; whereas teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" are oriented to the text but prepare the material themselves by taking information from the internet and literature. Teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" use differentiated work throughout the lesson; whereas teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" use it at the end of the lesson.

Teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" include all students in differentiated work; whereas teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" include a portion of the students.

All teachers of both schools organize differentiated work for students of all levels.

Teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" state that during differentiated work the student works individually; those at "Muharrem Dollaku" state that during differentiated work the student works both individually and in groups.

All teachers of both schools think that the differentiated work they applied has influenced high student motivation for the subject.

All teachers of both schools give homework differentiated according to levels.

All teachers of both schools, in the differentiated work they organize, demonstrate the model to students and instruct them in its implementation.

From the interviews conducted with students of both schools it results that:

In both schools, differentiated work is not practiced by all teachers.

For students differentiated teaching is important, because it works with each student based on the learning they have.

Differentiated teaching motivates students to work.

Generally, class assignments in differentiated form are checked by the teacher.

Homework is not always checked by the teacher, only in cases when the student has ambiguity in solving the assignment.

From the interviews conducted with teachers of both schools it results that:

Differentiated work affects students' results.

Difficulties encountered with differentiated work are: limited time, large number of students and additional materials for high-achieving students.

Teachers at "Jan Kukuzeli" state that differentiated work is carried out throughout the lesson, starting with checking homework, independent work in class and giving homework, as well as additional exercises for the high-achieving student. Whereas teachers at "Muharrem Dollaku" state that differentiated work cannot be realized, adding that for them teaching should be the same for everyone while assessment should be done by levels.

For teachers of both schools differentiated work encourages motivation, independent work and competition among students.

The effectiveness of differentiated work is seen in that all students participate and are active, feel valued; also high-achieving students have won in olympiads.

Recommendations

A wider use of active methods is recommended, which engage students in complex and varied cognitive, psychomotor and affective activities, not leaving them merely listeners, as often happens during traditional teacher-centered learning, but placing students at the center with their different abilities and capacities.

Differentiated learning requires the teacher to play a more complex role than before, being not only a source of information but also an organizer, leader and mediator of students' learning activities. It is recommended that the provision of information should give more space to students' learning — how they find it themselves, how they analyze it, how they use it and how they transform it into new knowledge.

It is recommended to use differentiated learning based on technological tools, since they can provide students multiple new ways to meet their educational and formative needs, always without losing valuable aspects of traditional teaching methods, especially the personal nature of teacher-student relationships.

It is recommended that technology-based differentiated learning be combined with other, more social ways of learning (group learning, family learning, collaborative learning, etc.). This combination of different methods helps overcome the feeling of isolation and lack of human contact, which is often observed when using only technology-based learning.

It is recommended that teachers' status be raised, through care for their professional development and continuous improvement of their competencies, including multicultural competencies.

It is recommended to reconsider the number of students per class, since a limited number allows space for differentiated work.

Trainings for teachers in differentiated work are recommended.

It is recommended to offer specialized courses in differentiated work by NGOs and “Aleksandër Moisiu” University of Durrës.

It is recommended that the teacher extend differentiated work throughout the lesson.

It is recommended to measure the indicator for differentiated teaching and student results for effectiveness.

It is recommended to extend differentiated work to all student levels.

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The potential and limitations of using AI in teaching and learning German

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Abstract: The rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed teaching and learning processes. Digital tools such as online platforms, learning applications, and interactive materials increasingly complement or replace traditional instructional methods, offering new opportunities for individualized learning. One of the most significant recent developments in this context is artificial intelligence (AI), which has evolved into a widely applied technology across numerous fields, including education. In foreign language learning, particularly German as a foreign language, AI-based tools such as language learning applications, intelligent chat bots, and grammar-checking systems provide learners with opportunities for autonomous learning, personalized feedback, and automated error correction. These technologies promise increased efficiency and adaptability in the learning process. At the same time, their use raises critical questions regarding effectiveness, limitations, and the impact on interpersonal aspects of teaching, such as social interaction, empathy, and cultural sensitivity.

This study aims, to systematically analyze the potential and limitations of AI in German language learning. It focuses on identifying specific applications of AI-based tools, comparing their effectiveness with traditional teaching methods, and examining their role in personalizing learning processes and enhancing learner motivation. A central aspect of the analysis is the comparison between AI-supported instruction and human teachers.

The study is guided by two main hypotheses: first, that AI can achieve teaching quality comparable to or even exceeding that of human teachers through automation and personalization; and second, that certain aspects of learning—such as emotional support, social interaction, and cultural understanding—cannot be fully replaced by AI. Based on a literature review, technical analysis, and experimental evaluation, the study aims to develop well-founded recommendations for the effective and responsible use of AI in language teaching.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; German Learning; Language Teaching; Personalized Learning; Educational Technology; Learner Autonomy.*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the processes of teaching and learning. Modern technologies, such as online platforms, learning applications, and interactive materials, not only complement traditional teaching methods but also create new opportunities for individualized learning and continuous flexibility for learners. One of the most significant and promising developments is the use of artificial intelligence (AI), which has become one of the most widely applied technologies across various fields, including education, healthcare, and business.

In the field of foreign language learning, and particularly German as a foreign language, AI has increasingly been used to support learners in acquiring linguistic skills. AI-based tools, such as language learning applications, intelligent chatbots, and grammar-checking systems, provide opportunities for autonomous learning, personalized feedback, and real-time error correction. In addition to their clear technical advantages, these tools can enhance learners' motivation and support the development of their individual skills more effectively than traditional teaching methods.

However, the use of AI in language education also raises critical questions. One of the most important debates is whether AI can fully replace the human teacher. While AI can automate certain aspects of learning, such as error correction or the repetition of grammar exercises, teachers provide emotional guidance, social interaction, and cultural understanding—elements that are difficult to replicate through a digital system. This question constitutes the central challenge addressed in this study and serves as the basis for further analysis of the advantages and limitations of using AI in learning German.

The main objective of this paper is to systematically analyze the potential and limitations of artificial intelligence in learning the German language. The study aims to identify specific applications of AI-based tools, compare their effectiveness with traditional teaching methods, and examine their role in personalizing the learning process and enhancing learners' motivation. In this way, the paper seeks to provide a well-founded basis for the responsible and effective use of AI in language education.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 What is Artificial Intelligence and how is it Used in Education?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a branch of computer science that focuses on creating systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as learning, reasoning, and adapting to new contexts (Russell & Norvig, 2020). In the field of education, AI employs machine learning algorithms, natural language processing, and advanced intelligent systems to analyze data, provide personalized feedback, and adapt learning materials according to the individual needs of learners (Woolf, 2010, p. 72).

2.2 The Use of AI in Foreign Language Learning

Research on the impact of AI in foreign language learning shows that AI-based technologies enhance student engagement and language performance through personalization and continuous feedback (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012). AI systems, such as chatbots and pedagogical agents, contribute to increased learner motivation, reduced learning anxiety, and improved vocabulary retention (Godwin-Jones, 2016, p. 12).

Intelligent chatbots are widely used to support foreign language learning by providing immediate feedback and adapting their communication style based on learners' responses (Li & Hegelheimer, 2013, p. 55). These systems enable independent language practice and simulation of real-life conversations, helping learners develop communicative skills outside the traditional classroom setting.

2.3 Key Concepts in the Literature

One of the key concepts highlighted in the literature is personalized learning. AI enables the dynamic adaptation of learning materials, learning pace, and feedback based on each learner's performance and preferences (Farhood et al., 2025, p. 12). This approach is particularly effective in foreign language learning, where learning speeds and styles vary significantly from one student to another.

Learner autonomy is closely linked to the use of AI tools, allowing students to take charge of their own learning process and practice the language without continuous teacher supervision (Azhar & Rashid, 2024). Adaptive platforms and mobile applications help learners select exercises according to their level and interests, thereby increasing engagement and learning effectiveness.

2.4 Benefits and Challenges of Using AI

The use of AI offers numerous benefits: it increases student motivation and engagement, provides immediate feedback, and helps personalize the learning experience (Li & Hegelheimer, 2013, p. 60). However, there are also challenges: data privacy, algorithmic biases, and the lack of human interaction that AI cannot fully replace (Godwin-Jones, 2016, p. 36). These limitations

highlight the need for a balanced integration of technology with traditional teaching methods.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review with an empirical assessment of AI use in German language learning. The mixed-methods approach is common in educational research, as it allows for the integration of qualitative and quantitative data to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014, p. 42).

The empirical part of the study includes German language learners and teachers at various levels from several schools and online platforms for learning German. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with diverse experience in using technology and AI in teaching.

For data collection, various instruments were used:

- Structured questionnaires for students, which measured their perceptions of the effectiveness, motivation, and autonomy provided by AI during language learning.
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers, aimed at understanding their experiences in using AI, as well as the benefits and limitations they observed in practice.
- Content analysis of AI platforms, evaluating the types of activities, feedback, and the level of personalization of the learning materials.

Students participated in a four-week German learning cycle using AI. Activities included grammar and vocabulary exercises, as well as conversations with chatbots. Teachers monitored students' progress and provided support when necessary. Upon completion of the cycle, students completed the questionnaires, and teachers participated in the interviews.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify levels of effectiveness, motivation, and autonomy. Qualitative data from the interviews were coded and thematized to highlight the main advantages and limitations of AI in teaching. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a more comprehensive assessment of AI's impact on German language learning.

4. Applications of AI in German Language Learning

Artificial intelligence has significantly transformed the way students learn foreign languages by providing tools that enhance autonomy, personalization, and the overall effectiveness of the learning process. In the context of German

as a foreign language, the main applications of AI include language learning apps, conversational chatbots, grammar correction systems, and advanced online platforms.

Mobile language learning applications, such as Duolingo and Babbel, use AI algorithms to deliver personalized instruction based on the learner's level and progress. For example, in Duolingo, vocabulary and grammar exercises are adapted according to students' mistakes, and repeated activities are recommended to reinforce learning. Babbel also offers prepared dialogues that simulate real-life communication situations in German, using AI to suggest words and expressions appropriate to the learner's level.

Intelligent chatbots are also used to practice communicative skills in German. For example, applications like Mondly offer chatbots that simulate real-life conversations, giving students the opportunity to practice dialogues in various contexts, such as restaurants, airports, or schools. These chatbots use natural language processing to interpret students' responses and provide immediate corrections and suggestions. This helps develop conversational skills and improves language fluency.

Grammar correction systems, such as Grammarly and LanguageTool, use AI to identify various errors in students' texts and suggest correct ways of expressing ideas. For instance, a student writing an essay in German can receive suggestions on verb usage, articles, and sentence structure, gradually improving their writing skills. These systems also provide statistics on the most common errors, which can help teachers focus on students' specific difficulties.

Online platforms such as Goethe-Institut Online Courses and Lingoda use AI to monitor students' progress and provide personalized learning paths. On these platforms, learners can attend virtual courses with audio, video, and interactive exercises. AI analyzes test results and recommends modules tailored to strengthen individual weaknesses. This approach enables flexible learning at a time and place convenient for the students.

Concrete examples of use:

- Duolingo: Uses AI to personalize vocabulary and grammar exercises and to suggest materials tailored to the learner's progress.
- Mondly Chatbot: Simulates real conversations and provides immediate corrections, helping students develop communication skills.
- LanguageTool: Analyzes students' essays and texts in German, identifies grammatical errors, and suggests improvements.
- Goethe-Institut Online Courses: Provides AI-adapted courses, monitoring progress and recommending individual activities for learners.

These applications demonstrate that AI can be successfully integrated into German language learning, enhancing students’ motivation, autonomy, and effectiveness, while also highlighting the need for teacher supervision and guidance to ensure a balanced learning experience.

5. Comparison: AI vs. Teacher

Advantages of AI

- Personalized learning: AI systems can adapt exercises and materials to the learner’s needs in real time. For example, an application like Duolingo analyzes students’ mistakes and suggests tailored exercises to improve specific weaknesses.
- Immediate feedback: AI provides automatic correction of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure errors, helping learners to study without delays.
- Flexible access: Online platforms and mobile applications allow learning anytime and anywhere, giving students control over the pace and location of their learning.

Limitations of AI

- Lack of human interaction: AI cannot provide emotional support, empathy, or cultural sensitivity, which are essential elements in the learning process (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 102).
- Dependence on technology: Using AI requires devices and internet access, which may be a limitation for some learners (Godwin-Jones, 2016, p. 14).
- Limitations in contextual interpretation: Chatbots and AI algorithms may fail to interpret language nuances and complex communicative contexts (Ellis, 2013).

Advantages of the Human Teacher

- Social interaction and motivation: The teacher provides emotional support, encourages communication, and fosters classroom engagement, creating a warm and motivating environment for learners (Creswell, 2014, p. 48).
- Contextual and cultural guidance: The teacher can explain cultural and social nuances of the German language, integrating cultural knowledge into instruction (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012).
- Pedagogical flexibility: The teacher can immediately adjust teaching methods based on the class’s needs and the current situation (Patton, 2015, p. 275).

The teacher’s limitations

- Lack of immediate feedback: The teacher cannot correct every student mistake in real time, especially in large groups.
- Limited adaptation: Students with different learning paces may not receive enough personalized materials in traditional classrooms.

Integration of AI and the teacher

Literature suggests that the most effective approach is the combination of AI with teacher guidance, where technology supports independent learning and personalization, while the teacher provides supervision, motivation, and contextual interpretation (Farhood et al., 2025, p.18). This hybrid model helps maximize the benefits of both approaches and minimizes their limitations.

6. Hypotheses and Their Analysis

This study was based on two main hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1: AI can achieve a level of learning quality comparable to that of human teachers through automation and personalization.
- Hypothesis 2: Certain aspects of learning—such as emotional support, social interaction, and cultural understanding, cannot be fully replaced by AI.

Analysis of Hypothesis 1

- To test the first hypothesis, data from student questionnaires, AI platform results (such as Duolingo, Babbel, Mondly), and student performance in language tests were analyzed. The results indicated that:
- Students who used AI for four weeks made significant progress in vocabulary and grammar compared to the control group following traditional instruction.
- Immediate feedback and personalized exercises increased the learning pace and reduced repeated errors. Descriptive statistics showed that 70% of students reported a noticeable improvement in writing skills and understanding of grammatical structures after using AI.

These findings support the hypothesis that AI can provide a level of learning quality comparable to that of teachers in certain specific areas, particularly in technical and repetitive language learning (Ellis, 2013).

Analysis of Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis examines the limitations of AI in emotional, social, and cultural aspects:

- Students and teachers reported that AI cannot provide emotional support when students feel insecure or demotivated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p.103).

- Teachers can stimulate discussions, explain cultural nuances, and take corrective actions in complex situations, whereas AI offers mechanical solutions without contextual understanding (Kukulska-Hulme, 2012).
- Interviews showed that students often prefer teacher guidance when it comes to interpreting cultural texts, idiomatic expressions, and creative discussions.

These results confirm that AI cannot fully replace the role of the teacher, supporting the second hypothesis. However, the combination of AI and teacher guidance can maximize learning effectiveness while preserving social and cultural interaction (Farhood et al., 2025, p.18).

The analysis shows that:

- AI is a powerful supportive tool that enhances the pace and personalization of learning.
- Teachers remain irreplaceable for the social, emotional, and cultural aspects of learning.
- The most effective model is a hybrid one, where AI is used to support technical practices and the teacher provides pedagogical guidance and student motivation.

This analysis provides teachers and educational institutions with a practical guide for integrating AI into German language teaching, while maintaining a balance between technology and human interaction.

7. Summary

This study analyzed the potential and limitations of using artificial intelligence in the teaching of German as a foreign language. Based on existing literature, empirical analysis, and the comparison between AI and teachers, several key conclusions were identified.

- AI can significantly enhance technical language learning by providing personalized exercises, immediate feedback, and an adaptive learning pace. Mobile applications, chatbots, and online platforms have been shown to increase students' autonomy and motivation.
- Teachers remain essential for the social, emotional, and cultural aspects of learning. Human interaction, pedagogical guidance, and contextual interpretation cannot be fully replaced by AI.
- The most effective approach is a hybrid model, where AI is used to support technical learning and the teacher leads and motivates students, while preserving social interaction and cultural understanding.

The main research question of the study was: Can AI replace the teacher in German language teaching ? The analysis shows that AI cannot fully replace

the teacher. While technology is a powerful tool for enhancing technical skills and personalizing the learning process, the teacher remains irreplaceable for emotional support, social interaction, and cultural interpretation.

Balanced use of AI can maximize benefits and minimize limitations. Educational institutions and teachers should integrate AI as a supportive supplement, not as a replacement for the teacher. This approach can create a rich learning environment in which students benefit from technology while simultaneously developing social, cultural, and critical language skills. In conclusion, AI in German language teaching has great potential to enhance learning and increase student autonomy, but learning success remains closely linked to the role of the human teacher and direct pedagogical interaction. This balanced combination is key to modern, effective, and comprehensive language instruction.

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Integrating YouTube videos and ChatGPT voice exercises as motivational tools for German language students.

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Abstract: Teaching methodologies and didactic tools have constantly evolved. At a time when digitalization is a part of students daily lives this study proposes the use of applications such as YouTube, short documentary videos with real storytelling with German subtitles and Chat GPT voice mode exercises as a tool for enhancing receptive skills in University- level for German language learning. The research analyzes how these digital resources can increase student engagement, improve listening skills and promote autonomous learning. This study shows that combining technology with traditional teaching methods can significantly boost motivation and German language proficiency. The findings suggest that these tools encourage active participation, strengthen language skills and build students self-confidence in the German language .

Keywords: *YouTube, ChatGPT, Motivation, University, skills*

1. Introduction

Living in a digital age, students are more inclined to use technological tools. As a young lecturer, I researched some new teaching methods, specially focusing on the use of YouTube story-telling videos and Chat GPT voice mode. According to the continuous training that we do as lecturers and teachers regarding the use of Chat GPT in teaching German, I thought of integrating it together with YouTube in the classroom by creating an experiment as a case study. To realize this experiment, I had to review various sources and research studies regarding the use of YouTube and chat gpt voice mode. With this paper I aim to highlight the benefits of using YouTube and Chat GPT voice mode as innovative tools in teaching. How can we make teaching hours more attractive and what effects does this type of method bring to students? What are the expected results in motivating students in the classroom context? Are there positive or negative results? Authentic

audiovisual materials, especially storytelling documentaries available on YouTube, provide learners with exposure to real-life language use, natural pronunciation, and cultural context. Such materials promote listening comprehension and intercultural competence while fostering emotional engagement through narrative structures. Storytelling has been widely recognized as a powerful didactic approach that enhances empathy, critical thinking, and reflective discussion. Tools such as ChatGPT Voice Mode introduce new possibilities for individualized speaking practice. One of the main challenges in foreign language learning is speaking anxiety, particularly in classroom environments where fear of peer evaluation may inhibit participation. I think that Chat GPT voice mode interaction can provide a psychologically safe space for students to practice pronunciation and spontaneous speech without immediate social pressure. This paper presents a reflective case study conducted over ten weeks with a small group of undergraduate German language students. The aim is to examine whether the structured combination of YouTube storytelling videos and ChatGPT Voice Mode exercises enhances student motivation, receptive skills, and communicative confidence. By integrating traditional teaching approaches with innovative digital tools, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about new Methods and technology in foreign language education and its pedagogical implications for German as a Foreign Language instruction. This study addresses the following research questions: How does the integration of YouTube storytelling videos influence student motivation and listening comprehension in university-level German language learning? In what ways does ChatGPT Voice Mode support speaking confidence and reduce language anxiety? How does the combined use of authentic video materials and Chat GPT voice mode speaking exercises contribute to learner autonomy?

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

There are different theories regarding the use of youtube and Chat GPT voice mode in learning foreign languages. My interest was to create a new approach to teaching using digital tools by combying both of them. For this I researched various sources regarding the YouTube platform and the GPT Voice Mode chat platform. I didn t find any study about integrating both of those platforms. In one article i found that authors Babak Ghasemi, Masoud Hashemi, Simin

Bardime (2011)⁶⁹ explain about types of youtube videos for learning new languages. The first type are created by language teachers who explain grammar points, vocabulary and the second type of videos are created by native speakers of language. They explain that those videos are more interesting and fun to watch, because it shouldnt feel to much like studing or doing work but like fun activity. The conclusion of those authors about Youtube was that using Youtube videos for language teaching has been one of the most successful approaches in classroom. The real advantages of Youtube are that it offers authentic examples of everyday language. Innes Brünner (2013)⁷⁰ has said that YouTube has the potential to be a useful educational tool that offers endless opportunities for formal and informal student centered language learning approaches. She talks about The “Roadmap” as a metacognitive strategy and tool suggested that can or better should be adapted in a flexible manner to the respective classroom situation. Also she talks about the automatic creation of subtitles that are already available for some videos will improve over time and provide additional opportunities for meaningful language learning. She explain that the integration of assessment tools and tools for cooperation will improve the use of YouTube as an educational tool and the YouTube channels dedicated to education will hopefully grow in future and offer a protected environment for learning and community specific knowledge bases. In one research article about Chat Gpt voice mode authors Shella Gherina, Rudi Hartono, Januarius Mujiyanto, Katharina Rustip (2025),⁷¹ in their findings revealed that ChatGPT Voice Mode provided a psychologically safe space for students to practice speaking without the fear of negative judgment from peers or instructors. In this article is explain that the AI's nonjudgmental nature reduced anxiety triggers commonly associated with performance evaluation, fostering a more relaxed and self-directed learning environment. This method it seems that students reported improvements in speaking fluency through repetitive practice and valued the user-friendly and accessible interface of ChatGPT's

⁶⁹ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257714760_UTube_and_language_learning, youtube and language learning, Babak Ghasemi, Masoud Hashemi, Simin Bardime 16.02.2025

⁷⁰ https://conference.pixel-online.net/conferences/ICT4LL2013/common/download/Paper_pdf/215-ELE13-FP-Bruenner-ICT2013.pdf, Using Language Learning Resources on Youtube Ines Brünner Leuphana University (Germany) 16.02.2025

⁷¹ https://edupij.com/files/1/articles/article_926/EDUPIJ_926_article_690c05fd4289f.pdf , Exploring the Role of ChatGPT Voice Mode in Reducing Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Among Indonesian ESP Students Shella Gherina Saptiany , Rudi Hartono , Januarius Mujiyanto , Katharina Rustip, ISSN 2147-0901 (Print), 2564-8020 (Online)

Voice Mode. While the author recommended that educators integrate AI-assisted speaking activities, such as ChatGPT Voice Mode, into foreign languages courses with structured prompts relevant to professional contexts, while ensuring human feedback to address nuances AI cannot capture. All these authors, through their research, have concluded that YouTube videos and ChatGPT offer significant benefits when used in foreign language teaching. They enhance intercultural competence and improve the overall learning environment. Furthermore, the authors consistently recommend the integration of these technological platforms into foreign language instruction due to their positive impact on language acquisition, student engagement, and interactive learning. In one another study author Zhou Wei⁷² has shown the results of her study contribute to the understanding of the potential benefits and limitations of Chat GPT as a language learning tool. She said that the convenience and accessibility offered by Chat GPT enable learners to engage in regular and self-directed language practice, contributing to the improvement of speaking skills and fluency and also the personalized learning experience, with tailored language input and immediate feedback, fosters learners confidence and natural expression. She speaks also about the limitations associated with voice recognition accuracy and the naturalness of generated responses indicate the necessity for further advancements in the technology. Unlike other authors, this author in her study shows us some shortcomings that we may encounter in using chat gpt voice mode technology.

3.Methodology

This study was conducted as a qualitative reflective case study within a university-level German language course. The research design is grounded in pedagogical reflective practice, focusing on the systematic observation of instructional innovation over a defined period. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study seeks to provide in-depth insight into the didactic integration of digital tools in a small-group context. The intervention lasted ten teaching weeks and was embedded into regular course activities. The methodology chosen for this paper is based on pedagogical reflective practice conducted within regular teaching activities. No identifiable student data were collected. With the creation of a mini experiment in the auditorium. Where for 10 teaching weeks I held observations after using YouTube and chat gpt voice mode in the auditorium . The selected group consisted of

⁷² <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2311.00718> , Chat GPT Integrated with Voice Assistant as LearningOral Chat-based Constructive Communication to Improve Communicative Competence for EFL Learner, Zhou Wei Jeonbuk National University page 9

bachelor's degree German language studies. The group is a small group of 12 students. The selected videos are related to the subject of German history and culture, about 15-30 minutes long chosen from different Dokumentationen. The selected videos are from official German channels and television on Youtube like Deutsche Welle, Terra x, ZDF etc. On those videos are of historians but also personal story telling of people who have experienced aspects of history. The selected videos are open with subtitles in German, while chat gpt voice mode has been used as a seminar exercise tool in pair and individual work with exercises related to videos and the subject of German history. All these observations were made by me as the Lecturer of the subject, preserving the anonymity of the students. The observation diaries are general for the entire group and not personal as I say before based on pedagogical reflective practice. These Observations are focused on results of increasing student engagement, improvement of understanding of learning content, comparing traditional method with the use of Technology, evaluating the effectiveness of YouTube and ChatGPT. One special focus is about visualization of theoretical concepts, real-time interaction support for active learning, facilitation of communication and clarification, student motivation and involvement. Student behavior and engagement. During the experiment, the following was observed: Active participation, increased interest in the topic, questions and critical comments, collaboration between students, concentration during the activity. One another important point of observation is about limitations and difficulties encountered while using Youtube and chat Gpt voice mode as student response and engagement, effectiveness of Technology use, suggestions for improvement.

3. Results / Findings and Discussions

The results obtained from the observation classes are that the implementation of youtube and chat gpt voice mode in learning German has a positive impact. Students feel freer to communicate with the Lecturer and with their group friends. Using youtube with subtitles helps them understand new words and focus on key points. Chat gpt voice mode improves communication skills, although from time to time there are minor technical problems, especially in the translation of some specific words. Long videos tire the student and 15-minute videos have a better impact where people narrate their experiences, increasing their sense of critical reflection. Storytelling increases empathy and students notice details. In Figure 1. I have presented some photos from the storytelling videos that I have used in teaching the German language with German subtitles.



Figure 1. Photo of using Youtube story-telling videos with subtitle

Communication and the level of discussion increase, as do the skills in using digital tools. The university offered us the capacity to develop technologically advanced lessons, which we were able to successfully develop in a small group, increasing their motivation, pass rate and even final results. In a small group, the lecturer can manage the use of digital tools and mentor students in the proper use of Chat GPT as an assistant. Also using youtube videos as homework for students and then to write an essay about their reflection is a great idea to motivate students of german language. Here are some videos from different documentary that i have used as homework for this experiment to growth empatia and reflexion as a motivation tool for german language and german culture in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Videos from Story-telling as homework by DW, Terra x, ZDF .

Here are some examples of the exercises that i have done with my students with chat GPT voice mode related to youtube videos in german language . These are some questions related to the learning topic which is also related to the first videos. Students work individually to answer then use the chat gpt voice mode to correct or evaluate their answer in front of other students, exercise paper in Figure 3.

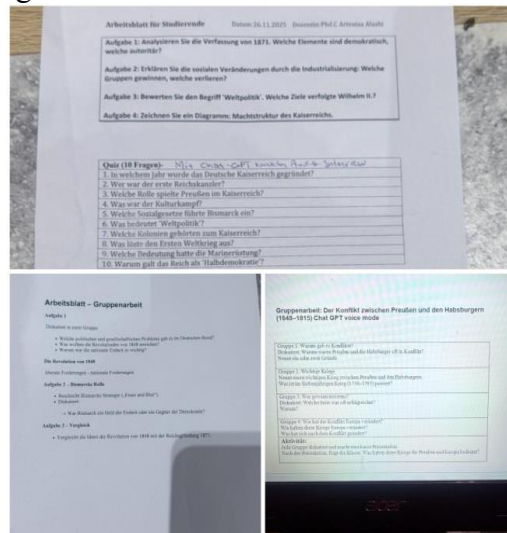


Figure 3. Some Exercises were student should use chat Gpt voice mode to correct their answers.

4. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of youtube and Chat GPT voice mode stimulates the interest of students in the lesson, makes them more focused and freer in the auditorium. It is manageable in a small group and the university has all the capacities to develop technological lessons. This experiment needs to be carried out and further observed in larger groups and with other lecturers to see the results and opinions of other lecturers with larger groups regarding the teaching of the German language. From this experiment in auditorium i notice from observations some main benifits The Use of YouTube Videos as Storytelling in Teaching German in combination with Chat GPT voice mode Increases Motivation and Engagement Storytelling makes students emotionally connected to the content.Videos are more engaging than traditional tests. Improves Listening Comprehension, Students are exposed to authentic language. They hear natural accents, intonation, and rhythm. Youtube helps acquire vocabulary, develops intercultural competence. Videos

show German culture stimulates and motivate students to discussion and critical thinking. They analyze the story aspect. The Role of Subtitles has many advantages it support comprehension .Students connect the sound with the written form, they understand new words from the contexts of story that they are seeing. It improve writing and reading skills. Using ChatGPT Voice Mode in exercises develops speaking skills, students practice without fear of making mistakes. One other benefit is immediate feedback and real-time correction of pronunciation and structure. One of the main objectives for me as lecturer is to increases student autonomy and by combining youtube videos and chat gpt voice mode it has a great result. Students can practice outside the auditorium as homework. Integration of Methods (Combined Approach) by combining storytelling through videos and the use of Chat Gpt voice mode creates an integrated approach to developing language skills and students are very interested on new methodolgies. One example of a Didactic Activity is :Watching a video with subtitles, discussion about the content and analysis, exercises using voice mode and Reflection and feedback by writing Essay as classwork or homework.

Limitations

Using this Method it has also the other side were it exist the risk that students only watch without active involment and a lack of interaction if the activity is not well structured. The role of Lecturer is very important to achive this method sucessfully. Some challenges by using Subtitles were students may focus only on the subtitles , and once i faced one problem were Subtitles were not written as correctly and Students may feel confused or overwhelmed. Although advanced, the system may Chat gpt voice mode. Not always understand pronunciation correctly, provide answers that are not always perfect and some technical and access issues were Internet connection problems may interrupt activities. Not all students may have equal access to devices or internet. I suggest this Method in small groups because motivates students. This method growth autonomy in auditorium and intercultural competences. This experiment needs to be conducted in larger groups of students to see the effect. It would be interesting to compare the results of this method between a large group of students and a small group.

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Chat GPT Integrated with Voice Assistant as Learning Oral Chat-bas ed Constructive Communication to Improve Communicative Competence for EFL Learner, Zhou Wei Jeonbuk National University page 9 <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2311.00718> ,

NATO’s strategic adaptation in the 21st century: enlargement, deterrence, and strategic transformation in a changing security environment

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Abstract: Since 2017, NATO has entered a new strategic phase marked by the rise of hybrid and regional threats, increased geopolitical competition, and the return of interstate warfare in Europe. While challenges on NATO’s southern border and the growing importance of cyber and information warfare broadened the Alliance’s security concerns, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 refocused NATO on deterrence and collective defense. Political debates in the US, particularly during Donald Trump’s administration, raised issues about cost sharing and the legitimacy of transatlantic commitments. This article examines NATO’s strategic adaptation through enlargement, enhanced military readiness, and strengthened institutional resilience. It looks at the geopolitical ramifications of Finland and Sweden joining NATO and assesses how the Alliance has responded to hybrid threats and instability on its southern border. The article makes the case that realist threat-balancing and institutional adaptation in an increasingly complex international security environment can account for NATO’s longevity, drawing on qualitative analysis of academic literature, NATO strategic documents, and policy reports.

Keywords: *NATO enlargement, deterrence, Russia–Ukraine war, transatlantic relations, hybrid warfare*

1. Introduction

Since its founding in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has served as the cornerstone of transatlantic security. NATO has changed significantly since the conclusion of the Cold War. It was founded to prevent Soviet expansion and guarantee the collective defense of Western Europe and North America. NATO's long-term goals and strategic significance were called into doubt by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

NATO grew both geographically and institutionally following the end of the Cold War, defying predictions that the Alliance would become less significant. NATO's strategic dominance was expanded eastward and the European security architecture was altered by enlargement waves that started in 1999 and included a number of Central and Eastern European states (Jacobs, 2015; Eichler, 2021). These events diminished Russia's traditional strategic buffer zone and drastically changed the geopolitical balance in Europe.

After Russia invaded Ukraine on a large scale in 2022 and annexed Crimea in 2014, the security landscape drastically changed. NATO strengthened its deterrent posture along the eastern flank as a result of these events, which led to the most serious military conflict in Europe since World War II (NATO, 2022).

NATO currently confronts a wider range of difficulties in addition to traditional military threats, such as cyber operations, terrorism, hybrid warfare, and instability in the Middle East and North Africa (Rid, 2020; Trenin, 2022). NATO must modify its policy in light of these changes in order to deal with an increasingly complicated security environment.

The following research questions are addressed in this study:

1. In light of Russia's actions since 2017 and the resurgence of geopolitical rivalry, how has NATO modified its strategic posture?
2. How much has NATO's strategic importance in the modern international order changed as a result of its expansion and new security challenges?

2. Theoretical Framework

A number of international relations theories may be used to explain NATO's persistence and evolution. The significance of power politics and outside challenges in forming coalitions is emphasized by realist theory. Walt's (1987) balance-of-threat theory holds that when governments confront a common security issue, alliances endure. According to this viewpoint, Russia's more aggressive foreign policy and its threat to the European security order are major factors in NATO's ongoing relevance.

By highlighting the role of international institutions in promoting collaboration among nations, liberal institutionalist researchers provide an alternate interpretation. Institutions provide coordinated responses to common problems, foster transparency, and lessen uncertainty (Keohane & Martin, 2003). NATO's institutional infrastructure, which includes interoperability standards, cooperative planning procedures, and integrated command structures, has made it possible for member states to react to new security challenges as a group.

Constructivist methods also highlight the importance of political identity and common democratic norms in maintaining NATO as a security community (Ikenberry, 2001).

The post-Cold War development of NATO has sparked a great deal of scholarly discussion in the field of international affairs. According to early realist academics, NATO would become less strategically significant after the fall of the Soviet Union. According to Mearsheimer (1990), coalitions created to combat particular dangers typically fall apart after those threats are eliminated.

But in the decades that followed the end of the Cold War, NATO not only endured but also greatly grew. According to institutional researchers, NATO's institutional structure and function as a security community among democratic governments account for its durability (Ikenberry, 2001; Keohane & Martin, 2003). According to this viewpoint, NATO developed from a conventional military alliance into a more expansive political and security organization that can handle emerging security issues.

Another major debate in the literature concerns NATO enlargement and its implications for relations with Russia. Critics of NATO expansion argue that enlargement contributed to the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West. Mearsheimer (2014) contends that NATO expansion created a security dilemma in which Russia perceived the Alliance as a direct military threat.

Other scholars argue that NATO enlargement reflected the sovereign decisions of Central and Eastern European states seeking security guarantees against potential Russian influence (Asmus, 2010; Rynning, 2015). From this perspective, NATO expansion contributed to the consolidation of democratic governance and political stability in post-communist Europe.

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Lastly, a number of studies highlight how important Finland and Sweden's NATO membership is geopolitically. Their entry has considerably changed the military balance in the Baltic Sea area and reinforced NATO's strategic posture in Northern Europe (Friis, 2024; Kaikkonen, 2024).

3. Methodology

In order to investigate NATO's strategic adaptation in the current security environment, this study uses a qualitative research approach based on document analysis and secondary sources.

Peer-reviewed academic literature, official NATO strategic publications, and policy studies from global research organizations like RAND, SIPRI, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies are all used in the study.

These resources shed light on NATO's institutional growth, military posture, and strategic aims. In order to examine NATO's reaction to renewed geopolitical rivalry, Russia's aggression in Ukraine, and new security issues including hybrid warfare and instability along NATO's eastern and southern borders, the research combines theoretical viewpoints from liberal institutionalism and realism.

NATO Enlargement and Strategic Reorientation

One of the most important changes to the European security framework since the end of the Cold War has been NATO expansion. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined in 1999, marking the first phase of enlargement. In 2004, a number of Central and Eastern European governments joined in a second significant phase of expansion (Jacobs, 2015). According to liberal institutionalists, NATO expansion signified the growth of a democratic security community to foster cooperation and stability throughout Europe (Ikenberry, 2001). However, realist academics contend that by posing a security conundrum, NATO enlargement increased hostilities with Russia (Mearsheimer, 2014).

NATO established the Enhanced Forward Presence project and deployed multinational battlegroups in Poland and the Baltic states to bolster its deterrent posture in the wake of Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 (Black et al., 2024).

Another significant strategic development is the entry of Sweden in 2024 and Finland in 2023. These advances improved deterrent capabilities in the Baltic Sea region and greatly bolstered NATO's strategic posture in Northern Europe (Friis, 2024).

Transatlantic Relations and U.S. Foreign Policy

Historically, the United States has been a key player in NATO's military might and strategic leadership. NATO's collective defense system is based on US military might, including nuclear deterrent and cutting-edge defensive technology.

However, there were serious political problems in transatlantic relations under Donald Trump's administration. Trump claimed that the United States was bearing an excessive amount of the Alliance's security burden and frequently chastised NATO countries for not meeting the Alliance's defense budget objective of two percent of GDP (Walt, 2018).

European governments began to question the veracity of U.S. security pledges as a result of these complaints (Daalder & Goldgeier, 2019). Trump's push also prompted partners in Europe to boost their defense budgets.

According to NATO data, European defense spending rose dramatically between 2017 and 2024 (NATO, 2023). The United States continues to supply the majority of NATO's military assets and is the Alliance's biggest military contributor notwithstanding political unrest.

Security Challenges on NATO's southern Flank

NATO's most pressing strategic danger is Russia, but the Alliance also confronts security risks from its southern neighbors.

European security is directly impacted by refugee flows, terrorist threats, and humanitarian problems brought on by conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Libya (Rid, 2020).

The emergence of ISIS served as an example of how Middle East instability may lead to risks to international security. In response, NATO has strengthened regional security organizations through training missions and increased counterterrorism cooperation (Trenin, 2022).

Hybrid warfare and Emerging Threats

A distinguishing characteristic of modern conflict is hybrid warfare, which reflects the growing complexity of contemporary security concerns. In order to destabilize enemies without starting a full-scale military conflict, these tactics combine conventional military might with unconventional tools including cyber operations, misinformation campaigns, economic pressure, and covert political influence (Rid, 2020).

In Ukraine and throughout Europe, Russia has often used hybrid strategies, such as coordinated misinformation operations, information warfare, and cyberattacks on vital infrastructure with the goal of weakening democratic institutions. By increasing its cyber defense capabilities and explicitly acknowledging cyberspace as an operational domain alongside land, sea, air, and space, NATO has bolstered its defenses against hybrid threats (NATO, 2022).

4. Discussion

The evolution of NATO since 2017 is indicative of more general structural shifts in the international system, which are marked by a comeback of great-power rivalry and increased geopolitical competitiveness. The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 strengthened the Alliance's strategic unity and restored collective defense as NATO's primary objective. From a realism standpoint, NATO's restored significance in the modern international order may be explained by the return of a significant external threat, which supports the logic of threat balancing (Walt, 1987; Mearsheimer, 2014). As a result, the conflict has restored the strategic justification that first kept NATO afloat throughout the Cold conflict.

However, realist dynamics alone cannot account for NATO's resiliency. Additionally, institutional elements are essential to the Alliance's continued existence. Member states may effectively coordinate responses to security threats and preserve operational cohesiveness thanks to NATO's integrated command structure, interoperability standards, and cooperative planning processes (Keohane & Martin, 2003; Ikenberry, 2001). By bolstering its advanced military presence along the eastern frontier and organizing military aid to Ukraine, these institutional characteristics allowed NATO to react quickly to Russia's invasion of that country (Black et al., 2024). Another significant strategic advancement in NATO's development is the entrance of Sweden in 2024 and Finland in 2023. NATO's deterrent posture in Northern Europe was greatly enhanced by Finland's joining alone, which quadrupled the Alliance's land boundary with Russia (Kaikkonen, 2024).

NATO's operational capacity in the Baltic Sea region is further enhanced by Sweden's sophisticated military capabilities, which include its air force, naval assets, and intelligence infrastructure (Friis, 2024). When taken as a whole, these changes have changed the strategic balance in Northern Europe and strengthened NATO's capacity to prevent future Russian military action in the Baltic Sea area (Atlantic Council, 2024; International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2024).

The United States' ongoing leadership is another important factor influencing NATO's development. The bulk of NATO's total defense budget comes from the United States, which continues to be the Alliance's biggest military contributor. The United States contributes almost two-thirds of NATO's overall defense spending, according to NATO data (NATO, 2023).

NATO's collective defense system is still built on American military assets, including as nuclear deterrent, sophisticated missile defense systems, and international intelligence networks (Brands & Gaddis, 2021). During Donald Trump's administration (2017–2021), the United States' position became very apparent. Trump claimed that the United States was unfairly paying the Alliance's security cost and frequently chastised European countries for not meeting NATO's defense budget commitments (Walt, 2018). European officials became concerned about the future of transatlantic ties and the veracity of U.S. security assurances as a result of these accusations (Daalder & Goldgeier, 2019).

But Trump's push also had an unforeseen consequence. European NATO members significantly increased their defense spending during this period, reflecting a growing recognition of the need to strengthen European military capabilities (SIPRI, 2024). A record number of NATO members have either met or surpassed the Alliance's two percent military budget objective by 2024 (NATO, 2025).

The United States continues to be the cornerstone of NATO's strategic deterrence despite political strains within the transatlantic alliance. NATO's collective defense architecture is still based on U.S. military assets, including as nuclear deterrent and cutting-edge military technology (Brands & Gaddis, 2021).

NATO must deal with new security issues including cyberattacks, misinformation operations, and hybrid warfare in addition to traditional military threats. In order to disrupt opponents without starting a full-scale military confrontation, hybrid warfare techniques combine conventional military power with cyber operations, economic coercion, and information warfare (Rid, 2020; Hoffman, 2007). In Ukraine and throughout Europe, Russia has regularly used hybrid strategies.

As a result, NATO acknowledged cyberspace as an operational area alongside land, sea, air, and space and increased its cyber defense capabilities (NATO, 2022). These changes show that NATO is progressively adjusting to a multifaceted security environment with interwoven military, technical, and political challenges.

NATO's capacity to handle both conventional military threats and new types of warfare while preserving political unity among its member nations is ultimately what will determine its continuing relevance. The Alliance's

capacity to adjust to these difficulties implies that NATO will remain essential to preserving stability in the Euro-Atlantic security framework.

5. Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, NATO has been remarkably resilient in responding to changing geopolitical threats. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 strengthened transatlantic collaboration among member nations and renewed NATO's primary objective of collective defense. Due to the crisis, the Alliance has increased military preparedness and cooperation among its members and strengthened its deterrent posture along the eastern flank (NATO, 2022). Simultaneously, NATO's strategic posture in Northern Europe and deterrence in the Baltic Sea region have been further boosted by the entrance of Finland in 2023 and Sweden in 2024 (Friis, 2024).

NATO has broadened its strategic focus to handle new issues including cyberwarfare, hybrid threats, and instability along its southern flank in addition to traditional military concerns (Rid, 2020). NATO continues to be the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security and a key component of the modern international security system, despite internal political disputes—particularly those pertaining to burden sharing and U.S. leadership—occasionally causing tensions within the Alliance.

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Simulating English Tutoring for Beginners with AI Language Models: Opportunities and Limitations

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Abstract: This paper investigates the potential of AI language models to support beginner learners of English through a simulated tutoring experience. The study examines whether AI can provide structured lessons, simple explanations, and corrective feedback for learners starting with minimal prior knowledge. By simulating beginner-level lessons, including elements like essential vocabulary and fundamental grammar concepts, the analysis evaluates key pedagogical aspects such as clarity of explanations, logical sequencing of content, adaptability to learner input, and the consistency of feedback across different AI models. The paper highlights the strengths of AI in offering immediate explanations, repeated practice opportunities, and tailored examples that adapt to the learner’s simulated responses. At the same time, it discusses notable limitations, such as the lack of reliable pronunciation guidance and occasional inconsistencies in explanation quality. The discussion critically reflects on the extent to which AI can function as a substitute for human tutors versus a complementary tool for independent learning. The findings provide insights for educators, curriculum designers, and learners on the practical integration of AI technologies into beginner English instruction and contribute to the broader discourse on artificial intelligence in language pedagogy.

Keywords: *EFL, AI tutoring, Independent language learning*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence has transitioned Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) (Warschauer & Healey, 1998) from static software to dynamic, generative interlocutors. Large language models

(LLMs), such as ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Gemini have become increasingly accessible to learners worldwide, including Romania.

In a globalized, digital society such as the one in which we live nowadays, there is an increasing demand for English language proficiency. Although English is taught in Romanian schools, there might be some issues that would make a person try to learn the language hiring a tutor, or, as this paper explores, using a LLM. One such challenge in the Romanian public education system might be the high student-to-teacher ratio, which often exceeds 20:1. In such a situation, the communicative approach, or individualized interaction, is mathematically impossible to sustain. While a teacher can provide great general instruction, they cannot offer the tailored scaffolding required for beginners to progress through their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Another such issue is that, often, when a student is “behind” their classmates, the teacher often still has to move on with the curriculum. Of course, one might hire a tutor, or pay for private English classes, however, there is a Socio-Economic factor. For a beginner with limited financial resources, AI could serve as an essential “leveler”.

Lastly, the LLM could act as a non-judgemental interlocutor, lowering the learner’s Affective Filter (Krashen, 1982), perfect for shy beginners who fear speaking in public, in front of their classmates or their teacher.

1.2. Research Problem and Objectives

While AI tools are increasingly used in language learning contexts, limited research examine their pedagogical performance specifically at the beginner level. The core challenge for any language tutor, human or AI, is providing adequate input – $i + 1$. Furthermore, this study will analyze multiple LLMs from different perspectives, using two different types of prompts (a naturalistic one vs. a structured one), which provides an element of innovation to the research that has been done previously.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To evaluate AI’s ability to maintain $i + 1$ for a “beginner”.
2. To compare AI-generated responses when using naturalistic vs. structured prompts.
3. To compare the two LLMs mentioned, in terms of clarity of explanation, scaffolding and logical sequencing, quality of feedback, adaptation to beginner level, and encouragement and affective support.

4. To determine whether AI could provide a low-cost, always-available, tutor that is close enough to a human teacher, with intuition and cultural background, or if it is just an aid in teaching at this point.

1.3. Relevance to Conference Theme

This study aligns with the conference theme *Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society*, by examining how and whether AI technologies influence foundational language education. By analyzing the interaction between a “Romanian beginner”, we can determine if an LLM could serve as true pedagogical innovation or just a translation tool. The study contributes to broader debates on digital literacy, learner autonomy and the role of AI in education.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

2.1 AI in Language Education

The integration of technology in language learning has evolved from early Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) systems to interactive AI-driven platforms. Early CALL systems were rule-based and rigid, only recognizing a “correct” answer that matched its pre-programmed databased exactly, leaving no room for communication. As it evolved, it became more engaging, providing various mini-games, puzzles, text reconstruction, but the system still couldn’t “understand” the student, adapt to their personalized needs, or provide feedback based on their answers.

AI tools, however, according to research, can provide immediate feedback, encourage learner autonomy and reduce learning anxiety through text-based, private communications. However, concerns remain regarding consistency, pedagogical coherence and the absence of socio-emotional awareness.

2.2. Theoretical Grounding

The study is grounded in three key SLA perspectives:

- Krashen’s Input Hypothesis

Beginners require comprehensible input (i+1). Explanations must be linguistically accessible and free of unnecessary complexity.

- Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory

Effective tutoring involves scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Instruction must be structured progressively.

- Long’s Interaction Hypothesis

Language development is enhanced through interaction and feedback. Responsive error correction and clarification are central to acquisition. These theories inform the evaluation criteria used in this study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative design. Two different LLMs’ responses were analyzed and compared under two prompt conditions:

1. Naturalistic Prompt Condition
2. Structured Prompt Condition

The choice of a qualitative approach is justified by the need to explore the nuance of linguistic interaction and pedagogical strategies rather than mere statistical frequency.

3.2. Participants/sample

Given the focus on the technical and linguistic capabilities of AI, this study utilizes a Simulated Zero-Beginner Learner Persona, rather than human subjects.

The AI models used are two easily-available leading LLMs (ChatGPT and Gemini). They were selected because they currently represent the “state-of-the-art” in generative ICALL (Intelligent Computer-Assisted Language Learning.).

3.3. Instruments and procedures

For this study, I used a Standardized Interaction Protocol, based on two distinct categories of prompts designed to test the AI’s pedagogical adaptability and see whether the first prompt we give the LLM changes the flow of the simulated “lesson”.

1. The Naturalistic Prompt: initiated in Romanian, for ecological validity, to simulate a real-world scenario where a student, who lacks the English skills or digital literacy to ask the AI for help in a manner which would yield the best results.

Bună! Aș dori să învăț engleză. Sunt începător. Mă poți ajuta? (Hello! I want to learn English. I am a beginner. Can you help me?)

2. The Structured Prompt: A meta-instruction, that explicitly tells the AI to adopt the role of an ESL tutor.

Act as a professional ESL (English as a Second Language) tutor specializing in teaching beginners. I am a native Romanian speaker with zero English knowledge.

3.4. Data Analysis Methods

The collected data consists of AI-generated responses, produced under the two prompting conditions. Five analytical criteria were operationalized: (1) clarity of explanation, (2) scaffolding and logical sequencing, (3) quality of feedback, (4) adaptation to beginner level, and (5) encouragement and affective support, graded using the Likert Scale (1 = Very Weak, 2 = Weak, 3 = Adequate, 4 = Strong, 5 = Very Strong).

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

4.1. ChatGPT

	Clarity of explanation	Scaffolding and logical sequencing	Quality of feedback	Adaptation to beginner level	Encouragement and affective support
Naturalistic Prompt	2	3	4	2	5
Structured Prompt	2	1	4	4	5

Table 1. Likert Scale Assessment of ChatGPT as an ESL Tutor

When starting with the naturalistic prompt, ChatGPT promptly asked what the student would like to learn first (in Romanian). Some might argue that this is not the best course of action, as a zero-beginner would need guidance even in relation to the starting point. After answering that I would like to learn more about vocabulary and grammar, ChatGPT sent a 1053 character answer, a long list of words, with categories such as, colors, base words, numbers, personal pronouns, and more, which is a lot to take in for a beginner. After clearing up that I would like an English lesson, ChatGPT gave me *Lecția 1: Introduceri și fraze uzuale* (Lesson 1: Introduction and usual phrases) and prompted me to use some of the phrases.

When I made a mistake, ChatGPT gave me affective support (*Great Try*), corrected my mistake in English and gave me an explanation in Romanian:

My name is ChatGPT! 😊 What's your name?

My name are John.

Great try, John! Almost there!

In English, we say: "My name is John."

"Are" este folosit pentru verbele „to be” în cazul plural, sau pentru a întreba despre stări sau acțiuni. În propoziția asta, folosim „is” pentru că vorbim despre un singur subiect (numele tău).

Ai vreo altă întrebare sau vrei să exersezi alte fraze?

("Are" is used for the verb 'to be' in the plural case, or for asking about states or actions. In this sentence, we use 'is' because we are talking about a single subject (your name).

Do you have any other questions, or would you like to practice other phrases?"

When starting with the structured prompt, ChatGPT gave an English-only response. For a zero-beginner, as the prompt specified, this would pose great difficulty, as they would not understand most of the words, and would either ask for a translation or use another program for this. It asked whether I would like to practice, and as the lesson went on, I was encouraged to repeat the phrases it gave me, which in my opinion, would not aid the learner much. However, even for those simple answers, it gave significant encouragement:

*Let's practice a bit more. Try this one: **Excuse me**, I'll say: "**Thank you!**" You can respond with: **You're welcome**.*

You're welcome.

*Awesome! You're getting the hang of this quickly, John! 🙌 Let's add a little more practice now. I'll say: "**Good morning!**" You can reply:*

- *Good morning!*

Further along in the lesson, when I made a mistake, ChatGPT explained the issue in English and encouraged me to try again.

Now you can try saying or writing:

- *This is a chair.*
- *I use a pen.*
- *The phone is on the table.*

Ready to try? 😊

The phone are on the table.

You're very close! The correct sentence is:

"The phone is on the table."

*Remember, we use "**is**" when talking about **one** object (singular). For **more than one** object, we use "**are**" (plural).*

For example:

- ***The phones are on the table** (if there are more than one phone).*

Keep going! You're doing great! Let's try another one:

I use a pen.

Can you make a sentence with "book" or "chair"?

4.2. Gemini

	Clarity of explanation	Scaffolding and logical sequencing	Quality of feedback	Adaptation to beginner level	Encouragement and affective support
Naturalistic Prompt	5	2	5	2	5
Structured Prompt	3	4	4	3	5

Table 1. Likert Scale Assessment of Gemini as an ESL Tutor

When starting with the naturalistic prompt, Gemini answered in Romanian and not only gave me some “First Words”, with elements such as *Hello* and *My name is...*, but also a table with the verb TO BE and even some advice such as:

Ascultă zilnic: Chiar dacă nu înțelegi tot, ascultă muzică sau uită-te la clipuri scurte în engleză. Te ajută să te obișnuiești cu ritmul limbii.

(Listen daily: Even though you don’t understand anything, listen to some music or watch short clips in English. It helps you get used to the rhythm of the language.

After beginning the lesson, it gave me some usual objects, as well as their pronunciation, the structure of a sentence, some possessive determiners and a translation exercise.

When I made a mistake, it gave positive encouragement and explained the mistake, then moved on to affirmative and negative present simple. I believe that this is a bit much for a first lesson, thus scoring the Adaptation to beginner level a 2. (weak):

My house are big. It is a phone.

Foarte bine! Ai nimerit a doua propoziție perfect, iar la prima ai fost extrem de aproape. Ai folosit cuvintele potrivite, dar avem o mică ajustare de făcut la "mortarul" propoziției (verbul).

Iată corecția:

1. Analiza exercițiului

Propoziția 1: "My house is big."

De ce? Folosim is pentru un singur obiect (el/ea/it). Folosim are doar pentru plural (ele/ei/they) sau pentru "tu/voi".

Deci: One house is... dar Two houses are...

Propoziția 2: "It is a phone."

Perfect! Nota 10.

3. Să trecem la nivelul următor: Negarea

(Very well done! You got the second sentence perfectly, and you were extremely close on the first one. You used the right words, but we have a small adjustment to make to the 'mortar' of the sentence (the verb).

Here is the correction:

1. Exercise Analysis

Sentence 1: "My house is big."

Why? We use is for a single object (he/she/it). We use are only for plural (they) or for "you."

So: One house is... but Two houses are...

Sentence 2: "It is a phone."

Perfect! A perfect score.

2. Moving to the next level: Negation)

When starting with the structured prompt, Gemini started the conversation in English and also gave me some basic words and sentences. Then, it asked me to simply type my name in the chat.

Let's Try It!

Can you try to introduce yourself in English? Just type: "Hello! I am [Your Name]." Would you like me to provide a list of common English words that are almost the same in Romanian to help you feel more confident?

Later in the lesson, when I made a mistake, it explained the mistake, in English, encouraged me. and quickly moved on to something else (common actions/verbs).

A Little Challenge

Can you try to finish this sentence about your family?

"My mother is [Name]." And just for fun, do you remember how to say "brother" in English?

After this, would you like to learn the "Colors" (Culorile) or "Common Actions" like "I eat" and "I drink"?

My mother are Ana.

Close! You are doing great, but remember that little rule we just talked about:

- **Is** = Este (for one person)
- **Are** = Sunt (for more than one person)

*Since **Mother** is one person, we say: "**My mother IS Ana.**" Think of it like this:*

- **I am** (Eu sunt)
- **She is** (Ea este)
- **They are** (Ei sunt)

Common Actions (*Verbe obișnuite*)

4.3.Results

The analysis revealed that both ChatGPT and Gemini, could aid in the learning of a new language, such as English, however, at this current point, they suffer from hyper-encouragement and often give the zero-beginner too much information too quickly, relying on exercises which are too basic or too advanced, which would leave a real learner confused. However, a human tutor could structure the lesson based on the knowledge and most certainly would not teach as many elements in one lesson.

Another finding is that despite being told that the learner was a total beginner, the models often defaulted to long explanations in English.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

In summary, AI models like ChatGPT and Gemini are highly motivational but pedagogically undisciplined tutors for beginners. They excel at "encouragement" but fail at "micro-pacing." They act more like a friendly textbook that turns pages too fast rather than a sensitive human tutor who watches the student's eyes for signs of confusion.

To “Shape the Future” of education, AI developers must program LLMs to use the learner’s L1 for explanations and wait for active mastery before moving on to a new topic.

The limitations of this study are the lack of real student data, as I have simulated the beginner, prompt sensitivity, as maybe another prompt might’ve yielded better results and interpretative judgement as the grading of the AI is based on personal expertise.

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The 8th International Conference *“Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society”* brings together researchers, and professionals from 18 different countries to explore contemporary challenges and innovations in education and social sciences.

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Intervention as an Innovative Element in Teaching Foreign Language Reading Comprehension

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Abstract: From the very beginning, teaching reading comprehension in a foreign language is based on stimulating cognitive processes in the first phases of working with a foreign language text, which mainly requires the involvement of simpler cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and perception. At higher levels of foreign language proficiency, understanding a foreign language text takes on a new dimension, as the student strives not only to understand explicit information from the text, but also to implicitly decode information from the text and inferentially think about the text. Many times, students are motivated to read, they read diverse texts, but they are unable to respond to questions verifying understanding of the text, which has also been confirmed in testing. This means that targeted reading and working with the text do not always develop understanding. For this reason, we consider the training and development of reading comprehension through intervention to be an innovative and extremely important element in teaching foreign languages. In the paper, we focus on the specifics of foreign language reading and reading comprehension intervention through an intervention program as a tool for effective and comprehensive development of reading comprehension. In the application part of the paper, we analyze the structure of the intervention program, the research plan for its experimental verification, and present an example of one intervention unit (methodology sheet) aimed at stimulating the cognitive process of inferential thinking.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, foreign language, pedagogical intervention*

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is one of the basic components of communicative competence and plays a key role in the acquisition of knowledge, professional expertise, as well as in the acquisition of diverse information and professional skills. The ability to understand written text is also considered one of the most

important prerequisites for successful learning in and outside the school environment. Several studies point to the fact that today's students read less than in previous decades and at the same time their level of reading comprehension is also decreasing (Miklovičová et al., 2017). Current international research also points to a persistent decline in reading engagement and student performance in the area of reading literacy (Mullis et al., 2023; OECD, 2023; Ólafsdóttir, 2025). This trend is of increasing interest to researchers and educators, as reading literacy significantly influences not only students' academic success, but also their further educational and professional prospects.

The process of reading comprehension is extremely complex. A complex set of cognitive and metacognitive processes are applied when processing a text, which are also complemented by affective and social factors influencing the reader's activity and motivation to read. Reading in a foreign language brings additional specific challenges to the comprehension process. In addition to language barriers, such as unfamiliar vocabulary or grammatical structures, the reader also has to deal with sociocultural aspects of the text, including knowledge of the cultural context and stylistic conventions typical of the target language (Fabricius-Hansen, 2002; Meireles, 2006). These factors often increase the level of uncertainty in interpreting the text and increase the demands on cognitive processing of information during reading.

One of the key processes supporting deeper understanding of a text is inferential thinking, which allows the reader to connect explicit information from the text with prior knowledge and to create implicit meanings that are not directly expressed in the text. Research repeatedly confirms that the ability to make inferences is one of the significant predictors of a higher level of reading comprehension and significantly contributes to the creation of coherent interpretations of the text (Cromley & Azevedo, 2007; Oakhill et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2023). The latest studies in the field of foreign language teaching also point to the importance of didactic approaches that specifically support the development of inferential thinking and other higher cognitive processes when working with text (Roman & Belda-Medina, 2025).

To overcome barriers related to text comprehension, it is therefore necessary to systematically develop higher cognitive processes, especially inferential, divergent and creative thinking of the reader. Stimulating these processes allows for deeper understanding of the text, supporting critical thinking and active involvement of the reader in the interpretation of text content. One of the effective ways of developing these abilities is the implementation of targeted pedagogical interventions, or implementation of intervention programs aimed at developing reading comprehension. The author team has addressed the issue of developing reading comprehension in accordance with

current scientific knowledge within the framework of several national and international projects (APVV, VEGA, KEGA, Erasmus+, Visegrad+). Based on the findings obtained, an intervention program aimed at the systematic development of reading competences was developed, which was subsequently verified in school practice in a number of countries.

The aim of the presented paper is to introduce this intervention program as a tool for effective and comprehensive development of reading comprehension in foreign language teaching. In the application part of the paper, we present an example of an intervention unit focused on the development of inferential thinking, which is an important prerequisite for deeper understanding and interpretation of the text.

2. Theoretical Framework

Reading comprehension models provide a theoretical framework for understanding the processes and skills applied when working with text. While creating the intervention program, we based ourselves on construction-integration and interactive models of text comprehension, which emphasize the active role of the reader in constructing meaning. Within these models, the comprehension process can be divided into micro-processes and macro-processes. Micro-processes represent local information processing at the word and sentence level, while macro-processes involve global understanding of the text and the creation of its mental representation (Gavora, 1992; Kintsch & Rawson, 2005; Oakhill, 2020). Interactive models also emphasize the dynamic nature of comprehension. While reading, the reader activates their prior knowledge, forms expectations, and continuously confronts them with the information contained in the text (Lutjeharms, 2010). Comprehension thus arises in the interaction between the text, the reader and the reading context. Research shows that this process involves the cooperation of several cognitive mechanisms, such as language skills, working memory and monitoring of comprehension (Oakhill, 2020; Dixon & Oakhill, 2024). Comprehension of a foreign language text is usually more demanding than reading in the mother tongue. In addition to linguistic factors such as vocabulary or grammatical structures, the discourse and stylistic conventions of the text also play an important role, allowing the reader to predict its content and organization (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). The cultural context of the text is also an important factor, as authors often implicitly assume certain cultural knowledge of the reader (Ehlers, 2006; Meireles, 2006; Fabricius-Hansen, 2002).

Inferential thinking is one of the key processes supporting deeper understanding of a text. It allows the reader to connect explicit information with prior knowledge and create meanings that are not directly expressed in

the text (Cromley & Azevedo, 2007; Oakhill et al., 2019). Through inference, the reader integrates information between individual parts of the text and creates a coherent mental representation of its content. Inference can be understood as the process of drawing conclusions based on existing knowledge and experience (Reich, 2002). Text comprehension thus involves adopting a coherent interpretation of information obtained from the text and from one's own mental representations (Hatano, 2001). Research confirms that the ability to create inferences is one of the significant predictors of reading comprehension and is closely linked to the development of higher forms of verbal reasoning (Barnes et al., 2024; Fiorella, 2023). From a pedagogical point of view, inferences can also be understood as cognitive operations through which the reader creates meaningful connections between information in the text (Liptáková & Cibáková, 2013). Inferential thinking thus goes beyond literal comprehension and requires the active use of the reader's mental schemas and prior knowledge.

An intervention program can be defined as a deliberate and systematic application of pedagogical and psychological procedures aimed at supporting the development of cognitive abilities, behavior, and emotional characteristics of participants in accordance with the goals of the educational process (Stranovská & Popelková, 2013; Stranovská et al., 2024). Intervention programs are often based on the principles of social learning and use group forms of work that support interpersonal learning and reflection on experiences. In the field of education, intervention programs represent an important tool for the development of reading literacy, as they allow the systematic development of not only language skills, but also higher cognitive processes associated with text comprehension. Research shows that purposefully designed intervention programs can significantly improve the level of reading comprehension, especially when they combine the development of language skills with the support of inferential and verbal reasoning (Barnes et al., 2024). The essence of an intervention program focused on reading comprehension is the systematic development of cognitive processes - from basic processes, such as attention and perception, to more complex forms of thinking, such as critical and inferential thinking. The program also supports the motivation of students to work with text, motivation to read in a foreign language and the development of the affective level of learning through activities carried out before reading, during reading and after reading the text (Hockicková et al., 2020; Stranovská & Ficzer, 2020). The intervention program uses an eclectic combination of various methods and activities that support not only the development of reading comprehension, but also the personal and social development of students. In our program, the intervention is implemented through two parallel procedures: working with

the text and developing a specific cognitive or metacognitive predictor of reading comprehension. Within each intervention unit, one or two interrelated predictors are purposefully developed through activities focused on a given cognitive process. In school practice, working with the text is often reduced to solving test tasks. The intervention approach therefore focuses on the process of text comprehension itself and on the development of strategies that allow students to actively construct meaning.

3. Methodology – Development of Intervention Programm, Application

The aim of this section is to analyze the creation of an intervention program or the creation of an intervention application for teaching reading comprehension in German, with a focus on the development of inferential thinking. The program is designed to help teachers prepare pupils to understand and work with text, develop the skills of searching for specific information, understanding implicit content and evaluating text. Special emphasis is placed on the processes of inferential thinking: creating hypotheses, predicting events and character behavior, drawing conclusions from incomplete information, interpreting hidden connections and linking the implicit content of the text with the pupil's prior knowledge.

Sample. The program is intended for secondary school pupils learning German as a second foreign language (level A2 according to the CEFR). It has been implemented and tested in grammar schools and secondary vocational schools in Slovakia. The program consists of 10 intervention units, each lasting approximately 45 minutes.

Analysis methods. The following criteria were taken into consideration when designing the program:

- Texts and activities correspond to A2 language proficiency level standards.
- Gender-neutral texts, suitable for all students.
- Considering the developmental characteristics of students aged 15–19.
- Texts suitable for a wide range of study fields.
- Inclusion of activities before, during and after reading that interconnect students' linguistic, cognitive and affective skills.

The program works with linear texts (factual and narrative) and non-linear texts (tables, graphs, diagrams) to support the development of inferential thinking and the ability to work with different types of information.

Design of the intervention unit. The intervention unit consists of four phases:

- Introductory phase – motivational and warm-up activities, activation of prior knowledge, reduction of language anxiety.
- Pre-reading phase – predicting the content of the text, planning the work strategy and identifying problems.
- During-reading phase – completing inferential tasks and activities, drawing conclusions, testing hypotheses, interpreting indirect meaning.
- Post-reading phase – reflection and discussion, connecting new knowledge with previous experiences, evaluating work with the text.

Instruments. A methodological sheet for the teacher has been designed for each unit. It contains:

- Detailed instructions for the activities.
- Implementation time.
- Variants of activities for students with a higher or lower language proficiency level.
- Texts, copying material and worksheets that support work with the text and the development of inferential thinking.

4. Výsledky

First, we will analyze the research plan for validating the intervention program and then we will present the design of a complete intervention unit focused on developing inferential thinking with respect to the criteria according to the analyzed methodology of designing the application procedure for the intervention program. The program will be validated using an experimental method with two measurements: pre-test and post-test.

- Pre-test: measuring learners’ level of reading comprehension using a validated instrument.
- Program implementation: ten interventions (i.e. intervention units) focusing on various cognitive processes, including inferential thinking.
- Post-test: measuring learners’ level of reading comprehension using a validated instrument, qualitative assessment of the improved ability to draw conclusions and understand the implicit content of the text.

1. Pre-test

- Purpose: To determine the initial level of reading comprehension skills of students.
- Tool: Administer a validated instrument for measuring reading comprehension in German (e.g. text tasks with questions focused on

information retrieval, interpretation of implicit content and drawing conclusions).

- Procedure:
 - Students will be given texts of varying length and type (linear and nonlinear texts).
 - They will solve tasks that test:
 - retrieval of explicit information,
 - drawing conclusions and inferential thinking,
 - interpretation of unexpressed connections in the text.
- Output: Assessment of individual students, identification of areas in which interventions need to be focused.

2. Program Implementation

- Duration: 10 intervention units, each 45 minutes.
- Intervention objectives: Development of cognitive and metacognitive processes, focusing on:
 - attention and concentration,
 - attention fluctuation,
 - memory and memory processes,
 - perception and norms of perception,
 - cognitive structuring and categorization,
 - inferential thinking (formation of hypotheses, prediction, interpretation of implicit content),
 - divergent and creative thinking,
 - tolerance of ambiguity,
 - critical thinking and metacognition.
- Intervention structure:
 - Pre-reading: Activation of prior knowledge, prediction of text content, development of hypotheses.
 - During reading: Working with the text – identification of implicit meaning, creation of inferences, work with characters and relationships, generation of possible scenarios for the development of the story.
 - After reading: Reflection and discussion to develop the ability to draw conclusions, discuss alternative interpretations and connections that are not explicitly contained in the text.
- Assessment methods during the program:
 - observation of students' activities,
 - recording the quality and creativity of the conclusions drawn,
 - assessment of students' ability to defend their inferences,
 - feedback from students,
 - feedback from teachers.

3. Post-test

- Purpose: To determine the extent to which reading skills have improved after completing the intervention program.
- Instrument: The same or similar validated test as used in the pre-test, with emphasis on:
 - drawing conclusions from the text,
 - understanding implicit content and context,
 - the ability to connect information from the text with prior knowledge.
- Evaluation: Comparison of pre-test and post-test results using quantitative (e.g. test scores) and qualitative methods (e.g. quality analysis).
- Expected outcome:
 - increased ability to draw conclusions from incomplete information,
 - expanded understanding of implicit content,
 - better use of inferential thinking when working with text.

Design of one intervention unit – inferential thinking - structure

Topic: Hobbies / Papierhelden

Duration: 45 min

Objective: Development of inferential thinking, hypothesis generation and text interpretation

Phase	Activity	Goal	Social form	Tools	Duration
Introductory	Wortspiel – creating sentences from random words	Developing verbal creativity	Frontal	Word cards	7 min
Before reading	Predicting the text content based on keywords	Forming hypotheses and creative thinking	Pair work	Text, worksheet	8 min
While reading	DRESS your stick figure IN your HEAD – characterizing the characters	Inferential thinking, drawing conclusions, interpreting	Groups of 4	Text, worksheet, crayons	20 min

Phase	Activity	Goal	Social form	Tools	Duration
After reading	Who is Anna? – discussing an unmentioned character	Developing inferential thinking, drawing conclusions from incomplete information	Group discussion	None	5 min
Conclusion	Your hobby – relaxing activity	Reflection and relaxation	Groups of 4	Paper	5 min

Intervention Unit Methodology Sheet: Developing Inferential Thinking

Duration: 45 minutes

Objective: To develop students' inferential thinking when working with a literary text, to support the creation of hypotheses, predictions and interpretations beyond the explicit information in the text.

Phase	Activity	Objective	Social form	Aids	Time	Procedure / Instructions
Before reading – Warm-up	„Words in Play“ (Wortspiel)	Activation of prior knowledge, development of associative and creative thinking	Frontal / individuals	Word cards, box	7 min	1. Each student draws 2 word cards. 2. Creates a sentence containing both words. 3. The teacher supports different and non-traditional ways of creating sentences.
Before reading – Content prediction	Story prediction based on keywords	Development of inferential thinking, creation of hypotheses	Pairs	Worksheet with keyword	8 min	1. Students discuss in pairs the possible content of the story. 2. The teacher encourages the creation of

Phase	Activity	Objective	Social form	Aids	Time	Procedure / Instructions
						alternative assumptions and argumentation.
While reading	„DRESS your stick figure IN your HEAD“	Development of inferential thinking, interpretation of the text, associations between characters	Groups of 4	Text „Papierhelden“, worksheet, paper figures, pencils, dice	20 min	1. Students read a passage of the text. 2. Each group is given a character determined by the dice (1–4, numbers 5–6: choice). 3. They write down information, assumptions and thoughts about the character. 4. The groups present the character to the class and discuss their conclusions.
After reading – Discussion	Who is Anna?	Development of inferential thinking, drawing conclusions from incomplete information	Group discussion / frontal work	Worksheet (optional)	5–7 min	1. The teacher informs that a new character has appeared – Anna. 2. Students discuss what role and motivations she could have. 3. Encourage argumentation, supported by clues from the text.
Conclusion – Reflec-	“Your hobbies”	Reflection, relaxation, application of	Groups of 4	Paper, pen	5 min	1. Students write 2 hobbies

Phase	Activity	Objective	Social form	Aids	Time	Procedure / Instructions
tion and relaxation		inferences to one's own life				on a piece of paper. 2. They exchange papers and guess the hobbies of others. 3. The activity encourages reflection, collaboration and anticipation

5. Conclusion

The intervention program for reading comprehension in German is interdisciplinary in nature, connects linguistic, pedagogical and psychological goals and is applicable at multiple levels. The program supports the development of inferential thinking, metacognitive processes and affective competencies of students. The results of the experimental implementation of the program will allow:

- to verify the effectiveness of the development of inferential thinking,
- to support systematic work with the text and the creation of hypotheses,
- to connect language skills with higher cognitive abilities.

The use of this approach is recommended for the comprehensive development of reading comprehension, because it combines work with the text, the development of cognitive and metacognitive processes, the support of motivation and social interaction.

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Reconceptualizing academic assessment in the age of AI: student perceptions, cognitive dependency, and academic integrity in EFL higher education

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Abstract: The Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) revolution has brought profound pedagogical and epistemological transformations in higher education, intensifying the debate on academic integrity, authorship and assessment practices. This study explores the challenges and perceptions of 60 students of the 1st–3rd year of the Bachelor’s program in English Language at Faculty of Education in Durrës-Albania, regarding the use of Artificial Intelligence platforms in their academic practices. The study follows a qualitative approach, where data were collected through 10 semi-structured interviews and 6 focus groups (8-10 participants each), and analyzed through thematic analysis. The results identify three main areas of tension: (a) academic integrity and assessment, with students expressing concerns about the loss of authorial voice and difficulties in distinguishing original from generated work; (b) cognitive dependency, perceived as a risk to the development of critical and analytical thinking; and (c) normative uncertainty, linked to the lack of clear institutional guidelines on the ethical use of GenAI. The study highlights the need to reconceptualize academic assessment in language disciplines, moving towards authentic assessments, based on process and critical reflection. The integration of GenAI is argued as a complementary pedagogical tool, which requires ethical guidelines and systematic training to avoid mechanical use and to maintain academic integrity.

Keywords: reconceptualizing, assessment, integrity, artificial intelligence

1. Introduction

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in higher education represents a paradigm shift in the way students learn, construct knowledge, and are assessed. AI platforms, such as ChatGPT and similar tools, have become an everyday part of students’ academic practices, providing immediate support in understanding complex concepts, structuring ideas, and improving academic writing. However, this development is accompanied by important ethical and pedagogical dilemmas, particularly regarding the originality of work, academic integrity, and the development of critical skills. In the context of linguistic disciplines and fields based on analysis and writing, the use of AI raises fundamental questions about the role of the student as an author and critical thinker. This paper aims to analyze students’ perceptions of the use of AI, addressing the modes of use, perceived benefits, potential risks and expectations for the future role of AI in higher education. The focus is on the need for a balanced approach that combines technological innovation with the principles of academic ethics and the sustainable development of academic competencies. Drawing on contemporary theoretical and empirical debates on the use of GenAI in higher education, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do students perceive the use of GenAI in the learning process and in the accomplishment of academic tasks?

RQ2: What are the pedagogical benefits and perceived risks associated with the use of GenAI, especially in relation to critical thinking, autonomy and academic integrity?

RQ3: How do current assessment practices and the absence/presence of institutional guidelines affect the way students use GenAI?

RQ4: What implications do these perceptions have for the reconceptualization of academic assessment in an AI-mediated context?

Although the international literature has extensively explored the potential and risks of AI in higher education, there is a lack of qualitative studies that focus on the perceptions of students in language majors, particularly in small university contexts outside of Anglophone countries. In the Albanian context, research on the use of AI remains fragmented and largely normative, failing to address students’ direct experience and concrete implications for academic assessment.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth empirical analysis of how English Language students understand, use, and problematize GenAI in their academic practices.

2. Literature review

The contemporary literature on Artificial Intelligence (AI), and particularly Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), in higher education represents a broad academic debate that oscillates between its transformative potential and the pedagogical, ethical, and epistemological risks that accompany its use. Recent studies argue that GenAI is reconfiguring the way academic knowledge is produced, mediated, and assessed, challenging traditional concepts of authorship, originality, and independent learning (Kasneci et al., 2023; Selwyn, 2023).

From a pedagogical perspective, a significant body of research highlights the potential of AI to improve conceptual clarity, personalize learning, and support students in completing complex academic tasks. GenAI is reported to provide cognitive scaffolding, immediate feedback, and linguistic support, particularly for students in the early stages of their studies or those studying in a foreign language (Luckin et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2019; Perkins et al., 2024). In this sense, AI is seen as a tool that can contribute to equity of access to learning and to improving the learning experience, if used in a reflective and guided manner.

However, critical literature highlights serious concerns regarding academic integrity and the long-term development of academic competences. Empirical studies show that the uncontrolled use of GenAI can lead to unconscious plagiarism, loss of authorial voice, and cognitive dependency, reducing students' engagement in deeper analytical and reflective processing (Cotton, Cotton, & Shipway, 2023; Kasneci et al., 2023). Various authors warn that there is a risk that students will become passive consumers of generated content if AI is used as a final source rather than as a supporting tool for knowledge construction.

In this context, the literature also highlights the increasing normative uncertainty in higher education institutions. The lack of clear institutional policies and guidelines on the ethical use of AI is reported to create confusion among both students and faculty, increasing the tension between technological innovation and the maintenance of academic integrity (UNESCO, 2023; Floridi et al., 2018). Responses based exclusively on strict prohibitions or the use of AI detection tools are widely criticized, as they often lead to covert usage practices and the weakening of the pedagogical relationship of trust (Selwyn, 2023).

As an alternative to these restrictive approaches, a growing body of literature argues for a reconceptualization of academic assessment in the AI era. Scholars suggest a shift from traditional, product-oriented tasks to authentic, reflective, and process-based assessments that challenge the mechanical use

of AI and foster critical thinking, metacognition, and academic responsibility (Wiggins, 1998; Brookhart, 2011; Perkins et al., 2024). In this context, the integration of AI through clear pedagogical and ethical guidelines is seen not as a threat, but as an opportunity to redefine teaching and assessment practices in higher education.

3. Methodology

Research design: The study follows a qualitative interpretive approach, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of students’ perceptions and experiences regarding the use of AI in the learning process and academic assessment. This approach is appropriate for understanding the subjective, ethical and pedagogical dimensions of integrating AI in university language contexts.

Participants: The study involved 60 students in the first to third years of the Bachelor's program in English Language, at the Faculty of Education. The selection was made purposefully, including students who reported regular use of AI platforms in academic writing, translation, and academic preparation tasks, as these activities constitute central components of university language training.

Instruments and procedures: Instruments and procedures: Data were collected through 10 individual semi-structured interviews and 6 focus groups, each with 8–10 participants. Data collection was stopped when data saturation was reached, as key themes began to recur. These instruments enabled exploration of usage practices, perceptions of benefits, and ethical concerns.

Data analysis method: Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying recurring patterns and key themes related to: (a) pedagogical use of AI, (b) risks and cognitive addiction, and (c) academic integrity and assessment practices.

Ethical considerations: Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured of anonymity and confidentiality of the data. Participation was voluntary and the data were used for research purposes only.

4. Findings and Discussions

Thematic analysis, developed according to the framework of Braun & Clarke (2006), highlights an ambivalent but reflective relationship of students with GenAI, characterized by strategic pedagogical use and concerns about cognitive dependency and academic integrity. Rather than portraying students as passive users, the findings indicate significant levels of metacognitive awareness regarding the limits and risks of AI use.

The theme of pedagogical use of AI positions GenAI as a supportive tool for conceptual clarification, idea structuring, and immediate feedback, reinforcing the literature on AI as a cognitive scaffold rather than an author of academic product (Luckin et al., 2016; Selwyn, 2023). This clear distinction between support and delegation of academic responsibility suggests a conscious and intentional use of technology.

In contrast, the theme of cognitive dependency highlights the tension between reflective and mechanistic uses of GenAI. Students report that excessive support can reduce deeper cognitive processing and critical engagement, confirming concerns raised by the literature on self-regulated and constructivist learning (Zimmerman, 2002; Selwyn, 2023). These findings suggest that the risk lies not with the technology itself, but with the lack of pedagogical design that fosters reflection and autonomy.

The institutional and ethical dimension represents one of the most critical findings of the study. Normative uncertainty and the lack of clear institutional policies create academic anxiety and confusion around authorship, shifting the focus from individual responsibility to structural gaps. This is consistent with AI ethics frameworks, which emphasize the need for transparency and institutional accountability (Floridi et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2023).

In this context, reconceptualizing academic assessment appears as the most important pedagogical implication. Students’ preference for authentic assessments, based on process and reflection, supports theories of assessment literacy and authentic assessment (Wiggins, 1998; Brookhart, 2011). The findings suggest that the challenge is not to stop GenAI, but to design assessments that make passive use pedagogically non-functional.

Table 1. Main theme, sub-theme and interpretive description

Main theme	Sub-theme	Interpretive description
AI Pedagogical use	Learning support; structuring ideas; immediate feedback	AI is perceived as an aid that facilitates the understanding of concepts and the organization of academic work, but not as a substitute for personal effort.
Cognitive addiction and critical thinking	Reflective & mechanical use;	Students clearly distinguish between critical use of AI and passive use, highlighting the risk of reducing deeper cognitive processing.
Academic integrity	Originality; authorship; normative uncertainty	The lack of institutional guidelines creates uncertainty about the ethical boundaries of AI use and increases academic anxiety among students.
Reconceptualizing assessment	Authentic assessment;	Students favor forms of assessment that require critical thinking, active

	process and reflection	presence, and personal elaboration, making the mechanical use of AI less useful.

Table 2. Empirical themes and representative student quotes

Topic	Representative quote
AI supportive use	“I use it to better understand the topic, but not to submit it as my own work.”
Addiction risk	“If I use it all the time, I feel like I’m not thinking for myself anymore.”
Academic integrity	“We don’t know exactly what’s allowed and what’s not with AI.”
Authentic assessment	“Presentations and projects force you to really understand.”

Table 3. Relationship between empirical themes and theoretical frameworks

Empirical topics	Theoretical Framework
Learning support	AI in education
Critical thinking and dependency	Constructivism; metacognition
Academic integrity	AI ethics
Authentic Assessment	Assessment literacy

4.1 AI uses and benefits

The findings show that students perceive Artificial Intelligence primarily as a supporting tool in the learning process, especially for clarifying concepts, structuring ideas, and receiving immediate feedback. This perception is consistent with the literature on AI in Education, which emphasizes the role of AI as a “cognitive scaffold” that helps students operate within the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), without replacing individual intellectual effort. In this context, the use of AI as a guiding tool rather than as a final source of academic output reflects a constructivist approach to learning, where students actively construct meaning. This finding supports the arguments of Luckin et al. (2016) and Selwyn (2023), according to which the pedagogical potential of AI is only realized when it is critically and reflectively integrated into teaching practices.

4.2 Challenge and impact on critical thinking skills

Thematic analysis highlights a persistent tension between reflective use of AI and the risk of cognitive addiction. Students report that, when AI is used mechanically, it can reduce deeper cognitive processing and dampen critical

thinking. This finding directly relates to theories of self-regulated learning, according to which academic development depends on students' ability to plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning process (Zimmerman, 2002). From a sociocultural perspective, passive use of AI risks turning students into consumers of ready-made content, undermining active knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978). In contrast, reflective use of AI can support metacognition and critical thinking, if accompanied by clear pedagogical guidance and tasks that require personal interpretation. These results align with the warnings of Selwyn (2023), who argues that educational technologies are not neutral and that their use without critical frameworks can reinforce superficial learning practices.

4.3 Academic integrity and assessment

One of the most prominent themes in the empirical data relates to academic integrity and normative uncertainty around the use of AI. Students express difficulty in defining the boundaries between permissible use and copyright infringement, especially in the absence of clear institutional policies. These concerns align with the AI ethics approach, which emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability, and fairness in the use of generative technologies (Floridi et al., 2018).

From an academic assessment perspective, the findings suggest a clear shift towards forms of authentic assessment. Students favour oral presentations, practical projects and reflective essays, which require personal elaboration and demonstration of deep understanding. This supports Wiggins' (1998) theory of authentic assessment, according to which assessment should focus on the meaningful process and transfer of knowledge, rather than on mechanical reproduction.

In this context, authentic assessment emerges as a pedagogical strategy that reduces the uncontrolled use of AI and strengthens academic integrity. This interpretation also aligns with the concept of assessment literacy, which emphasizes the importance of designing assessments that encourage critical thinking and reflection (Brookhart, 2011).

In a broader educational context, the findings can also be interpreted through Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model, where critical reflection, ethical awareness, and academic responsibility constitute key components of the student's formation as an academic citizen.

5. Conclusions and limitations of the study

This study shows that Artificial Intelligence is perceived by students as a supportive and innovative tool in the learning process, helping to understand

complex concepts, structure ideas, and improve academic writing. The reflective use of AI can strengthen critical and metacognitive skills, consistent with the constructivist theories of Vygotsky (1978) and the literature on metacognition (Zimmerman, 2022).

A key finding is the cognitive dependency and mechanical use of AI, which can reduce deep cognitive processing and create intellectual passivity. This reflects international concerns about the impact of AI on students' analytical and creative skills (Floridi, 2023; Selwyn, 2023) and highlights the importance of pedagogical guidance and reflective practices, especially in Albania, where the tradition of learning often relies on memorization and standardized tasks. Another important conclusion relates to academic integrity and normative uncertainty. The lack of clear institutional policies creates tension and anxiety among students, making it necessary to formalize ethical guidelines and rules of use. This is consistent with international literature that highlights the key role of the institutional framework in preventing violations of academic ethics (Selwyn, 2023; Floridi, 2023).

In relation to academic assessment, the study suggests that adopting authentic forms of assessment: such as presentations, projects and reflective essays, can reduce the mechanical use of AI and strengthen students' critical thinking and autonomous work. This is consistent with the concept of assessment literacy (Wiggins, 2022) and reflects the need for adapting assessment practices to the Albanian context.

This study has several limitations. The data reflect the perceptions of students from a specific institutional and disciplinary context, and do not aim for statistical generalization to all Albanian higher education. However, the findings provide transferable insights to similar university linguistic contexts, especially in countries with similar educational traditions.

5.1. Recommendations

1. Higher education institutions should develop clear and coherent policies on the ethical use of Generative Artificial Intelligence, moving from prohibitive approaches to pedagogically oriented and transparent guidelines.
2. Professional training of academic staff on the reflective integration of GenAI is essential to address the risks of cognitive addiction and to maintain academic integrity in technology-mediated contexts.
3. Reconceptualizing academic assessment towards authentic forms, based on process and critical reflection, represents a key strategy to reduce the mechanical use of GenAI and to foster critical thinking and student autonomy.
4. The pedagogical integration of GenAI should be positioned as a supporting tool for exploration, idea structuring, and formative feedback, accompanied by sustainable practices of reflection and self-assessment.

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Teachers at the intersection of CLIL and AI: perceptions and practices from the Albanian context

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Abstract: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been widely investigated with respect to its challenges, benefits, implementation, and impact on students’ academic development across Europe and beyond. More recently, research in CLIL has begun to explore the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning processes. Although CLIL is not yet widely implemented in mainstream schools in Albania, several teachers who adopt this methodology have begun to incorporate AI tools in their teaching practices to support lesson planning, delivery, and student projects. However, teachers’ perceptions of the role of AI in CLIL classrooms in the Albanian context remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the following research questions: (1) How do CLIL content teachers perceive the role of AI in promoting student learning? (2) Do CLIL content teachers feel prepared to incorporate AI into their lessons?

The paper reports findings from a subset of a larger ongoing international study conducted within the framework of the EU-funded project CA21114 CLILNetLe. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Albanian CLIL teachers working in upper secondary schools. The findings indicate that teachers primarily perceive AI as a supportive tool that can scaffold student learning and facilitate classroom activities. While teachers generally view AI as a useful resource, many express concerns regarding their level of preparedness to integrate such tools effectively into their teaching. The lack of formal training in AI integration is frequently highlighted, alongside a strong interest among teachers in receiving professional development in this area. Participants also raise concerns about ethical considerations related to AI use both inside and outside the classroom. In the absence of national guidelines or protocols, teachers report encouraging students to use AI responsibly and ethically.

Keywords: *CLIL; Artificial Intelligence; Teacher Perceptions; AI Integration in Education; Upper Secondary Education; Albania.*

1. Introduction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become one of the most widely adopted approaches for bilingual education in Europe (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010). By integrating subject content and foreign language learning, CLIL aims to promote both disciplinary knowledge and linguistic competence simultaneously. While CLIL has been extensively studied across European contexts, the rapid emergence of AI technologies has begun to reshape the landscape of language and content education.

Recent advancements in generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, and other AI-powered platforms have introduced new possibilities for teaching and learning. These tools can support lesson planning, material development, differentiated instruction, and student inquiry. At the same time, AI raises important pedagogical and ethical questions related to reliability, academic integrity, and student dependency.

Despite the growing international literature on AI in education, relatively little research has explored how CLIL teachers perceive the role of AI in their classrooms, particularly in emerging CLIL contexts such as Albania. Although CLIL has not yet been systematically implemented across Albanian schools, a number of teachers have begun experimenting with CLIL methodologies and digital technologies in upper secondary education. This study therefore seeks to explore how Albanian CLIL teachers perceive and use AI in their teaching practices. By focusing on teachers' experiences and perceptions, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how AI may support or challenge CLIL implementation in developing educational contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 CLIL and Digital Innovation

CLIL has been widely recognised as a pedagogical approach that promotes deeper cognitive engagement and language development (Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). In recent years, digital technologies have played an increasingly important role in supporting CLIL instruction, particularly through multimodal resources and interactive learning environments, even in the Albanian educational system as reported by Sula et al., (2024) who emphasize that CLIL and video integration enhance motivation, content understanding, and student autonomy.

Digital tools have been shown to support vocabulary acquisition, conceptual understanding, and learner autonomy in CLIL classrooms (Dooly & Sadler, 2016). By enhancing student engagement, comprehension, and autonomy, these innovative practices (CLIL and the use of digital tools) offer a pathway to more effective and inclusive education (Sula & Hoxha, 2025). However, the integration of emerging technologies also requires teachers to develop new digital pedagogical competencies.

2.2 Artificial Intelligence in Education

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly being incorporated into educational environments to support adaptive learning, automated feedback, and personalised instruction (Holmes et al., 2022). AI-powered tools can assist teachers in designing materials, generating exercises, and supporting inquiry-based learning.

In language education, AI tools can support vocabulary development, translation, text generation, and writing feedback (Godwin-Jones, 2023). These capabilities may be particularly valuable in CLIL contexts, where learners often encounter complex disciplinary concepts through a second language.

2.3 Teacher Perceptions of AI

Teachers' perceptions play a crucial role in the adoption of educational technologies. Previous research suggests that teachers often view AI as both an opportunity and a challenge (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). While many recognise its potential for enhancing teaching efficiency and student engagement, concerns remain regarding reliability, ethical use, and academic integrity.

In CLIL environments, the integration of AI raises additional questions related to language mediation and cognitive processing. Teachers must balance the benefits of AI support with the need to promote independent thinking and critical literacy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' perceptions and practices regarding AI in CLIL classrooms. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences and interpretations of emerging technologies in their teaching.

3.2 Participants

The study draws on interviews conducted with seven Albanian CLIL teachers working in upper secondary schools. Participants represent a range of subject areas including biology, geography, and other science subjects. All teachers had experience implementing CLIL methodologies in English-medium instruction.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted as part of the international CLILNetLe project. The interviews explored three main areas:

1. Teachers’ perceptions of AI in promoting student learning
2. Teachers’ preparedness to integrate AI
3. Teachers’ classroom applications of AI tools

Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was transcribed for analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved several stages:

1. Familiarisation with the data
2. Initial coding of relevant excerpts
3. Identification of thematic categories
4. Refinement of themes and subthemes

Three major themes emerged from the analysis:

- Perceived role of AI in learning
- Teacher preparedness
- AI application practices

4. Data Analysis

4.1 AI as a Supportive Tool for Learning

Across interviews, teachers consistently described AI as a supportive tool that can facilitate teaching and learning processes. AI was perceived as particularly useful for preparing instructional materials and supporting differentiated instruction. For example, one teacher explained how AI simplifies the preparation of teaching materials and activities:

“By using AI especially ChatGPT, we can prepare differentiated work for a certain age group... and reflect it in an experiment or accompany it with an image.”

Similarly, another teacher emphasised the role of AI in supporting students’ digital competencies and learning processes:

“It helps students also improve their digital skills.”

These findings suggest that teachers primarily perceive AI as a pedagogical scaffold that supports both teaching efficiency and student learning.

4.2 Substitution of Time-Consuming Tasks

In addition to scaffolding learning, teachers highlighted AI’s ability to replace time-consuming preparation tasks. AI was frequently used to gather information, generate lesson plans, and create classroom materials. As one teacher explained:

“We do not need to spend much time collecting information... in a very short time we have it ready to use with students.”

This perception reflects AI’s role as a functional assistant that reduces teachers’ workload.

4.3 Critical Awareness and Concerns

Despite recognising the benefits of AI, teachers also expressed concerns regarding its use in education. These concerns were primarily related to reliability, student dependency, and academic integrity. Teachers emphasised the importance of critical evaluation of AI-generated content. For instance, one participant noted that AI outputs must be interpreted carefully and integrated thoughtfully into learning activities.

Teachers also raised concerns about potential over-reliance on AI tools and the possibility that students might rely on generated answers instead of engaging in independent thinking. These concerns highlight the importance of developing digital critical literacy among both teachers and students when integrating AI into educational contexts.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that Albanian CLIL teachers generally perceive AI as a valuable pedagogical tool that can support both teaching and learning processes. In line with previous research on AI in education (Holmes et al., 2022; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), teachers emphasised the potential of AI to enhance efficiency and facilitate differentiated instruction.

However, the results also indicate that teachers’ perceptions are shaped by a balance between opportunity and caution. While AI is recognised as a supportive technology, teachers remain aware of the need to maintain pedagogical control and encourage critical engagement with AI-generated content.

The findings also highlight the importance of teacher training. Participants frequently reported feeling underprepared to integrate AI effectively into their classrooms. This aligns with existing research indicating that teacher professional development is essential for successful technology integration. Sula & Hoxha (2024) conclude that to sustain and expand the use of CLIL and digital technologies, it is essential that Albanian educators receive the necessary support to develop their skills in both the pedagogical and technological domains.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions and practices of Albanian CLIL teachers regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence in their teaching. The findings indicate that teachers largely perceive AI as a supportive tool that can facilitate lesson preparation, enhance student engagement, and support learning processes.

At the same time, teachers express concerns regarding their preparedness to integrate AI effectively and emphasise the need for critical evaluation of AI-generated content. The lack of formal training and institutional guidelines represents a key challenge for teachers seeking to incorporate AI into their pedagogical practices.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of professional development initiatives that support teachers in developing the digital pedagogical competencies required for AI integration. Future research should further investigate how AI can be integrated effectively within CLIL environments while promoting critical thinking, ethical use, and meaningful learning.

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Shaping future-ready bilingual learners: integrating interlanguage strategies in EFL teaching

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Abstract This paper explores the role of Interlanguage Strategies in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to bilingual learners. Its main aim is to prepare students for the linguistic and communicative demands of a digital society. Based on Second Language Acquisition, the study considers interlanguage as a dynamic and developmental system that reflects learners' evolving linguistic competence.

Using a qualitative research, this study is based on classroom observations, analysis of learners' spoken and written output and reflective teaching practices in bilingual EFL contexts (Bilingue classes French-English in Elbasan's High School “Luigj Gurakuqi”). The paper examines the implementation of interlanguage-focused instructional strategies such as contrastive analysis, error awareness, metalinguistic reflection and formative feedback, supported by digital tools that enhance learner autonomy and engagement.

Findings suggest that integrating interlanguage-aware strategies promotes deeper linguistic awareness, reduces fossilization and supports more inclusive and learner-centered instruction.

Key words: *Interlanguage, bilingual learners, contrastive analyses, error awareness, digital tools*

1. Introduction

In a time of digital communication and global interconnectedness, English proficiency in the classroom and on the job plays a decisive role in what educational and job prospects there are for learners. However, for bilingual French with English learners, learning English is uniquely problematic due to interference by a language system, transfer effects, and the dynamism of interacting systems. These learners not only have to cope with differences in vocabulary and grammar but are also faced with the cultural complexities of

communicating. This paper examines the use of bilingual-targeted interlanguage strategies in EFL lessons. For this section, we focus on 11th Grade bilingual French-English-speaking students of Elbasan High School “Luigj Gurakuqi,” with French as the first foreign language and English as the second. Developing language awareness and learner autonomy via interlanguage-centered pedagogy and digital tools helps to prepare students to become future-ready bilingual learners prepared to function confidently in a multiliteracy and digital world.

2. Literature review

The theoretical base for this study is the theory of Interlanguage proposed through Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Selinker, 1972). Interlanguage is the language system formed by the learner that lies between his or her mother tongue and the target language. It evolves as learners try out rules, test hypotheses, and receive feedback. Most importantly, interlanguage is dynamic and not fixed (Ellis, 2008). For our students, learning in this fashion involves a cycle of stages, mixing with our target language norms language-specific influences (including those from French). Mistakes are seen as normal and a step-by-step part of language progression, not errors as some bad form per se. Such a view facilitates pedagogical approaches that allow for error-aware approaches to be accepted, analyzed and handled positively.

3. Methodology

Setting: The study occurred in the bilingual group (French-English) of Elbasan’s High School “Luigj Gurakuqi” where 10th to 12th graders study French as the primary foreign language and English as a secondary foreign language. They usually have 8-10 years of French instruction and 5-8 years of English instruction, which means they are relatively proficient bilingual learners.

Methods: A qualitative research design was implemented, leveraging:

- Classroom Observations: Several observation sessions were conducted to document the phenomena of interlanguage communication, teaching strategies, and interpersonal practices among learners.
- Learner Output Analysis: Compiling spoken presentations, talks and written work of learners to provide descriptions of mistakes and language growth.
- Reflective teaching techniques: Teacher maintained recording journals on instructional decisions, student reactions and perceived problems. These and other combined methods presented various levels of understanding of how interlanguage strategies influenced language learning.

3.1 Interlanguage-focused teaching methodologies and activities

Four strategies in particular were combined with supportive activities specific to 10th-12th graders in the classroom settings.

3.1.1 Rationale for Contrastive Analysis:

The interlanguage is largely informed and modified in French since students are bilingual and the language spoken in both French and English significantly affects their interlanguage communication. By contrastive analysis, learners are encouraged to more directly appreciate key distinctions and commonalities between the two languages and reduce the amount of negative transfer (overly applying rules from French into English, for example) and positively transfer when possible (Ellis, 2008).

Classroom Activity - Contrastive Grammar Workshop: Students work with pairs of sentences, French and English, where students have to analyze structures affected by interference.

Example:

- French: “Je suis allé au magasin.” (I went to the store.)
- English: “I went to the store.”
- Talk points: French passé composé vs English past simple.

Students work with partners to note and make a list of differences (1 paragraph, 1 verb), and write their own sentences for English using the French examples and structures. Common mistakes such as word order and verb conjugations are highlighted by the teacher. This will facilitate students to use French sentences in which they have to express themselves and the French in a different way with grammar, i.e., they will use a verb, with an ending.

Table 1. Contrastive Analysis Example

Focus: French passé composé vs. English simple past

French Sentence	English Sentence	Key Differences & Notes
Je suis allé au magasin.	I went to the store.	French passé composé uses auxiliary verb + past participle; English uses simple past form.
Il a mangé une pomme.	He ate an apple.	French auxiliary "a" vs. simple past "ate."
Nous avons fini nos devoirs.	We finished our homework.	Structure change; English does not use auxiliary in simple past.

Students compare these pairs, list grammatical differences (verb forms, auxiliary usage), and write new English past tense sentences inspired by French examples, noting possible interference.

Benefits: Engaging directly with the linguistic contrasts promotes metalinguistic knowledge generation, and lessens fossilized errors, particularly negative transfer errors.

3.1.2 Error Awareness Rationale:

Instead of just focusing on correcting errors, encouraging learners to be aware of their mistakes helps them identify and reflect on errors themselves, allowing for a deeper understanding and self-correction, which is an essential skill for fluent language instruction throughout life (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Nunan, 2015).

Classroom Exercise - Error Analysis Journals: Students keep journals where they document their errors (from speaking or writing activities) along with a statement or explanation of why they were incorrect. For example, a student might write: “Error: ‘He go to school every day.’

Reflection: ‘I forgot to put ‘s’ in the third person singular. In French, the verb also changes form but more obviously.

The teacher periodically reviews the journals and provides feedback, with students participating in mini-workshops at times to reinforce common mistakes and correct many of the errors.

Advantages 1: Learners absorb natural grammatical rules and become independent. This contributes to focusing on mistakes rather than fear or avoidance. The table below shows an example of the Error awareness

Table 2. Student Error Journal Excerpt:

Error Sentence	Reflection/Explanation
He go to school every day.	"I forgot the ‘s’ in the third person singular. In French, verbs change more obviously depending on the subject."
She don’t like coffee.	"Incorrect use of ‘don’t’ instead of ‘doesn’t’. French negative forms differ from English negatives."
I have 20 years.	"Literal translation of ‘J’ai 20 ans’ — English uses ‘I am 20 years old.’"

Classroom Use: Teacher reviews journals, discusses common patterns, and organizes mini-workshops focusing on these typical errors.

3.1.3 Metalinguistic Reflection Rationale:

Metalinguistic reflection is when we think and speak precisely about language - how it works, why it uses certain forms, and how meaning might change (Fotos & Ellis, 1991).

Classroom Activity - Metalinguistic Discussion Circles - Small groups share questions such as:

- Why is the present perfect used in English but not in French?
- How does word order change meaning in English sentences vs. French?
- What are the differences between English and French in politeness?

Such discussions are scaffolded by guiding questions and teacher support. Additionally, students write one or two essays describing a grammatical point or a difference they have found, thereby building reflection in writing.

Example prompt for written reflection: "Describe how the formation of English questions differs from French and why this might cause mistakes for French speakers."

The table below shows the example prompt clearly.

Table 3. Metalinguistic Reflection Example

Discussion Prompts & Student Written Reflection:

Prompt	Student Reflection Excerpt
Why is the English present perfect used differently than in French?	"English uses the present perfect to link past actions to the present (e.g., 'I have eaten'), while French often uses passé composé without this connection."
How does word order in questions differ between English and French?	"English inverts the subject and auxiliary verb ('Do you like?') while French uses inversion or est-ce que structures ('Aimes-tu?'). This difference often confuses me."

Activity: Students discuss in groups and then write short essays explaining these points

Advantages: This tactic fosters awareness of language and not just memorization; it promotes creative expression and critical thinking using language.

3.1.4 Reasoned Formative Feedback: Continuous, constructive feedback that is appropriate for a learner's stage allows for growth and motivation over time (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

Classroom Event - Digital Peer Review: Students submit and provide feedback on each other's written assignments and use digital media (e.g., Google Docs, learning management systems) to review each other's work with clear criteria focusing on language accuracy and communicative impact. Teachers also provide focused commentary on particular language features associated with interlanguage issues (e.g., articles, verb tenses, prepositions). Furthermore, oral presentations are recorded and analyzed; afterward, the following sessions allow for individual feedback on strengths and possible areas for

improvement. The following table reflects an example of the Formative Feedback:

Table 4. Formative Feedback Example

Digital Peer Review Table (Sample Feedback on Written Assignment):

Aspect	Feedback from Peer	Teacher’s Additional Comment
Article Use	"Missing ‘the’ before ‘store’."	"Great catch! Remember English requires articles more often than French."
Verb Tense (Past)	"Incorrect tense in ‘he go’."	"Focus on subject-verb agreement in past and present tenses."
Sentence Clarity	"Sentence is unclear in final paragraph."	"Try breaking complex ideas into shorter sentences for clarity."

Oral Presentation Feedback Summary:

Strengths	Areas for Improvement	Next Steps
Clear pronunciation and confidence.	Frequent pauses and incorrect verb forms.	Practice verb conjugations using recording tools; review tense rules.

Students receive these comments digitally and discuss improvement strategies in class.

Pros: Learners obtain timely and actionable information, increased engagement, and learn about themselves and their own successes.

3.1.5 Digital tools: All the strategies described above, are complemented by digital technologies, which help boost student interaction and enable self-direction. Examples of digital tools utilized:

- Language Learning Apps (Quizlet, Kahoot) - Interactive vocabulary and grammar practice with features that include contrastive elements
- Digital Journals and Portfolios: Using platforms like Google Classroom, students can maintain error analysis journals and metalinguistic reflections that teachers can review and provide feedback on.
- Speech Recording Tools (Vocaroo, Flipgrid): Students practice spoken English and evaluate themselves in recordings and can also share recordings with peers and teachers for review.
- Collaborative Platforms (Padlet, Google Docs): Allow online peer-review and group discussions outside class. These technologies foster a collaborative learning experience where learners participate collaboratively in learning outside of traditional classrooms and allow for a variety of learning styles.

4. Results/ Findings and discussions

The combination of interlanguage strategies and digital support resulted in significant findings and discussions:

- Improved Linguistic Literacy: Learners improved their ability to detect and explain the distinction between French and English grammar, demonstrating greater metalinguistic proficiency.
- Decrease in Fossilized Mistakes: Analysis journals and targeted feedback led to a significant decrease in ongoing errors like tense misuse, omission of articles, and sentence structure mistakes commonly found in French speakers.
- Increasing Learner Autonomy: Digital tools empowered students to work at their own pace, revisiting lessons and reflections as needed, supporting the development of individual language management skills and processes.
- Inclusive and Responsive Teaching: By adopting a learner-centered approach, many different levels of learning were accommodated in the classes, encouraging motivation to participate and better learning for those involved. These results emphasize the effectiveness of integrating SLA-based and technological activities in bilingual EFL settings, assisting learners in bridging language gaps and aiding them on the linguistic preparation path to live communication in the real world.

5. Conclusion and limitations of the study

The study emphasizes the substantial gains of interlanguage-based teaching methods in bilingual French-English EFL classrooms. By involving contrastive analysis, error consciousness exercises, metalinguistic reflection and reasoned formative feedback, teachers help learners learn about linguistic differences and typical difficulties that differ between their first and second foreign languages. These approaches facilitate student identification, scrutiny, and self-correcting of errors instead of fixed ones, while aiding in the sustainability of language development by minimizing the fossilization of repeated errors, such as tense and article misapplication.

Inclusion of digital technology also provides more opportunities to enable student autonomy and pace of learning, peer review to promote cooperative learning and increased engagement in L2 learning beyond the walls of the classroom. Results show that such a holistic and learner-centered approach addresses different proficiency levels in bilingual classrooms, supporting involvement, motivation and individualizing learning.

Thus, this is an important contribution to the development of students who are prepared to tackle the intricate linguistic and communicative needs of their

globalized and increasingly digital, world as future-ready bilingual learners and are also congruent with present second language acquisition theory and technology-enhanced pedagogy.

However, there are some limitations of this study. Firstly, it was in a particular field 10th, 11th and 12th grade bilingual students at a single high school in Albania, which may restrict the generalization of the findings to other educational contexts, developmental ages and language combinations. Second, the fact that the qualitative design was primarily concerned with short-term observation and analyses doesn't lend itself well to exploring lasting gains and retention of interlanguage strategy benefits. Further, the study focused on reading, writing and speaking competences but did not extensively address listening or other communicative competences essential for full language ability.

Further studies could fill these gaps by a longitudinal study across different bilingual contexts, by including different aspects of language skills and by examining the potential for scaling and adapting interlanguage-integrated and technology-supported methods across diverse student populations and language pairs. The latter results provide summary evidence that being sensitive to different interlanguage levels along with the use of digital tools is a successful strategy for bilingual EFL instruction to promote linguistic competence, learner autonomy and engagement; in other words, the conditions for success in the ever connecting, digital era.

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Innovative approaches in foreign language teaching: a comparative analysis of practices in schools with Albanian and foreign curricula

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Abstract: Foreign language teaching is a continuously evolving field in which the adoption of innovative approaches is gaining increasing importance in enhancing student engagement, learning effectiveness, and language acquisition.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a comparative analysis of innovative teaching practices implemented in foreign language classrooms within schools that follow the Albanian national curriculum and those operating under foreign curricula, with a particular focus on the ways in which students are engaged and supported in the development of the four core language skills.

The study examines foreign language teaching practices in both curricular contexts, analyzing how traditional instructional methods are combined with contemporary approaches in classroom settings. The academic significance of this research lies in the need to identify pedagogical approaches that foster active student participation and promote balanced development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, thereby contributing to the improvement of teaching practice and pedagogical innovation.

The methodology employed includes a review of relevant literature, classroom observations, and concrete examples drawn from teaching practice, with an emphasis on the integration of traditional and modern instructional elements. The study aims to identify the most effective practices and to provide practical guidance for teachers and education professionals, contributing to the development of an integrated methodological model applicable across diverse educational contexts.

The findings and reflections of this study offer a comparative perspective on innovative approaches and highlight their potential to enhance foreign language teaching in schools operating under different curricular frameworks.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Methods, Teaching, Foreign Language, Classroom, Students*

1. Introduction

In recent decades, foreign language teaching has undergone significant transformations due to globalization, academic mobility, and the orientation of educational systems toward the development of functional competencies. At the European level, the standardization of learning objectives has been structured through the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, which conceptualizes the learner as a “social actor” and promotes an action-oriented approach (Council of Europe, 2001). This framework has significantly influenced the reform of national curricula, including the Albanian education system.

However, the practical implementation of CEFR principles often presents challenges, particularly in contexts where pedagogical traditions have been oriented toward structural and grammar-translation methods. Second language acquisition literature emphasizes that the development of communicative competence requires exposure to comprehensible input and continuous interaction in authentic contexts (Krashen, 1982; Long, 1996). At the same time, Lev Vygotsky’s socio-cultural perspective argues that learning is a social process mediated through collaboration and pedagogical scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978).

In Albania, educational reforms have formally integrated CEFR principles into curricular documents. Nonetheless, a significant gap exists between the normative framework and actual classroom practice. While some private schools or institutions implementing foreign curricula apply communicative models, project-based learning, and systematic use of digital technology, many schools following the national curriculum continue to rely on traditional methods focused on grammatical accuracy and summative assessment.

International literature suggests that communicative and task-based approaches significantly increase student engagement and language fluency (Ellis, 2003; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, comparative studies in the Albanian context are limited, particularly those that analyze both national curriculum schools and schools with foreign curricula in parallel. This

research gap justifies the need for an empirical analysis that critically evaluates the implementation of innovative approaches in both contexts.

The aim of this study is to analyze and compare foreign language teaching practices in Albanian curriculum schools and schools with foreign curricula, examining their impact on the development of the four language competencies. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Which methodological approaches dominate in Albanian curriculum schools?
2. How are innovative approaches implemented in schools with foreign curricula?
3. What differences emerge in the development of language competencies between the two contexts?
4. Do the results suggest the need for an integrated pedagogical model?

By combining theoretical analysis with empirical field data, this study contributes to the literature on foreign language pedagogy in Albania and offers practical implications for teacher professional development and educational policy improvement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Evolution of Approaches in Foreign Language Teaching

Foreign language pedagogy has shifted from structural paradigms toward communicative and competency-oriented approaches. The grammar-translation method, which dominated for decades, primarily focused on analyzing language structures and translation, placing less emphasis on functional language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Critics argue that this method produces declarative knowledge but does not necessarily foster communicative competence.

In response to these limitations, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged, emphasizing the use of language in authentic communication contexts. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), CLT aims to develop communicative competence through interaction, negotiation of meaning, and the use of authentic materials. A further development of this approach is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which places communicative tasks at the center of the learning process (Ellis, 2003). In this model, language structures are learned in service of completing meaningful tasks, promoting the use of language as a tool for action.

2.2 The European Framework and Action-Oriented Approach

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, represents a milestone in the

standardization of language teaching objectives (Council of Europe, 2001). CEFR conceptualizes the learner as a “social actor,” promoting an action-oriented approach. Within this framework, language competence is not reduced to structural knowledge but encompasses the ability to use language effectively in concrete social situations.

Subsequent studies have emphasized that effective CEFR implementation requires methodological transformation, not just formal adaptation of curricular documents (Little, 2006). Without changes in classroom practice, the framework risks remaining a normative instrument with limited pedagogical impact.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition

Stephen Krashen’s Input Hypothesis posits that acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current competence level (Krashen, 1982). This theory supports the use of authentic materials and the reduction of affective factors such as anxiety.

At the same time, Long’s Interaction Hypothesis (1996) argues that negotiation of meaning during communication enhances language acquisition, placing interaction at the center of the learning process.

From a socio-cultural perspective, Lev Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interaction and pedagogical support within the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978), highlighting the teacher’s role as a mediator in developing competence.

Additionally, Howard Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that learners acquire language through different cognitive channels, justifying the use of differentiated instructional methods (Gardner, 1983).

2.4 Pedagogical Innovation and Digital Technology

Integrating technology into foreign language teaching has been considered a key factor in increasing student motivation and engagement (Chapelle, 2001). Digital platforms, interactive tools, and multimodal resources provide opportunities for enhanced exposure to authentic language and immediate feedback. However, the literature cautions that technology alone does not guarantee pedagogical quality; its effectiveness depends on how it is integrated into instructional practice (Hockly, 2018). Pedagogical innovation thus requires not only new tools but also a transformation of the teacher’s and learners’ roles.

2.5 Research Gap in the Albanian Context

While international literature provides a broad theoretical foundation on innovative approaches, empirical studies in Albania remain limited, often

focusing only on curricular document analysis. Comparative analyses empirically examining differences between national curriculum schools and foreign curriculum schools in terms of actual classroom practices are lacking. This study aims to fill this gap by providing an empirical analysis that links classroom practice to the theoretical framework of second language acquisition and the principles of CEFR.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a literature review with field-based data collection to examine foreign language teaching practices in international schools in Albania following the IB curriculum. The research began with an analysis of relevant literature, focusing on the IB framework and contemporary methodologies for foreign language instruction. This provided a theoretical foundation and highlighted effective global practices adaptable to the Albanian context.

Field data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations focused on lesson organization, student engagement, interaction patterns, use of instructional materials and technology, and development of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with international language teachers and school leaders to explore their experiences, pedagogical strategies, and adaptations in implementing the IB curriculum.

The selection of international teachers and school leaders as participants was intentional, aiming to capture multiple perspectives on teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and learner autonomy. This approach also allowed the study to explore how globally-informed methods are applied in a local Albanian setting, highlighting both challenges and opportunities in promoting communicative competence and student-centered learning.

Data analysis followed standard qualitative procedures, including transcription of interviews, thematic coding, and triangulation with observational notes. This process facilitated the identification of recurring patterns, innovative strategies, and areas for improvement in foreign language teaching within IB schools.

Overall, this mixed-methods design integrates theoretical insights with practical classroom evidence, providing a comprehensive understanding of IB-based foreign language instruction in Albania. It highlights effective practices, pedagogical challenges, and strategies for fostering learner autonomy, fluency, and interactive communication, offering insights relevant to both local and international educational contexts.

4. Results

4.1 Results in the School Following the Albanian National Curriculum

Classroom observations and teacher interviews in the school implementing the Albanian national curriculum revealed a structured, textbook-driven approach. Lessons typically followed a predictable sequence: homework review, introduction of new grammatical structures, controlled practice, and error correction. This aligns with the grammar-translation and structuralist paradigms historically prevalent in formal education, where linguistic accuracy and knowledge reproduction are prioritized over communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Student Engagement and Interaction

Students engaged primarily through individual responses to teacher-directed questions and written exercises. Peer interaction was limited and highly structured, with infrequent opportunities for pair or group work. Engagement was largely oriented toward cognitive reproduction rather than creative or spontaneous use of the language, reflecting behaviorist assumptions that learning occurs through repetition and reinforcement (Brown, 2007). Younger students (grades 6-7) demonstrated some enthusiasm during occasional language games, suggesting that integrating even limited communicative activities can positively influence motivation, consistent with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis. Older students (grades 8-10) were more exam-focused, indicating the strong influence of assessment-driven pedagogy on student behavior.

Development of Language Skills

Classroom activities were dominated by reading and writing, while listening was practiced mainly through textbook-based audio materials. Speaking opportunities were minimal, generally limited to short responses or scripted dialogues. Consequently, students developed a strong structural and lexical foundation but had limited opportunities to enhance fluency, pragmatic competence, or interactive communication skills, which are central components in communicative language teaching (CLT) frameworks.

Use of Technology and Instructional Materials

Technology was used sporadically, primarily to support presentations or audio playback. The textbook remained the central instructional resource, guiding lesson pace and content. This limited integration of digital tools contrasts with contemporary TBLT (task-based language teaching) and CALL (computer-assisted language learning) perspectives, which emphasize technology as a means to provide authentic input and promote learner autonomy (Thomas & Reinders, 2010).

4.2 Results in the School Following the IB Curriculum

In contrast, the IB school demonstrated a flexible, learner-centered approach emphasizing communication, collaboration, and autonomy. Lessons integrated communicative tasks, short-term projects, interactive activities, and real-world language use, reflecting principles of constructivist and competence-oriented pedagogies (Little, 2007). The approach aligns with the IB learner profile, which emphasizes inquiry, reflection, and active engagement.

Student Engagement and Interaction

Students exhibited high levels of engagement across all grades. Younger learners (grades 6-7) participated enthusiastically in language games, role-plays, and visual activities, while older students (grades 8-10) engaged in debates, research projects, presentations, and thematic discussions. Peer-to-peer interaction was frequent and purposeful, fostering authentic communication and negotiation of meaning, consistent with Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, which highlights the role of social interaction in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). Interviews confirmed that teachers intentionally designed activities to support collaboration, critical thinking, and learner autonomy, echoing student-centered and task-based approaches.

Development of Language Skills

All four language skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing were integrated within lessons. Listening and speaking activities relied on authentic audio-visual materials and collaborative discussion. Reading included authentic and supplementary texts beyond the textbook, while writing was often linked to creative or research-based projects. This integrated approach promotes balanced skill development and real-world communicative competence, supporting findings from research on content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

Use of Technology and Instructional Materials

Technology was systematically embedded, including interactive presentations, online platforms, and multimedia resources. Technology functioned as an integral component of instruction, enhancing motivation, providing exposure to authentic input, and supporting differentiated learning, in line with 21st-century learning frameworks emphasizing digital literacy and learner autonomy (Redecker, 2017).

Teacher Perspectives

International teachers emphasized the importance of flexibility, student-centered strategies, and reflective practice. School leaders highlighted that professional development and access to diverse resources are critical for sustaining high-quality foreign language instruction, consistent with theories

of reflective teaching and continuous professional learning (Schön, 1983).

5. Conclusion

This study examined foreign language teaching practices in two non-public schools in Albania: one following the national curriculum and the other the IB curriculum. Findings reveal distinct pedagogical approaches with significant implications for student engagement, skill development, and learner autonomy.

The national curriculum school employed a structured, textbook-driven approach emphasizing formal accuracy and controlled practice. Student participation was mainly individual, peer interaction was limited, and opportunities for authentic language use were minimal. While students developed strong structural and lexical foundations, their communicative competence and fluency remained constrained.

In contrast, the IB school applied a flexible, learner-centered approach integrating communicative tasks, projects, and authentic materials. Peer interaction was frequent and purposeful, fostering negotiation of meaning and critical thinking. Technology was systematically embedded, enhancing motivation and exposure to authentic language input. Teachers’ reflective practices and adaptability were identified as key to instructional effectiveness. Overall, the study underscores that curriculum design and pedagogical orientation profoundly shape language learning outcomes. Structured, content-focused approaches support knowledge consolidation, whereas communicative, competence-oriented models better promote fluency, interactive skills, and learner autonomy. These findings highlight the importance of balancing accuracy with communication, integrating technology meaningfully, and fostering student-centered learning in foreign language education.

6. Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of this study, several evidence-based recommendations are proposed to enhance foreign language pedagogy in Albanian schools:

a. Adopt Learner-Centered Methodologies

Traditional, textbook-driven curricula should incorporate interactive and collaborative learning strategies, including project-based tasks, debates, and role-plays, to foster active engagement, critical thinking, and authentic language use.

b. Balance Linguistic Accuracy with Communicative Competence

Instruction should integrate controlled practice with meaningful communicative activities that develop fluency, pragmatic competence, and student confidence in real-world language contexts.

c. Systematic Integration of Educational Technology

Digital resources, multimedia materials, and online collaborative platforms should be embedded purposefully to enhance motivation, provide exposure to authentic language input, and support differentiated instruction.

d. Support Reflective Practice and Professional Development

Ongoing professional development and reflective practices are essential. Structured workshops, peer observations, and training in innovative pedagogical approaches enable teachers to adapt methodologies to diverse classroom contexts effectively.

e. Promote Peer Interaction and Collaborative Learning

Structured opportunities for pair and group work should be expanded, as peer collaboration is critical for negotiating meaning, developing communicative skills, and fostering learner autonomy.

f. Contextualize International Best Practices

International models, such as those employed in IB schools, should be adapted thoughtfully to local educational contexts, ensuring cultural and institutional relevance while maintaining pedagogical effectiveness.

By implementing these recommendations, educators can create a more dynamic, communicative, and learner-centered foreign language learning environment, bridging the gap between traditional and competency-oriented instructional approaches and enhancing both student engagement and linguistic proficiency.

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Integrating global challenges and technology-enhanced learning in ESP for Social Sciences courses: Insights from student questionnaire data

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Abstract This study explores the extent to which global and contemporary issues were integrated and discussed throughout the course, with particular reference to students’ perceptions gathered through an end-of-course questionnaire. One key item invited students to evaluate how effectively the course addressed themes relevant to the Social Sciences, including cultural differences, multilingualism, diversity and inclusion, migration, digital surveillance, global inequality, as well as the role of technology and innovation in teaching and learning. The purpose of this analysis is to assess the relevance and impact of these topics on students’ academic engagement and critical awareness.

Preliminary findings indicate that the inclusion of global issues and technological innovations significantly enhanced the learning experience. Students highlighted that discussions on intercultural communication, social justice, and global interconnectedness helped them better understand contemporary social realities. Moreover, the integration of technology—such as digital platforms, AI tools, and interactive learning methods—was perceived as a valuable innovation that supported engagement, collaboration, and independent learning. These elements encouraged students to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world developments and emerging professional practices.

Overall, responses suggest that embedding global issues alongside technological and pedagogical innovations fosters a more inclusive, relevant, and future-oriented learning environment. Such integration not only strengthens students’ critical thinking and academic skills but also prepares them to navigate complex global and digital landscapes within the field of Social Sciences.

Keywords: *Global issues, Social Sciences education, technology-enhanced learning, diversity and inclusion; student perceptions, innovative teaching*

1. Introduction

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has long been recognized as a learner-centred approach that responds to the communicative needs of students within particular academic and professional domains (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). In the context of Social Sciences, ESP courses extend beyond the development of discipline-specific vocabulary and genre conventions; they also engage students with contemporary social realities, global challenges, and evolving forms of communication. As higher education increasingly emphasizes internationalization, intercultural competence, and digital literacy, ESP instruction must adapt to reflect these broader academic and societal transformations.

Social Sciences education inherently addresses issues such as cultural diversity, migration, global inequality, multilingualism, social justice, and digital transformation. These themes are not peripheral but central to students’ academic formation and professional development. Consequently, ESP courses designed for Social Sciences students have the potential to function not only as language development spaces but also as platforms for critical engagement with global and contemporary issues. Integrating such themes into language instruction supports the development of academic discourse skills while simultaneously fostering critical awareness and intercultural sensitivity.

At the same time, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has reshaped teaching and learning environments in higher education. Technology-enhanced learning—through digital platforms, interactive tools, online collaboration, and emerging AI-supported applications—has become an integral component of contemporary pedagogy. In ESP contexts, these tools offer opportunities to simulate authentic communication scenarios, facilitate collaborative tasks, and support autonomous learning. When strategically integrated, technology can enhance engagement, provide multimodal input, and encourage reflective and participatory learning practices.

Despite the growing emphasis on global issues and digital innovation in higher education, there remains a need to examine how students perceive the integration of these elements within ESP courses. Student perceptions are particularly significant in learner-centred approaches, as they provide insight into the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of instructional practices. Understanding how students evaluate the inclusion of global challenges and technology-enhanced learning can inform curriculum design and pedagogical decision-making in ESP contexts.

This study therefore explores the extent to which global and contemporary issues, alongside technological innovations, were integrated into an ESP course for Social Sciences students. Drawing on questionnaire data collected at the end of the course, the research examines students’ perceptions of the relevance, inclusivity, and pedagogical value of these components. By analysing student feedback, the study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on how ESP courses can foster critical awareness, digital competence, and meaningful engagement with complex global realities.

2. Literature Review

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is widely recognized as an approach that focuses on developing communicative competencies required in specific academic and professional domains (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Its pedagogical foundation is closely linked to needs analysis (Munby, 1978), which identifies the communicative demands of learners’ disciplines, and genre analysis (Swales, 1990), which examines the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of disciplinary texts. In Social Sciences contexts, ESP extends beyond general language proficiency to include the development of analytical, argumentative, and interpretative skills necessary for engaging with contemporary social issues and academic discourse.

Recent scholarship emphasizes that ESP involves participation in disciplinary discourse communities where knowledge is constructed through language rather than merely the acquisition of specialized vocabulary (Hyland, 2006). For Social Sciences students, this includes engaging with topics such as cultural diversity, migration, global inequality, and social justice while developing the linguistic and rhetorical tools required for academic and professional communication. Such integration aligns with academic literacies frameworks, which conceptualize learning as entry into discipline-specific meaning-making practices (Lea & Street, 1998).

Within this framework, the integration of global and contemporary issues into ESP courses has gained increasing attention. Scholars argue that language learning should reflect real-world challenges and prepare students for globalized and multicultural environments (Baker, 2015). Incorporating themes such as intercultural communication, diversity and inclusion, multilingualism, and global interconnectedness can foster critical awareness and enhance student motivation by linking linguistic development with disciplinary knowledge and professional aspirations (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

At the same time, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has reshaped ESP pedagogy. Technology-enhanced learning environments—including digital

platforms, collaborative tools, multimedia resources, and AI-supported applications—create opportunities for more interactive and learner-centred instruction (Warschauer, 2004). These tools facilitate access to authentic materials, support multimodal communication, and encourage autonomous learning. In Social Sciences-oriented ESP courses, technology can simulate real-world communication scenarios, support research-based tasks, and promote collaborative problem-solving.

From a socio-constructivist perspective, learning is understood as a socially mediated process shaped through interaction and reflection (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996). Digital platforms and interactive technologies can therefore function as mediating tools that support dialogue, reflection, and knowledge co-construction, enhancing both language acquisition and disciplinary understanding. Moreover, technology-enhanced instruction contributes to the development of digital literacy—an essential competence for contemporary learners—which includes the ability to evaluate information, engage in digital communication, and learn autonomously (Godwin-Jones, 2018).

Overall, the literature indicates that integrating global issues and technology-enhanced learning into ESP courses contributes to more relevant, inclusive, and engaging learning experiences. Nevertheless, further empirical exploration of students’ perceptions remains necessary to better understand the effectiveness and pedagogical value of such integration in contemporary ESP contexts.

2.2. Technology-Enhanced Learning and Digital Innovation in ESP

The integration of digital technologies has significantly reshaped pedagogical practices in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly within Social Sciences contexts. Technology-enhanced learning now extends beyond traditional computer-assisted language learning to include interactive platforms, multimedia resources, collaborative tools, and emerging AI-supported applications. These developments have transformed language classrooms into dynamic environments where learners engage with authentic materials, multimodal communication, and digitally mediated academic discourse (Warschauer, 2004; Godwin-Jones, 2018).

In ESP courses for Social Sciences students, digital tools play a key role in linking language development with disciplinary knowledge. Multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, online articles, and simulations enable students to engage with global and contemporary issues—including migration, diversity, and global inequality—while simultaneously developing linguistic and analytical skills. Research suggests that technology-supported instruction enhances learner motivation, autonomy, and participation when integrated into

meaningful and contextually relevant tasks (Chapelle, 2001; Dudeney & Hockly, 2012).

Recent advances in generative artificial intelligence have further expanded opportunities for technology-enhanced ESP learning. AI-supported tools can assist with drafting texts, generating discussion prompts, and providing feedback, thereby supporting academic writing and disciplinary communication. Studies indicate that such tools may increase learner engagement and confidence when used within pedagogically structured environments (Lee, 2024; Sharples, 2023). These practices align with constructivist and socio-constructivist perspectives, which view learning as an interactive process mediated through tools and collaboration (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978).

At the same time, the integration of digital and AI-supported tools requires critical and pedagogically informed implementation. Digital literacy in ESP involves not only technical skills but also the capacity to evaluate information, engage responsibly with digital content, and reflect on the implications of technology use (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Educators therefore play a central role in ensuring that technology functions as a support for critical thinking and disciplinary engagement rather than as a substitute for them.

Overall, the literature suggests that technology-enhanced learning and digital innovation can substantially enrich ESP instruction for Social Sciences students. When thoughtfully integrated and pedagogically aligned, digital tools contribute to more engaging, inclusive, and future-oriented learning environments that foster language development, critical awareness, and digital competence.

2.3. Pedagogical Innovation through Technology and AI in ESP

At institutional and classroom levels, educators are increasingly experimenting with digital and AI-supported tools in diverse pedagogical roles, ranging from automated writing support and adaptive learning systems to simulation-based and project-based tasks. These developments build on a long trajectory of educational technology adoption, where new tools have historically reshaped instructional design rather than simply supplementing existing practices (Cuban, 2001). In ESP contexts—particularly within Social Sciences programmes—such innovations offer opportunities to redesign teaching practices in ways that align more closely with contemporary academic and professional realities.

Institutional reports and policy guidelines emphasize the importance of integrating AI responsibly and transparently into teaching and learning. For instance, university-level recommendations stress ethical oversight, collaboration between faculty and students, and clarity regarding when and

how AI tools are used in coursework. These institutional perspectives reflect Rogers’ (2003) Diffusion of Innovations theory, which suggests that successful adoption of new technologies depends not only on technical functionality but also on perceived relevance, social acceptance, and demonstrable pedagogical value. Within ESP for Social Sciences, innovation is therefore not merely technological; it is pedagogical, requiring thoughtful alignment between digital tools and disciplinary learning outcomes.

From a socio-constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1996), technology and AI can function as mediating artifacts that support dialogue, scaffolding, and collaborative meaning-making. When integrated appropriately, AI-supported tools can encourage learners to engage actively with disciplinary content, refine their arguments, and experiment with different rhetorical strategies. In Social Sciences-oriented ESP courses, this may include drafting policy briefs, analyzing global case studies, or simulating intercultural negotiations. Rather than replacing teacher input, AI can serve as a catalyst for reflection and discussion, shifting the classroom dynamic toward more interactive and learner-centred models.

Pedagogical innovation with AI and digital tools in ESP can take multiple forms. Flipped and blended learning models, for example, allow students to engage with AI-generated summaries, guiding questions, or vocabulary support before class, thereby reserving classroom time for higher-order discussion and critical analysis (Bishop & Verleger, 2013). Project-based learning can also benefit from digital tools that simulate real-world scenarios—such as policy analysis tasks, global issue debates, or collaborative research projects—enhancing authenticity and relevance. Additionally, AI-supported formative feedback can provide learners with immediate responses on draft texts, encouraging revision and iterative learning in line with process-oriented writing approaches (Bloom, 1984).

However, pedagogical innovation with AI must be approached critically. Scholars caution that AI-generated outputs, although linguistically fluent, may lack pragmatic depth, cultural nuance, or contextual sensitivity (Godwin-Jones, 2024). In Social Sciences contexts, where discourse often reflects complex power relations and ideological positions, uncritical reliance on AI risks reproducing dominant narratives rather than fostering critical awareness (Fairclough, 1995). Moreover, issues of transparency, bias, and equitable access to advanced technologies remain significant concerns (Yan et al., 2023; Warschauer, 2004).

From a critical pedagogy perspective (Freire, 1970), the challenge lies in avoiding passive consumption of AI-generated content. Instead, AI should be embedded within dialogic, reflective, and inquiry-based practices that encourage students to question, adapt, and contextualize digital outputs.

Instructors thus assume a mediating role, guiding students toward responsible and critical engagement with technology. This approach ensures that innovation enhances, rather than diminishes, learners’ autonomy and analytical capacity.

In sum, pedagogical innovation through technology and AI in ESP for Social Sciences offers substantial potential to enrich learning experiences, increase engagement, and foster critical and digital literacy. Yet, its effectiveness depends on human-centred design, ethical awareness, and alignment with disciplinary objectives. When embedded within reflective and dialogic pedagogical frameworks, digital and AI-supported tools can contribute to more inclusive, relevant, and future-oriented ESP instruction.

2.4. ESP Teachers’ Perspectives and Digital Competence

In order to investigate students’ perceptions of digital integration within the ESP course, the questionnaire included the item: “How effectively was technology (e.g., online platforms, digital tools, videos, simulations) integrated into your ESP learning process?” The responses demonstrate a markedly positive evaluation of technology-enhanced instruction. Fifteen out of twenty respondents characterized the integration of digital tools as very effective, indicating a strong level of student satisfaction with the manner in which technological resources were embedded in the learning environment.

This result suggests that digital technologies were not perceived merely as auxiliary or decorative elements of instruction, but rather as integral components of pedagogical design. Students’ positive evaluations point to the successful incorporation of multimedia materials, online platforms, and interactive tools in ways that supported comprehension, engagement, and the development of disciplinary language competences. Such findings resonate with established research in computer-assisted language learning, which emphasizes that the pedagogical value of technology emerges most clearly when digital tools are purposefully aligned with instructional objectives and embedded within coherent learning tasks (Chapelle, 2001; Godwin-Jones, 2018).

From the perspective of digital competence frameworks, particularly the European Commission’s DigCompEdu model (Redecker, 2017), the high proportion of favorable responses may be interpreted as evidence of effective pedagogical orchestration of technology. The integration of digital tools appears to have facilitated not only access to authentic and multimodal resources, but also opportunities for interaction, reflection, and academic discourse development within Social Sciences ESP contexts. These dimensions are particularly significant in disciplines where language learning

intersects with critical analysis, interpretation of global issues, and engagement with complex sociocultural content.

At the same time, the distribution of responses suggests that technology integration remains a dynamic and evolving process. While the majority of students perceived the use of digital tools as highly effective, continued reflection on pedagogical alignment, task design, and the critical use of emerging technologies—including generative AI—remains essential. Overall, the findings reinforce the broader argument of this study: technology-enhanced learning can significantly enrich ESP instruction when implemented through deliberate, reflective, and pedagogically grounded practices.

3. Methodological Framework

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual research approach, grounded in literature synthesis, analysis of practitioner perspectives, and the examination of illustrative classroom practices. The research focuses on ESP instruction in Social Sciences contexts, where language learning is closely connected with critical thinking, academic discourse, and engagement with global and contemporary issues. Such contexts provide a relevant setting for examining the integration of technology-enhanced learning and digital innovation within ESP pedagogy.

The methodological framework is primarily interpretative and analytical. It draws on a comprehensive review of relevant academic literature, empirical studies, and institutional reports addressing ESP pedagogy, technology-enhanced learning, and the integration of digital tools and AI-supported resources in higher education. These sources inform the conceptualization of pedagogical practices and support the exploration of how global issues and technological innovations can be embedded in ESP instruction to enhance student engagement and critical awareness.

In addition to literature analysis, the study incorporates student questionnaire data as an empirical component. Student responses provide insight into perceptions of course content, the integration of global and contemporary issues, and the role of digital tools and innovative teaching approaches in shaping the learning experience. This combination of conceptual analysis and empirical reflection allows for a more comprehensive understanding of pedagogical effectiveness within ESP courses.

The framework is based on the assumption that technology and digital tools function not as replacements for teacher-led instruction but as catalysts for pedagogical innovation when integrated in a purposeful and reflective manner. Emphasis is placed on analysis, interpretation, and comparison of instructional practices and student perceptions rather than on extensive statistical

measurement. Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses, are maintained throughout the research process. Through this methodological orientation, the study seeks to provide theoretically informed and practice-oriented insights into the integration of global issues and technology-enhanced learning in ESP for Social Sciences, contributing to ongoing discussions on innovation, relevance, and inclusivity in higher education language instruction.

4. Findings and Discussion

The questionnaire results indicate a strongly positive student perception of technology integration within the ESP course. Notably, 15 out of 20 respondents rated the integration of digital tools and platforms as very effective, reflecting a high level of satisfaction with the way technology was embedded in the instructional design. This suggests that digital resources—such as online platforms, multimedia materials, and AI-supported tools—were not perceived as supplementary additions, but as meaningful components of the learning process.

Students’ evaluations imply that technology contributed to enhanced engagement, facilitated access to authentic and contemporary materials, and supported the development of disciplinary language and academic discourse skills. These findings are consistent with research in technology-enhanced ESP instruction, which emphasizes that digital tools are most impactful when pedagogically aligned with learning objectives and integrated into coherent task design (Chapelle, 2001; Godwin-Jones, 2018).

At the same time, the results underscore the importance of continued reflective implementation. While student perceptions are largely positive, effective and responsible integration—particularly of emerging AI-supported tools—requires sustained pedagogical mediation to ensure that technology enhances critical thinking, disciplinary literacy, and meaningful engagement within Social Sciences contexts.

5. Conclusion

The integration of global challenges and technology-enhanced learning within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for Social Sciences highlights the evolving relationship between language learning, disciplinary knowledge, and digital innovation in contemporary higher education. The findings of this study demonstrate that embedding global and contemporary issues—such as diversity and inclusion, migration, intercultural communication, and digital transformation—alongside the purposeful use of technological tools

contributes to a more relevant, engaging, and future-oriented learning environment. When students perceive a clear connection between course content and real-world developments, their motivation, critical awareness, and academic engagement are strengthened.

Technology-enhanced learning, including the use of digital platforms, multimedia resources, and AI-supported tools, has emerged as a significant factor in shaping students' learning experiences. These tools support interactive and collaborative learning, facilitate access to authentic materials, and encourage independent exploration beyond the classroom. However, their pedagogical value depends on structured integration and critical mediation by instructors. Technology should function as a support for meaningful learning rather than as a substitute for reflective engagement or teacher guidance.

The study also underscores the importance of fostering digital and critical literacy among students. As learners increasingly interact with digital content and AI-assisted tools, they must be equipped to evaluate sources, recognize potential biases, and use technological resources responsibly. Similarly, educators play a central role as facilitators of critical engagement, designing tasks that connect language learning with disciplinary inquiry and global perspectives. Institutional support, including access to digital resources and clear guidelines for responsible technology use, is essential for ensuring equitable and effective implementation.

Overall, the integration of global issues and technology-enhanced learning in ESP for Social Sciences contributes to the development of key competences required in contemporary academic and professional contexts: critical thinking, intercultural awareness, digital literacy, and effective communication. By aligning ESP pedagogy with the realities of a globalized and digitally mediated world, higher education institutions can foster more inclusive, innovative, and meaningful learning experiences. Future research may further explore long-term impacts of technology-enhanced ESP instruction and examine how evolving digital tools continue to shape language learning and disciplinary engagement in Social Sciences education.

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Critical thinking and artificial intelligence in ESP: classroom strategies that work

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Abstract: This paper explores how AI - supported teaching strategies can contribute to the development of critical thinking skills in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classrooms in higher education. With the growing role of technology in education, the study focuses on how AI enhanced activities can support students’ analytical, reflective, and problem-solving skills in English language learning. The study is guided by three main research questions: How do AI-supported teaching strategies influence the development of critical thinking skills in ESP classes? Which classroom strategies do students perceive as most effective for developing critical thinking.

A quantitative research design was employed, using a structured questionnaire administered to undergraduate students from different faculties and academic years. The questionnaire examined student satisfaction and perceptions of critical thinking development through a range of instructional strategies, including debates and discussions, case studies, project-based learning, group problem-solving, role-playing activities, and instructor feedback, many of which were supported by AI tools.

The findings indicate a high level of student agreement regarding the effectiveness of these strategies, particularly collaborative and activities focused on problem solving, in supporting critical thinking development. Overall, the results suggest that thoughtfully integrated AI-supported strategies can enrich ESP classrooms by encouraging active engagement, deeper understanding, and the practical application of knowledge.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Critical Thinking, ESP Instruction, Innovative Teaching Strategies, Second Language Acquisition*

1. Introduction

The rapid digital transformation of society has significantly changed how teaching and learning take place in higher education. Universities today are

expected not only to provide students with subject knowledge but also to help them develop transferable skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and effective communication. In English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, which prepare students to use English in academic and professional contexts, these skills are particularly important because students are learning to communicate in real workplace situations.

For this reason, ESP instruction needs to reflect the demands of a global and technology-driven world and provide learning experiences that support both language development and higher-level thinking.

Critical thinking is widely recognized as one of the most important outcomes of modern education. In many fields, students are expected to analyze information carefully, evaluate different options, and respond to complex situations rather than simply recall facts.

Researchers have shown that traditional approaches based mainly on memorization are no longer sufficient for the needs of the 21st century, where learners must actively engage with knowledge and apply it in meaningful ways (Marin & Halpern, 2011).

Studies also indicate that students develop deeper understanding when they participate in tasks that require reasoning, discussion, and problem solving (Jonassen & Reeves, 1996). In ESP classrooms, activities such as debates, case studies, simulations, and project work provide practical opportunities for students to practice these skills while using English for professional communication.

At the same time, advances in digital technology have created new possibilities for improving learning processes. Artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most influential developments, offering tools that support personalized learning, immediate feedback, and interactive engagement. Applications such as intelligent tutoring systems, adaptive learning platforms, and natural language processing tools are increasingly used in language education. These technologies can respond quickly to students' needs, generate realistic communication scenarios, and support problem solving, making learning more flexible and student-centered. In ESP contexts, AI tools can simulate workplace communication, help students develop content area vocabulary, and encourage engagement with complex tasks.

However, the use of AI in ESP classrooms is still not defined. Many courses continue to rely mainly on traditional teaching methods, and there is limited research on how AI-supported strategies influence critical thinking. Existing studies often focus on technological effectiveness or language improvement rather than on cognitive development. This gap highlights the need for research that examines how AI can be integrated into ESP teaching in ways that genuinely support analytical thinking and meaningful learning.

2. Literature review

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an increasingly influential factor in contemporary education, offering new opportunities for personalized learning, adaptive instruction, and interactive engagement. In language education, AI tools can provide immediate feedback, automated assessment, learner profiling, and flexible content delivery, allowing students to follow learning paths suited to their individual needs (Okolo et al., 2024; Mananay, 2024). Technologies such as natural language processing systems, intelligent tutoring platforms, and automated evaluation tools enable learners to practice language skills actively while receiving instant responses, thereby supporting more student-centered learning environments (Son et al., 2023; Choudhury et al., 2024). Nevertheless, researchers argue that the mere presence of technology does not automatically improve learning. Concerns remain regarding ethical issues, insufficient teacher preparation, data reliability, and the risk that excessive dependence on automated systems may reduce independent thinking and meaningful interaction (Siregar et al., 2024).

Recent research has also explored AI’s potential to support the development of critical thinking, particularly in academic contexts. AI-based analytical tools can process large amounts of information, identify patterns, and highlight gaps in knowledge, which can help learners formulate research questions and evaluate evidence more effectively (Raharjana et al., 2021; Duman & Akdemir, 2021). By handling routine tasks such as searching for information, AI allows students to focus on higher-order thinking such as making sense of information, linking ideas together, and judging their credibility. In addition, data analytics and machine learning tools can assist in testing assumptions and exploring alternative explanations, thereby encouraging inquiry and analytical reasoning (Mathisen et al., 2019; Halpern & Dunn, 2021). Scenario-based applications further support problem-solving skills by allowing students to experiment with different options and consider possible outcomes (Lamb et al., 2020).

Despite these advantages, the literature also points to several important limitations. Algorithmic bias may restrict exposure to diverse viewpoints, potentially creating informational “echo chambers” that limit analytical depth (Sasahara et al., 2019; Kusters et al., 2020). AI systems may also struggle to interpret context, emotion, or cultural nuance, which can result in incomplete or oversimplified interpretations of complex issues (Heimerl et al., 2022). Questions of reliability and ethical use further complicate their application in education, as inaccurate data or flawed algorithms can produce misleading outputs (Ryan, 2020). Another concern is cognitive offloading, whereby

students rely heavily on AI support instead of developing their own reasoning abilities (Marzuki et al., 2023). These findings suggest that AI should complement, rather than replace, human guidance in order to preserve intellectual independence and critical engagement.

Alongside technological developments, there has been growing interest in innovative learning environments that promote creativity, collaboration, and active participation. Research on creative learning spaces indicates that well-designed environments, whether physical or digital, can enhance motivation, engagement, and self-reflection (Thoring et al., 2012; Byers, 2020). Technology-supported settings facilitate inquiry-based learning and collaborative problem solving, enabling students to exchange ideas, negotiate meaning, and construct knowledge through interaction (Richardson & Mishra, 2018). However, scholars emphasize that the effectiveness of such environments depends largely on pedagogical design rather than on technology alone.

These issues are particularly relevant in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education. ESP courses aim to prepare learners for communication in specific academic or professional contexts, where tasks often involve teamwork, negotiation, and decision making in complex situations. AI integration offers opportunities for discipline-specific practice through simulations, contextualized dialogue, adaptive materials, and immediate feedback (Tang, 2023; Sinkus & Ozola, 2024). Generative AI tools, for example, allow students to rehearse professional communication, refine written texts, and explore alternative solutions, thereby supporting functional language use. Studies also suggest that AI-mediated interaction can reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and promote autonomous learning, factors that indirectly support critical thinking development (Hapsari & Wu, 2022; Xiao & Zhi, 2023). Emotional variables such as trust and self-efficacy have likewise been shown to influence both language learning and analytical performance in AI-supported environments (Bahufite et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, research on AI in ESP remains fragmented. Many studies focus on specific outcomes such as language proficiency or technology acceptance, rather than examining how AI-supported activities contribute to broader pedagogical change. There is still limited empirical evidence on how students experience AI tools in real classroom settings and whether these technologies enhance or potentially weaken independent reasoning skills.

This study is based on sociocultural and constructivist perspectives that understand learning as an active process developed through interaction with others and engagement in meaningful tasks.. From a sociocultural viewpoint, knowledge develops through interaction and the use of tools that support cognitive growth. AI technologies can function as such tools by providing

guidance, modeling language use, and offering timely feedback during complex tasks. Constructivist theory similarly highlights the importance of experience, reflection, and problem-based engagement in knowledge construction. AI-supported activities align with these principles by enabling students to explore ideas, revise their responses, and consider multiple solutions, thereby fostering autonomy and deeper understanding.

Overall, the literature indicates that AI has considerable potential to enhance ESP instruction when used within carefully designed teaching approaches that prioritize interaction, inquiry, and reflection. However, significant gaps remain regarding how AI-supported strategies influence critical thinking development in discipline-specific language learning. This study aims to address this gap by examining students' perceptions of AI-enhanced classroom practices in ESP courses and their role in supporting critical thinking, thereby contributing to ongoing discussions about the future of technology-mediated education.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to examine students' perceptions of how artificial intelligence (AI) tools influence the development of critical thinking skills in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning. A survey-based approach was selected because the research aimed to gather direct insights from students regarding their experiences with AI-supported learning activities rather than to test causal relationships. This design enabled the collection of structured data reflecting students' attitudes, usage patterns, and perceived cognitive impact of AI tools in academic contexts. The research was conducted at South East European University (SEEU) in the Republic of North Macedonia during the Winter Semester 2025–2026. The participants consisted of 33 undergraduate students enrolled in Business English courses. Students were studying in programs such as Business Administration and Economics. These courses are mandatory and are part of the curriculum that aim to prepare students for professional communication using English in workplace contexts.

The sample included students who regularly used digital technologies in their academic work and had varying levels of experience with AI tools. Participation was voluntary, and all respondents completed the questionnaire anonymously. The selected group was considered appropriate because Business English courses often involve problem solving, discussion, case analysis, and decision making tasks where both language use and critical thinking are required.

4. Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from previously used instruments measuring critical thinking behaviors and AI usage in educational settings. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

Perceived impact of AI on learning, including items on language improvement, understanding of complex material, time efficiency, feedback usefulness, and overall academic performance.

AI use and independent learning, focusing on reliance on AI tools, motivation to search for information independently, creativity, and preference for AI-assisted versus traditional learning. AI and critical thinking, examining problem-solving behavior, influence of AI suggestions, evaluation of AI-generated information, consideration of alternative solutions, and overall perceived contribution to critical thinking development

Most items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Additional items used frequency scales (Never to Always) to assess patterns of AI use during problem-solving tasks. The questionnaire also included several open-ended prompts allowing students to elaborate on their experiences, providing qualitative insights that complemented the quantitative data.

5. Procedure

The survey was administered online through Google Forms and distributed via Google Classroom, the platform used for course communication. Students completed the questionnaire outside class time to reduce pressure and encourage honest responses. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were calculated to identify overall trends in students’ perceptions. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were reviewed to identify recurring themes regarding the benefits and challenges of AI use in learning.

Particular attention was given to patterns indicating whether AI tools supported or hindered critical thinking processes. These included indicators such as autonomous learning, evaluation of information sources, identification of possible solutions, and reliance on automated assistance.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were respected throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their

involvement. Responses were collected anonymously, and no identifying information was recorded. The data were used solely for academic purposes, and confidentiality was maintained in accordance with institutional research guidelines.

7. Research results

The findings provide insight into students' perceptions of the role of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in supporting learning and critical thinking within Business English ESP courses. Overall, the results indicate that students view AI as a valuable academic resource, while also recognizing potential drawbacks related to dependence and reduced independent effort.

Most participants reported that AI tools contribute positively to language development. A large proportion agreed that AI applications help improve vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and writing quality. Students also indicated that AI makes it easier to understand complex academic material by providing simplified explanations and examples. Time efficiency emerged as a particularly important benefit, with many respondents agreeing that AI tools enable them to complete academic tasks more quickly and efficiently.

AI-generated feedback was also perceived as useful for improving assignments, especially in written work. The majority of students therefore expressed the view that AI has an overall positive effect on their academic performance. However, responses also revealed concerns about excessive reliance on these tools. A noticeable proportion of participants acknowledged that they sometimes depend on AI instead of engaging in independent thinking. Some students agreed that frequent AI use may reduce motivation to search for information independently or may limit creativity and the ability to express personal ideas.

When comparing AI-supported learning with conventional study methods, student opinions were divided. While many participants expressed a preference for AI-assisted learning due to its convenience and efficiency, a substantial group indicated that traditional learning approaches promote deeper understanding. These students emphasized the importance of active engagement, independent thinking, and interaction with instructors and peers. Responses related to problem-solving activities suggest that AI is commonly used as a supplementary tool rather than a primary solution. The majority of students reported that they sometimes use AI when working on tasks that require problem solving or critical thinking, while smaller groups indicated frequent or consistent reliance. Only a minority stated that they rarely or never use AI in such situations.

Similarly, many participants noted that AI-generated suggestions influence how they approach complex problems. However, responses also indicate that students do not uniformly accept AI outputs without reflection. A considerable number reported that they critically evaluate the information provided by AI systems before incorporating it into their work.

Students generally recognized AI’s potential to support higher-level thinking processes. Many respondents agreed that AI tools help them consider alternative perspectives and solutions, particularly when dealing with complex or unfamiliar topics. At the same time, opinions were mixed regarding the overall impact on critical thinking skills. While a substantial proportion believed that AI enhances analytical abilities by providing additional information and viewpoints, others expressed concern that excessive dependence could weaken independent reasoning.

Taken together, the results suggest that AI tools play a dual role in ESP learning. On one hand, they facilitate language development, comprehension of complex material, and efficient completion of academic tasks. On the other hand, they may introduce risks related to overreliance, reduced autonomy, and diminished creative engagement. Students appear to use AI most frequently as a supportive resource rather than a substitute for their own thinking, indicating a cautious but generally positive attitude toward AI integration in language learning.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that artificial intelligence tools are increasingly integrated into students’ learning practices and are perceived as valuable supports for both language development and academic work in Business English ESP courses. These results align with recent research suggesting that AI technologies can enhance learning through immediate feedback, adaptive responses, and access to extensive information resources (Okolo et al., 2024; Son et al., 2023). Students’ positive perceptions of AI for improving vocabulary, grammar, and writing quality support the view that AI-driven tools function effectively as language support systems in higher education contexts.

The strong emphasis on efficiency observed in the results reflects an advantage of AI-assisted learning. Previous studies note that AI can reduce cognitive load associated with routine tasks, allowing learners to focus on complex cognitive processes such as interpretation and evaluation (Raharjana et al., 2021; Duman & Akdemir, 2021). Participants in this study similarly reported that AI tools help them complete assignments more quickly and understand complex topics more easily. This suggests that AI can function as

a scaffolding mechanism, supporting learners in managing demanding academic tasks.

However, the findings also reveal a complex relationship between AI use and critical thinking development. While many students acknowledged that AI helps them explore alternative perspectives and solutions, concerns about reduced independent effort and creativity were also evident. This dual perception corresponds with research highlighting the risk of cognitive offloading, whereby reliance on automated systems may weaken learners' own analytical capacities (Marzuki et al., 2023). The present results therefore reinforce the argument that AI's educational impact depends not only on availability but also on patterns of use.

Students' divided preferences between AI-assisted learning and traditional study methods further support this interpretation. While convenience and instant gratification motivate many learners to adopt AI tools, others emphasize that deeper understanding requires active engagement, reflection, and interaction with teachers. This supports findings that technology alone does not guarantee meaningful learning outcomes and must be embedded within well-structured teaching approaches (Richardson & Mishra, 2018). In ESP contexts, where communication skills and problem solving are central, relying on automated assistance may be insufficient for developing required competencies.

Importantly, the results suggest that students generally use AI as a supplementary resource rather than as a substitute for their own reasoning. Many participants reported evaluating AI-generated information before using it, indicating a level of critical engagement with technological outputs. This observation aligns with studies emphasizing that AI can support critical thinking when learners maintain an active role in decision making and interpretation (Halpern & Dunn, 2021). Rather than replacing human cognition, AI appears to function most effectively as a tool that stimulates reflection and exploration.

The findings also highlight the potential of AI to support problem solving in ESP learning. Students reported using AI particularly when facing unfamiliar or complex tasks, suggesting that technology may facilitate access to alternative approaches and field-specific knowledge. In Business English courses, where students engage with professional scenarios and decision-making situations, such support may contribute to more confident participation and deeper understanding.

At the same time, the concerns expressed regarding creativity and independent thinking indicate that excessive reliance on AI could weaken cognitive skills. Algorithmic biases and limited contextual sensitivity may restrict exposure to diverse viewpoints, potentially narrowing analytical possibilities (Sasahara et

al., 2019; Heimerl et al., 2022). These issues underscore the need for guided use of AI tools within structured learning environments that encourage questioning, evaluation, and discussion.

Overall, the discussion suggests that AI tools can enhance ESP instruction when integrated thoughtfully into pedagogical practice. Their effectiveness depends on balancing technological support with opportunities for independent reasoning, collaboration, and reflective engagement. In this sense, AI should be viewed not as a replacement for traditional learning but as a complementary resource that expands the range of instructional possibilities in a digitally transformed educational landscape.

9. Conclusions

This study examined students' perceptions of the impact of artificial intelligence tools on learning and critical thinking within Business English ESP courses. The findings indicate that AI is widely perceived as a useful academic resource that supports language development, comprehension of complex material, and efficient completion of tasks. Students particularly value the immediate feedback, accessibility of information, and time-saving features provided by AI applications.

At the same time, the results reveal ambivalent attitudes regarding the relationship between AI use and critical thinking. While many participants recognize AI's potential to support analytical processes by offering alternative perspectives and explanations, concerns were expressed about overreliance and reduced autonomous learning. These findings suggest that AI does not automatically enhance critical thinking skills; rather, its impact depends on how learners engage with the technology.

The study also demonstrates that students continue to value traditional learning approaches, especially for achieving meaningful understanding and long-term learning. This indicates that effective ESP instruction in the digital age should combine technological innovation with pedagogical practices that promote active participation, reflection, and interaction.

Overall, the research supports the view that AI can enrich language learning environments when used as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for human cognition. In Business English ESP courses, where students prepare for professional communication and complex problem solving, balanced integration of AI can contribute to more flexible and responsive learning experiences while preserving the development of independent reasoning skills.

10. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, the study is based on student's own perception, which may differ from what they actually achieve or do in practice. Students' responses may be influenced by personal attitudes toward technology or by varying levels of familiarity with AI tools.

Second, the sample size was relatively limited and drawn from a single institutional context, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other educational settings or disciplines. Future research involving larger and more diverse samples would provide a more comprehensive understanding of AI's impact on ESP learning.

Third, the study focused primarily on perceived effects rather than direct measurement of critical thinking development. Empirical studies employing experimental or longitudinal designs would be valuable for examining causal relationships between AI use and cognitive outcomes.

Finally, the rapidly evolving nature of AI technologies means that students' experiences and perceptions may change over time as tools become more sophisticated and widely adopted. Continuous research is therefore necessary to monitor emerging trends and challenges.

Despite these limitations, the study offers useful insights into how students experience AI integration in ESP courses and highlights the importance of pedagogically guided implementation to ensure that technological innovation supports rather than undermines critical thinking development.

Questionnaire

Artificial Intelligence and Critical Thinking in ESP Learning

Please indicate your response using the scale provided.

AI tools help me improve my language skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, writing).

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

AI tools make it easier to understand complex academic topics.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Using AI tools saves time when completing academic tasks.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

AI tools provide useful feedback that improves my work.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Overall, AI tools have a positive effect on my academic performance.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

I sometimes rely too much on AI instead of thinking independently.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Using AI tools reduces my motivation to search for information myself.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

AI use may limit my creativity or ability to express my own ideas.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

I prefer AI-assisted learning over traditional study methods.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Traditional learning methods help me understand material more deeply.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

I use AI tools when working on tasks that require problem solving.

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

AI suggestions influence the way I approach complex problems.

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

I critically evaluate the information provided by AI tools.

☐ Never ☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Often ☐ Always

AI tools help me consider alternative solutions or perspectives.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

Overall, AI tools support the development of my critical thinking skills.

☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

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Innovative assessment approaches in blended English language teaching: from traditional testing to assessment for learning

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Abstract: Pedagogical changes urged by the integration of technology in education have increased the need to reconceptualize assessment in foreign language teaching, especially within the context of blended learning. The aim of this paper is to analyze innovative assessment approaches in English language teaching, with a focus on the shift from traditional testing to assessment for learning in grades 6–9 of pre-university education. This work draws on a qualitative methodological approach, combining a critical review of contemporary literature on formative assessment and blended learning with a reflective analysis of didactic practices used in English language teaching. Data were collected through the analysis of assessment instruments used in blended learning environments, including analytic rubrics, student self-assessment and peer assessment, continuous formative feedback, and the use of digital assessment tools. The analysis relies on how these instruments support the development of language skills and help student engagement and autonomy in the learning process. The results show that the intentional integration of assessment for learning in blended teaching leads to the improvement of language competence, enhances metacognitive reflection, and promotes teacher–student interaction. The paper discusses that the shift from a mainly summative assessment approach toward a formative assessment orientation represents a major element of pedagogical innovation in English language teaching and provides significant implications for didactic practice and teacher professional development.

Keywords: *blended learning; assessment for learning; formative assessment; English language teaching*

1. Introduction

In the digital age, education has changed significantly. In the light of the rapid development of technology, traditional classrooms are not the only place

where learning takes place. Computers, smartphones and the internet have transformed the way students access information, communicate with teachers, and develop new skills. In the past, students mostly used textbooks and libraries, which were often limited. Today, with just a few clicks, students can have access to online libraries, academic articles, e-books, and educational videos from all over the world. Students can use several platforms such as online courses, virtual classrooms, and educational websites and study at their own pace and according to their personal needs.

Over the past two decades, technological advancements have thoroughly transformed educational practices all over the world. As for English language teaching (ELT), the emergence of blended learning has reshaped it by integrating face-to-face interaction with digital learning environments. This hybrid model promotes flexibility, accessibility, and increased learner engagement. Nevertheless, while teaching practices have developed to embrace communicative, task-based, and technology-enhanced instruction, assessment systems often remain anchored in traditional summative paradigms.

Traditional assessment in ELT is typically based on standardized examinations, grammar-focused tests, and end-of-term evaluations. These forms of assessment consider knowledge as a fixed body of information to be measured objectively. Meanwhile, language learning is inherently dynamic, socially mediated, and developmental. The difference between innovative teaching practices and conventional testing methods creates a theoretical and teaching misalignment.

Therefore, this paper discusses that assessment for learning (AFL) providing a coherent theoretical and pedagogical framework for assessment in blended ELT contexts. Moving beyond the measurement paradigm, AFL places assessment as an integral part of the learning process. Drawing on the contemporary learning theories and fundamental assessment research, this paper argues why innovative assessment approaches are not optional but necessary transformations for modern language teaching.

Within this evolving view, assessment practices have become a key issue. While instructional methodologies in English Language Teaching (ELT) have increasingly embraced communicative, student-centered, and technology-enhanced approaches, assessment systems often rely on traditional paradigms. As Brown (2004) notes, conventional language testing prioritizes reliability and standardization, frequently at the expense of communicative authenticity. Similarly, Black and Wiliam (1998) show that heavy reliance on summative assessment can narrow pedagogical focus and limit meaningful feedback.

At the same time, contemporary educational theory increasingly emphasizes learner agency, metacognition, and collaborative knowledge construction.

Constructivist perspectives focus on the significance of dialogue, reflection, and social interaction in learning processes. In blended learning contexts, these dimensions become even more prominent. According to Garrison and Vaughan (2008), effective blended learning environments require the integration of cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence: dimensions that traditional examinations are poorly equipped to capture.

Moreover, digital gadgets have introduced new possibilities for formative assessment, immediate feedback, learning analytics, and student self-monitoring. Research by Hattie (2009) underscores the powerful impact of feedback on student achievement, while Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) emphasize the role of formative assessment in developing self-regulated learners. Despite these advances, a persistent tension is seen between innovative instructional practices and assessment systems that continue to prioritize high-stakes, product-oriented testing.

In this broader academic and social context, characterized by digital transformation, demands for innovation, and the need for adaptable competencies, rethinking assessment in blended English Language Teaching is not merely a pedagogical preference but an educational necessity.

Even though blended learning has reshaped instructional use in ELT, assessment practices often lag behind these methodological innovations. Many institutions continue to rely mainly on summative, standardized testing models rooted in behaviorist assumptions. This creates a miscoordination between student-centered teaching approaches and teacher-centered evaluation systems.

The central research problem addressed in this research is the theoretical and pedagogical inconsistency between traditional assessment paradigms and the interactive, reflective, and digitally mediated nature of blended ELT environments. Specifically, there is a need to examine how assessment can evolve from a mechanism of certification to a process that actively supports learning, autonomy, and continuous development.

In response to this issue, the study seeks the following objectives, aiming at contributing to a more coherent and future-oriented model for assessment in English language education.

To critically analyze the theoretical foundations of traditional assessment in ELT.

To explore the conceptual principles of Assessment for Learning (AFL) within constructivist frameworks.

1. To examine innovative assessment approaches—such as digital formative assessment, peer and self-assessment, performance-based tasks, and e-portfolios—in blended ELT contexts.

2. To discuss the pedagogical implications of combining assessment practices with the demands of a digital and innovation-driven educational panorama.

In a digital society where adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking are essential competencies, assessment practices must develop to reflect and support these skills. Traditional high-stakes examinations are not enough to capture the complex, process-oriented learning that characterizes blended and technology-enhanced environments.

By reshaping assessment as a dynamic, feedback-driven, and learner-centered process, this study contributes to contemporary discussions on educational innovation and digital transformation. It emphasizes how assessment for learning can serve as a catalyst for pedagogical change, fostering autonomy, feedback literacy, and lifelong learning skills.

Furthermore, the study provides a forward-looking perspective on how institutions can include innovative assessment models within blended ELT frameworks, ensuring that evaluation systems are not barriers to innovation but enhancers of meaningful educational reform. In doing so, it places assessment in the center of shaping a more responsive, equitable, and future-oriented educational system.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

2.1 Behaviorist Foundations of Traditional Assessment

Traditional assessment in English Language Teaching (ELT) originates from behaviorist learning theory, which considers learning as habit formation through stimulus–response mechanisms. In the light of this paradigm, knowledge is divided into parts that can be measured parts, while assessment verifies the accurate reproduction of these units.

Brown (2004) highlights that traditional testing gives priority to reliability, objectivity, and efficiency. While these features support standardization, they are often not able to capture communicative competence in authentic contexts. Language becomes reduced to grammar accuracy and vocabulary recall rather than interactive meaning-making.

In recent years, scholars have reconsidered traditional testing paradigms to examine their compatibility with 21st century competencies. Bachman and Palmer (2010) discuss that the ability of communicative language involves not only linguistic knowledge but also strategic competence and contextual appropriateness—dimensions that tests with discrete points seldom measure in an effective way. In addition, Fulcher (2015) emphasizes the social and political implications of standardized language testing, highlighting that

assessment systems often form teaching practices more powerfully than curricula do.

Contemporary critiques also point to the tension between high-stakes standardized assessment and inclusive, competence-based education models promoted across Europe and beyond. Recent discussions in educational policy literature emphasize that excessive reliance on summative metrics may undermine creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking—skills increasingly recognized as essential in digital societies.

2.2 Constructivist Foundations of Assessment

Constructivist theory posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction and reflection. Language acquisition is viewed as socially mediated and dialogic. Therefore, assessment aligned with constructivism must:

- Capture learning processes rather than isolated outcomes
- Encourage interaction and dialogue
- Support reflection and self-regulation
- Recognize diverse pathways to competence

Assessment becomes embedded within instruction rather than functioning as an external evaluative mechanism.

Building on socio-constructivist principles derived from Vygotsky, recent assessment research emphasizes scaffolding, dialogic feedback, and collaborative meaning-making as central components of effective evaluation. In this view, assessment is not a terminal checkpoint but an ongoing negotiation of understanding between teacher and learner.

2.3 Assessment for Learning

Assessment for Learning (AFL) represents a paradigmatic shift from measurement to improvement. Dylan Wiliam (2011) conceptualizes AFL as any assessment practice that provides evidence used to adapt teaching and enhance learner progress. Five core AFL strategies include: Clarifying learning intentions; Engineering effective classroom discussions; Providing actionable feedback; Activating learners as instructional resources; Promoting learner ownership. This framework situates assessment as integral to pedagogy rather than separate from it.

More recent empirical syntheses, such as those inspired by John Hattie (2009, updated meta-analyses 2017), consistently rank formative feedback among the highest-impact educational interventions. Feedback that is timely, specific, and dialogic has been shown to significantly influence student achievement and motivation.

Moreover, contemporary scholarship introduces the concept of “feedback literacy,” which refers to learners’ capacity to interpret, internalize, and act upon feedback. This perspective shifts responsibility from teachers alone to a shared feedback partnership. In digital environments, feedback literacy becomes especially critical, as students engage with automated comments, peer reviews, and iterative drafts.

2.4 Blended Learning as a Transformative Context

Blended English Language Teaching (BELT) integrates face-to-face instruction with digital learning environments. D. Randy Garrison and Norman D. Vaughan (2008) discuss that effective blended learning requires the integration of cognitive, social, and teaching presence. Assessment in such contexts must therefore evaluate: Cognitive development, social interaction, reflective engagement. Traditional examinations inadequately address these dimensions, whereas AFL aligns closely with blended learning principles. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, research on blended and online education has expanded significantly. Studies show that digital learning environments require flexible and multimodal assessment strategies capable of considering participation, collaboration, and digital communication skills.

Recent research on technology-enhanced assessment also highlights the role of learning analytics and adaptive feedback systems in personalizing instruction. These tools allow educators to track engagement patterns, identify misconceptions early, and design targeted interventions. However, scholars warn that technological innovation must be pedagogically grounded to avoid superficial digitization of traditional tests.

Within emerging digital societies, assessment in blended ELT must therefore balance innovation with inclusivity, ensuring equitable access to digital tools while promoting reflective and autonomous learning. This reconceptualization positions assessment not as a static measurement instrument but as a dynamic, technology-mediated dialogue that shapes the future of language education.

3. Methodology

This paper follows a theoretical and conceptual research design relying on a systematic analysis of existing literature for language assessment and blended learning.

The methodology of this paper involves:

- A comparative analysis of traditional and formative assessment paradigms
- A theoretical synthesis of constructivist and behaviorist perspectives

- A conceptual mapping of assessment practices within blended ELT contexts

Primary sources include seminal works by Black & Wiliam (1998), Brown (2004), Garrison & Vaughan (2008), Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006), and Wiliam (2011).

The analytical procedure focuses on identifying epistemological assumptions, pedagogical implications, and alignment with blended learning environments.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

4.1 Theoretical Tensions Between Traditional and AFL Models

The findings show a clear epistemological divergence between traditional testing and AFL methods. Traditional assessment reflects behaviorist assumptions highlighting accuracy and standardization. On contrary, AFL is based on constructivist principles centered on interaction, reflection, and learner agency.

4.2 Innovative Assessment Practices in Blended ELT

Digital Formative Assessment

Digital tools provide real-time feedback, adaptive quizzes, and learning analytics. These approaches align with self-regulated learning theory and enhance continuous monitoring of progress. Immediate feedback decreases anxiety that is associated with high-stakes exams and supports differentiated instruction.

Peer and Self-Assessment

Rooted in socio-constructivism, peer and self-assessment promote assessment literacy and metacognitive awareness. Students internalize quality criteria and develop feedback literacy, enhancing autonomy.

Performance-Based Assessment

Tasks based on performance, such as presentations, debates, and projects—reflect communicative language teaching principles. These tasks evaluate discourse competence, pragmatics, and fluency in authentic contexts.

E-Portfolios and Reflective Assessment

E-portfolios are an evidence of longitudinal progress and encourage reflective practice. They combine online and face-to-face learning components, ensuring coherence across modalities.

4.3 Learner Autonomy and Feedback Literacy

A key finding is that AFL significantly contributes to learner autonomy. Based on Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006), effective formative assessment helps self-regulation by promoting goal-setting, monitoring, and revision. Blended

environments provide extended opportunities for iterative drafting, peer commentary, and dialogic feedback.

4.4 Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

Successful implementation requires:

- Teacher assessment literacy
- Transparent rubric design
- Institutional balance between formative and summative demands
- Adequate technological infrastructure

Without systemic alignment, formative assessment risks becoming procedural rather than transformative.

5. Conclusions and Limitations of the Study

The shift from traditional testing to Assessment for Learning (AFL) represents far more than a methodological adjustment in English Language Teaching (ELT); it reflects a significant transformation in how learning itself is perceived. Moving away from behaviorist-oriented, summative models means moving away from viewing language as a fixed body of knowledge to be reproduced. Instead, language learning is acknowledged as a dynamic, socially constructed, and context-dependent process. In blended learning environments—where interaction unfolds across physical and digital spaces—this reconceptualization becomes even more essential.

Traditional examinations, while valuable for standardization and certification, often capture only a snapshot of performance. They rarely reveal how learners negotiate meaning, respond to feedback, collaborate with peers, or refine their thinking over time. In contrast, AFL places assessment within the ongoing flow of teaching and learning. It asks for dialogue, reflection, and adaptation. It transforms evaluation from a moment of judgment into a process of growth. Founded in constructivist theory and supported by digital innovation, AFL provides a coherent and future-oriented framework for assessment in blended ELT. Digital formative tools enable timely and personalized feedback; peer and self-assessment promote critical reflection and shared responsibility; tasks based on performance simulate authentic communicative situations; and e-portfolios consider learning as an evolving journey rather than a final product. Altogether, these approaches foster learner autonomy, promote feedback literacy, and strengthen deeper communicative competence.

Primarily, this transformation also has its ethical and pedagogical implications. When students are urged to participate actively in assessment processes, they are positioned not as passive recipients of grades but as co-constructors of knowledge. In a digital society that values adaptability,

collaboration, and lifelong learning, such competencies are inseparable. Reimagining assessment is therefore not only a pedagogical necessity but also a societal imperative.

Despite its theoretical contributions, this study has several limitations that must be recognized:

- The research is primarily theoretical and conceptual in nature and does not include empirical validation through classroom-based data.
- Context-specific institutional variables, such as national assessment policies, curriculum constraints, or resource disparities, are not examined in depth.
- Technological implementation challenges, including digital inequality, teacher training needs, and platform limitations, require more systematic investigation.

These limitations show the complexity of transforming assessment practices and the need for context-sensitive approaches.

Research in the future should go beyond conceptual analysis and involve empirical case studies in diverse educational settings. Mixed-method research designs—combining quantitative measures of learning outcomes with qualitative insights into student and teacher experiences—would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how AFL operates in blended ELT contexts.

Longitudinal studies could also explore how formative assessment practices affect learner autonomy, motivation, and communicative competence over time. In addition to this, comparative research across institutional or national contexts may show how policy frameworks and digital infrastructures shape assessment innovation.

Eventually, validating and refining the theoretical claims presented in this study will require sustained collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and institutions. Only through such collaborative inquiry can assessment develop in ways that genuinely support meaningful, inclusive, and language education ready for the future.

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Action-oriented and student-centred approaches to foreign language teaching in Slovakia: challenges and perspectives

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Abstract: The educational system in Slovakia is currently undergoing a comprehensive transformation through a curriculum reform at the elementary education level. This particular aims to promote a more student-centred approach, and also foster innovative teaching practices. Therefore, teachers play a central role in this process; yet, their acceptance and readiness for the changes vary. The given research examines the insights of foreign language teachers towards the ongoing curriculum reform in Slovakia, with a specific focus on its key pillars, namely the student-centred approach and the action-oriented approach. Furthermore, the present study explores how foreign language teachers perceive these approaches and the extent to which they are prepared to incorporate them into their daily classroom teaching. The research involved nine experienced primary school teachers and employed a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that even though primary school teachers generally acknowledge the relevance of the reform’s goals; yet, their attitudes and understanding remain uncertain, specifically in terms of the feasibility of applying action-oriented approaches in everyday teaching. Overall, although the research aligns with contemporary trends in foreign language education, the readiness and willingness of teachers to implement its principles remain inconsistent. All participants, however, emphasised the need for stronger institutional support and professional development to ensure the effective integration of student-centred and action-oriented approaches in foreign language classrooms in Slovakia.

Keywords: *student-centred approach, action-oriented approach, curriculum, language learning*

1. Introduction

In today’s world, digitalisation and globalisation are coming to the fore; therefore, educational systems across Europe should undergo substantial

changes. As a result of these developments, curriculum reform in Slovakia places greater emphasis on learner autonomy and also more innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Currently in Slovakia, the ongoing curriculum reform at the elementary level reflects these trends by promoting student-centred and action-oriented approaches, particularly in the area of foreign language education. Approaches that are rooted in constructivist learning theories and the principles of the common European framework of reference for languages aim to create meaningful learning experiences through active learner involvement and communication in authentic situations. However, the extent to which these principles are successfully implemented in classrooms largely depends on teachers' understanding of the reform, their readiness to implement changes, and last but not least, their everyday teaching practices. Although student-centred and action-oriented approaches are advocated in contemporary foreign language education, their practical implementation at the primary school level remains inconsistent. Speaking of the Slovak context, there is still limited empirical research that examines how foreign language teachers perceive these approaches within the framework of the current curriculum reform. As a consequence, this paper tries to address this gap by exploring teachers' understanding of student-centred and action-oriented approaches, their readiness to incorporate them in their daily classroom practice, and the challenges they face during the implementation of the reform as well. In addition, this study aligns with the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education and Innovation in a Digital Society” by focusing on how educational innovation is applied in classroom practice during a current systemic change. Therefore, by highlighting approaches that ought to be implemented, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on educational innovation, but also professional development, and the effective integration of curriculum reform principles in contemporary foreign language education in Slovakia.

2. Literature Review

The ongoing transformation of education in Slovakia at the elementary level is embedded in broader international discussions on curriculum innovation and the role of teachers who serve as active agents of the change. Firstly, contemporary approaches to curriculum reform no longer perceive the curriculum only as a fixed list of subject content, but as a complex framework of educational experiences that shape learners' cognitive, social, and, last but not least, personal development. This system does not shape only what is taught in schools, but also how learning takes place and why certain learning goals are emphasised. Accordingly, it represents a shift from traditional

content-based teaching towards approaches that focus more on competencies and learning processes. Greater attention is paid to transversal skills and learner autonomy. At the same time, the success of curriculum reform does not depend only on official documents or structural changes. Fullan (2007) argues that teachers' beliefs, attitudes, professional preparedness, and their willingness to change everyday teaching practices play a major role in the reform process. Teacher agency, therefore, becomes an important factor in translating theoretical reform principles into real classroom practice.

In the matter of the Slovak educational context, the curriculum reform seeks to respond to rapid technological and cultural changes by redefining educational goals and even methodologies. Pupala and Fridrichová (2022) emphasize that modern education should prepare learners to function properly in a digital environment by reinforcing autonomy, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The reform thus promotes a learner-centred orientation in which the teacher's role shifts from knowledge transmitter to facilitator who designs inclusive and responsive learning environments. Another essential and crucial factor of the reform is the emphasis on meaningful learning experiences that connect school knowledge with everyday life, thereby strengthening learner motivation and engagement, too. Furthermore, the development of transversal skills, especially intercultural awareness, critical thinking, collaboration, and even creativity, is considered fundamental for participation in today's multilingual and multicultural society. Consequently, these objectives are reflected in interconnected pillars of the curriculum reform, namely the learner-centred approach and the action-oriented approach. (Porubský, 2024). Firstly, speaking of the learner-centred approach, which is closely connected with constructivist theories of learning, particularly those developed by Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1986), since they understood learning as an active process in which every learner gradually constructs their own knowledge through interaction and experience, rather than only passively receiving information from teachers. In the context of foreign language education, this perspective calls for teaching practices that take into account learners' prior knowledge and experiences as well as their individual needs. As Pokrivčáková et al. (2024) note, contemporary foreign language teaching increasingly adjusts both content and instructional methods to each learner and often chooses topics linked to familiar personal contexts and everyday life, in order to enhance relevance and comprehensibility. Empirical studies also point to the benefits of learner-centred teaching. For example, Liang (2024) shows that when learners are given a more active role, their motivation to learn English tends to increase. Similar results are reported by Xhomara (2022), who found a clear connection between learner-centred instruction and the development of critical thinking skills. Moreover, Bhardwaj (2025) claims that classrooms

organised around learners’ needs are often more inclusive and flexible, as they allow for different learning styles and support a more balanced learning environment. Taken together, these findings indicate that learner-centred education supports not only academic performance, but also motivation and cognitive development, areas that are frequently neglected in more teacher-led forms of instruction.

In the recent decade, the action-oriented approach has gained a more important place in foreign language teaching. It builds on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), which sees learners of the foreign language as social actors who use language to carry out meaningful tasks in everyday situations. From this point of view, foreign language learning is not only about grammatical accuracy, but also, greater attention is given to communication, cooperation, and learning through practical experience. As a consequence, one teaching approach that reflects these ideas is Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Based on the research that suggests that learners who take part in meaningful communicative tasks often enhance not only their language skills but also their confidence when using the language. For example, Lume and Hisbullah (2022) report statistically significant improvements in learners’ communicative skills when a task-based approach is implemented in contrast to traditional teaching approaches. Furthermore, qualitative data obtained from the studies frequently point to changes in learners’ spoken performance, including, especially, greater fluency, reduced use of fillers, and more natural speech among those who are exposed to task-based instruction.

Teacher perspectives are as well very important for putting an action-oriented approach into practice. In New Zealand, East’s (2013) long-term study showed that teachers who took an active role in TBLT implementation generally developed more positive attitudes toward it, even if they were initially worried about practical difficulties or the need for more institutional support. Overall, these studies suggest that while action-oriented and task-based approaches have real teaching potential, their success depends a lot on teacher training, confidence, and support from the school.

Examples of the curriculum transformation within Europe show that broad curriculum reforms often may improve education once they are supported by clear policies and ongoing professional development of the teachers. Countries such as Estonia, Portugal, or Slovenia indicate how systematic changes to the curriculum can lead to improvements in learner learning and make teaching practices more consistent across schools (OECD, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c).

Despite international trends in education of foreign languages, there is still limited research on how primary school teachers in Slovakia perceive the key pillars of the curriculum reform. Even though recent research shows that,

although the principles of learner-centred and action-oriented approaches are understood, their implementation in classrooms is often inconsistent, influenced by factors such as teacher preparation and willingness, available resources, and school support. For this reason, it is especially important to explore how foreign language teachers interpret, value, and apply these approaches, since their experiences are key to understanding the impact of the reform. This knowledge gap is what motivates the present study, which aims to explore teachers’ perceptions and readiness to integrate learner-centred and action-oriented practices into daily foreign language teaching in Slovak primary schools.

3. Methodology

Research design

The present study used a qualitative research approach to better comprehend how foreign language teachers in Slovakia view and experience the current curriculum reform, with the specific focus on the implementation of student-centred and action-oriented approaches. Furthermore, a qualitative research approach enables a more in-depth investigation of primary school teachers’ perspectives, attitudes, and daily teaching practices, particularly concerning student-centred and action-oriented approaches. Rather than focusing on quantitative data, the given study aimed to gather teachers’ personal experiences and attitudes on the current curricular reform and its practical implications. The study employed a descriptive case study design, allowing a researcher to assess the reform in its actual educational environment. Consequently, this technique assists the study’s main purpose by giving insights into how the reform’s aims are understood and applied at the classroom level, as well as what challenges teachers encounter in their daily practice.

Participants/sample

The study included a total of nine primary school foreign language teachers working at the elementary education level who had already implemented and were teaching under the new curriculum reform. Moreover, all participants were carefully chosen to ensure that they had relevant expertise with foreign language teaching and were familiar with the curriculum transformation. All participating instructors had at least five years of primary teaching experience, allowing them to reflect meaningfully on changes in teaching methods over time.

Instruments and procedures

Data were collected employing semi-structured interviews. This instrument was chosen since it allowed the conversations between the researcher and the

teacher to develop naturally while still keeping the focus on the main themes of the study. The interviews gave the researcher enough structure to address key issues, but at the same time left space for teachers to express their own views, attitudes, and talk about aspects they felt were important to mention. The discussion centred on how teachers understand student-centred and action-oriented approaches, their experiences with using these approaches in the classroom, and whether they feel ready to implement them in everyday foreign language teaching or see any challenges. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed to support careful analysis.

Data analysis

Subsequently, the obtained data were analysed using thematic analysis. This particular analysis enabled the researcher to find repeating patterns and major themes across the conducted interviews. The final themes represented teachers' understanding of action-oriented and student-centred approaches, and readiness to embrace student-centred and action-oriented approaches, as well as challenges they encounter in future implementation.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study procedure. All participants were informed about the aim of the research in advance, the voluntary nature of their involvement, and the possibility of withdrawing at any time. Moreover, all interviewed teachers provided written informed consent. Additionally, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, personal information was deleted from the data, and only the researcher had access to interview recordings and transcripts.

4. Findings and Discussions

Teachers' understanding of action-oriented approach and student-centred approach

The first category focused on teachers' understanding of two key pillars of the ongoing curriculum reform in Slovakia, which are the student-centred approach and the action-oriented approach. The obtained data from the semi-structured interviews revealed that teachers' understanding and interpretation of these concepts varied considerably. While some participants demonstrated a relatively clear understanding of both approaches, others expressed uncertainty or did not see a fundamental difference from teaching practices. Firstly, in terms of the student-centred approach, the obtained data indicated that this concept was generally the most familiar among the respondents. Teachers mainly associated the student-centred approach with individualisation, personalisation, and attention to learners' needs, emphasising that the focus should be placed on pupils rather than solely on

subject content. One teacher expressed this idea by stating, "I always say that we do not teach content, but we teach pupils." (R1). As a result, this statement illustrates that some teachers perceive the student-centred approach as a continuation of long pedagogical values rather than a genuinely new element introduced by the reform. Several participants also described the student-centred approach as respecting learners' individual needs, and even their learning pace. For instance, one teacher explained that "the primary emphasis should be on the pupils and their individual needs" (R4). Similarly, one respondent emphasised the importance of motivating pupils and supporting their progress without lowering expectations: "I try to adapt teaching to their needs, but at the same time I do not lower the level of demands; I try to motivate them and push them forward" (R3). However, despite general agreement with the underlying idea of the student-centred approach, some interviewed teachers expressed scepticism regarding its practical feasibility. One experienced teacher described individualisation as "a slightly naïve idea" and questioned its practicality in everyday classroom practice: "It is not imaginable that with fourteen pupils everyone would work at a different pace or have tasks of different difficulty. Teachers are not machines" (R5). Therefore, this response may highlight concerns related to time demands, workload, and classroom management, suggesting that although teachers may conceptually support the approach, they remain uncertain about its implementation under real school conditions. Moreover, one teacher openly admitted uncertainty, stating, "The pupil should be the main actor in the lesson? But I am not really sure" (R8). Such responses indicate that not all teachers possess a clear conceptual understanding of what a student-centred approach entails beyond traditional teacher-pupil interaction.

Regarding the action-oriented approach, many teachers interpreted this pillar primarily as pupils' activity and engagement during lessons. The most common definition emphasised that pupils should not remain passive, but should actively participate in classroom activities. For example, one teacher defined the approach as "making sure that the pupil is active during the lesson and does not just sit passively during the whole lesson." (R3). Similarly, another respondent stated that "the pupil should be active in class, so that it is not always the same pupil raising their hand" (R5). In addition, one participant described it as "learning by doing, with more emphasis on communication rather than just completing exercises and drilling grammar" (R4). Nevertheless, several respondents questioned the relevance of the action-oriented approach in foreign language teaching. One teacher expressed doubts by stating, "This is not a practical subject; it is English. At the primary level, drilling grammar is important" (R6); thus, these interpretations suggest

that the action-oriented approach is often understood narrowly, rather than as meaningful language use in authentic communicative contexts.

Overall, the findings indicate that while most teachers are familiar with the concepts of student-centred and action-oriented approaches, their interpretations vary significantly. Inconsistency in understanding may represent a potential barrier to the effective implementation of the curriculum reform in everyday foreign language classrooms in the future.

Teachers' readiness to implement student-centred and action-oriented approaches

The second category looked into teachers' readiness to implement the student-centred and action-oriented approaches within their everyday foreign language teaching practice. Based on the findings, varying levels of readiness among participants, ranging from strong confidence and active implementation to resistance, or only partial adoption of the reform's principles. Overall, the majority of the interviewed teachers expressed that they had already been implementing elements of both approaches prior to the reform.

A significant number of respondents stated that they felt prepared to implement the student-centred approach because they perceived it as something they had been implementing before the curriculum reform was introduced. For instance, one participant stated, "I definitely implemented this approach before the reform" (R1), while another confirmed, "Yes, we have always done this" (R4). These teachers often justified their readiness by referring to routine practices such as allowing pupils to choose partners for pair work (R4, R5) or adjusting tasks to pupils' skills (R2). Such statements suggest that these teachers feel comfortable with the reform because they do not perceive it as fundamentally modifying their daily teaching practices. On the contrary, several responders expressed only partial readiness while questioning the broader applicability of the student-centred approach. Furthermore, a number of teachers expressed reservations regarding the workload and organisational demands associated with the student-centred approach. One experienced teacher openly questioned their readiness by describing individualisation as unrealistic, stating that "it is not imaginable that every pupil would work at a different pace or have tasks of different difficulty. That would be pure chaos, and teachers are not machines" (R5). Such statements reflect concerns about time constraints, lesson preparation, and classroom management, which negatively influence teachers' willingness and readiness to fully embrace the reform.

Regarding the action-oriented approach, several teachers reported feeling ready to implement it, particularly through pair work, group activities, and project-based tasks. Respondents described role-plays, dialogues,

presentations, and projects such as “introducing oneself” or “my family” as common classroom activities (R4, R5). One teacher emphasised that pupils learn more effectively through experience, stating that “learning is not based only on theory, but also on exploration, discovery, and practical tasks” (R3). These responses suggest a relatively high level of readiness among teachers who associate the action-oriented approach with communicative and experiential learning. On the other hand, many teachers limited the action-oriented approach to traditional exercises and textbook-based activities. Several respondents equated action-oriented teaching with completing as many exercises as possible during the lesson. For example, one teacher stated, “I try to go through as many exercises as possible during the lesson” (R9), while another added, “I try to complete as many tasks with them as possible” (R8). This indicates that teachers’ practices often remain rooted in conventional, form-focused instruction. Additionally, a significant barrier to readiness was resistance towards shifting classroom roles and authority since one teacher explicitly rejected the student-centred approach, stating, “I do not agree with this at all, because the teacher is an authority. Pupils need to have respect” (R6), and further added that they “do not plan to apply this approach” (R6).

Altogether, the findings indicate that while many teachers consider themselves ready to implement student-centred and action-oriented approaches, this readiness is often based on a perception of continuity rather than transformation. Although some participants demonstrate engagement with the reform’s principles, others showed selective adoption, uncertainty, or even resistance. This uneven readiness highlights the need for methodological support and professional development to help teachers implement the reform’s goals into consistent daily classroom practice.

Challenges in the implementation of learner-centred and action-oriented approaches

The last category, with the focus on perceived challenges of teachers towards the implementation of learner-centred and action-oriented approaches, revealed several challenges. Although many teachers expressed conceptual understanding of these approaches, practical and barriers limit their full application in the future.

To begin with, teachers frequently noted that preparing lessons in line with the discussed approaches is time-consuming and demanding. Respondent 5 expressed scepticism regarding the feasibility of differentiating instruction: “It’s a bit of a naïve idea. It’s not realistic, if I have 14 pupils in a class, that each one has a different pace, or a different difficulty of task... Teachers are not machines.” Similarly, Respondent 2 acknowledged that while

personalized tasks are desirable, they require substantial preparation: “However, it is demanding to prepare, but this approach is effective in improving pupils’ learning outcomes.” Besides that, another challenge that emerged since some teachers viewed the learner-centred approach as challenging traditional teacher authority. Respondent 6 expressed disagreement with placing the pupil at the centre of learning: “In the centre should be the pupil, not the teacher. I do not agree with that, because the teacher is the authority. Pupils need to have respect.” This perception suggests that ideological beliefs about the teacher’s role can act as a barrier to implementing reform principles. Furthermore, another challenge mentioned by teachers was time constraints, which often led teachers to rely heavily on textbooks and workbooks. Respondent 8 explained: “Tasks that are in the textbook...we mostly use them because otherwise it would be very time-consuming.” Respondent 9 also emphasized: “Exercises in the textbook are meaningful...” While textbooks provide structure, they limit the scope for authentic communication and learner autonomy.

In conclusion, the challenges identified in the collected responses from the interviewed teachers highlight a combination of practical constraints, specifically, lack of time, workload, or ideological barriers (teacher authority). Despite conceptual understanding and readiness to adopt learner-centred and activity-based practices, these obstacles often restrict full implementation in daily classroom practice.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

The present study sought to examine how foreign language teachers at the elementary education level in Slovakia understand and implement the student-centred and action-oriented approaches promoted by the current curriculum reform. Based on the findings, data revealed that the teachers generally agree with the goals of the curriculum reform; yet, their understanding and use of these approaches differ. In terms of the student-centred approach, the majority of the interviewed teachers mentioned that they have already been employing it even before curriculum reform, thus making the reform feel familiar rather than transformative. In contrast, the action-oriented approach is often less clearly understood and is frequently applied only in a limited way. As a consequence, practical issues such as lack of time, increased workload, and even reliance on textbooks were identified as key barriers to fuller implementation. Overall, the results suggest that teachers need clearer guidance, practical examples, and ongoing professional development to integrate the discussed approaches in their everyday teaching because, without this support, the reform risks remaining more theoretical than practical.

Despite this, the study also has some limitations. First of all, it involved a small group of only nine teachers; thus, the findings cannot be generalized to all Slovak primary schools. Additionally, the research relied only on semi-structured interviews and did not include other instruments such as classroom observation. Incorporating other research instruments could have offered deeper insight into teaching practices. For that reason, future research could build on this study by involving more teachers, observing lessons, and lastly exploring how professional development influences teachers’ willingness and ability to implement the key pillars of the reform.

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Debate-based learning as a pedagogical approach for developing intercultural competence in EFL higher education

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Abstract: The development of intercultural competence has become a central objective of higher education in response to internationalization, digitalization, and the growing need for global communication skills.

This study investigates the role of debate-based learning as an innovative pedagogical approach for fostering intercultural competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Grounded in intercultural communicative competence models and Sociocultural Theory, the research explores how structured debates support perspective-taking, collaborative learning, and intercultural awareness. A qualitative case-study design was employed with undergraduate EFL students who participated in a semester-long debate-based learning project.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, reflective journals, and classroom observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that debate activities enhanced students' intercultural knowledge, empathy, and ability to engage with diverse perspectives while simultaneously strengthening collaboration and reducing communication anxiety.

The study also highlights the importance of scaffolding, team composition, and reflective tasks in maximizing intercultural outcomes. The results suggest that integrating debates into language curricula can support both cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions of learning, aligning with the goals of education in a digital and global society.

The study contributes to current debates on innovative pedagogies by providing a theoretically grounded and practice-oriented framework for using debates to develop intercultural competence in higher education.

Keywords: *intercultural competence, debate-based learning, EFL, sociocultural theory, higher education*

1. Introduction

Higher education is undergoing rapid transformation as institutions respond to internationalization, digitalization, and the growing need for graduates who can communicate and collaborate across cultures. Universities increasingly operate in multilingual, multicultural, and digitally mediated environments where students interact with diverse perspectives in classrooms, online platforms, and professional networks. In this context, the development of intercultural competence has become a central educational priority, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs, where language learning is closely linked to global communication and participation in international academic and professional communities. Contemporary educational reforms emphasize not only linguistic proficiency but also the ability to interpret cultural perspectives, negotiate meaning, and engage respectfully with difference. At the same time, innovative pedagogical approaches are being explored to address the limitations of traditional language instruction, which has often focused on grammar and vocabulary rather than authentic communication, critical thinking, and intercultural interaction.

One pedagogical approach gaining increasing attention is the use of classroom debates. Debate-based learning has been widely recognized for its ability to develop speaking skills, critical thinking, collaboration, and learner motivation. Structured debates require students to research complex issues, defend positions, consider opposing viewpoints, and engage in real-time interaction with peers. In digitally connected societies, where students encounter diverse viewpoints through social media, global news, and virtual collaboration, the ability to engage in respectful, evidence-based argumentation is becoming a key academic and professional competence. However, while the literature has documented the benefits of debates for language development, collaboration, and the reduction of foreign language anxiety, their potential as a systematic tool for developing intercultural competence remains underexplored. Much of the existing research focuses on linguistic and cognitive outcomes, with limited attention to how debate activities can foster openness, empathy, perspective-taking, and critical cultural awareness. This gap highlights an important research problem. Intercultural competence is frequently included in language education policies and curricula, yet teachers often lack concrete pedagogical strategies and classroom practices for developing and assessing it. There is a need for innovative, research-informed approaches that integrate intercultural learning into everyday classroom activities rather than treating it as an abstract or supplementary objective. Debate-based pedagogy offers a promising solution

because it naturally requires students to engage with controversial global issues, consider multiple cultural perspectives, and negotiate meaning through interaction. Nevertheless, empirical research is needed to examine how debates can be intentionally designed and implemented to support intercultural learning and to identify the mechanisms through which such development occurs. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the use of structured classroom debates as a pedagogical tool for developing intercultural competence in EFL contexts. The study aims to examine how debate-based learning fosters intercultural attitudes, knowledge, skills of interaction, and critical cultural awareness, as well as the classroom conditions that support or hinder this development. By focusing on the intersection of language learning, collaborative interaction, and intercultural education, the research seeks to contribute to both theoretical and practical discussions on innovative teaching approaches in higher education.

In digitally mediated environments, students must navigate diverse perspectives, evaluate information critically, and communicate effectively across cultural boundaries. Debate-based pedagogy represents an innovative and future-oriented teaching approach that integrates communication, collaboration, and critical engagement with global issues. By investigating debates as a tool for intercultural learning, the study contributes to contemporary discussions on educational innovation, the development of 21st-century skills, and the role of higher education in preparing students for participation in an increasingly interconnected and digitally driven world.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Intercultural competence in language education

The increasing emphasis on intercultural competence in higher education is closely linked to the internationalization of universities and the expansion of global mobility. In contemporary academic and professional contexts, communication in a foreign language is no longer limited to linguistic accuracy; it also involves the ability to interpret cultural meanings, negotiate differences, and critically reflect on one's own assumptions (Byram, 1997). Language classrooms have therefore become key environments for fostering intercultural learning, as language and culture are inseparable components of communication. One of the most influential frameworks in this field is Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), which conceptualizes intercultural development as a multidimensional construct consisting of attitudes (openness and curiosity), knowledge of social groups and practices, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness. The strength of this model lies in

its pedagogical applicability, as it links classroom activities with observable learning outcomes. Complementing this perspective, Deardorff's (2006) process model presents intercultural competence as a cyclical and developmental process that involves attitudes, knowledge, skills, and both internal and external outcomes. Together, these frameworks emphasize that intercultural learning emerges gradually through meaningful social interaction rather than through isolated exposure to cultural content.

Despite the prominence of intercultural competence in educational policy and curriculum design, empirical research highlights a persistent gap between theoretical expectations and classroom practice. Intercultural objectives are often addressed indirectly through course materials instead of being embedded in structured pedagogical practices. Teachers frequently report difficulties in operationalizing intercultural outcomes and assessing students' progress in this domain (Deardorff, 2009). This discrepancy indicates a need for classroom-based pedagogical strategies capable of integrating intercultural learning into everyday language instruction.

2.2 Debate-based learning in EFL contexts

Debate-based learning has gained recognition as an effective active-learning strategy in EFL and higher education settings. Research consistently demonstrates that debate activities enhance speaking proficiency, vocabulary development, and argumentation skills while fostering learner motivation (Alasmari & Ahmed, 2013; Kennedy, 2007). Debate tasks integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing, thereby supporting communicative language teaching and academic literacy development.

In addition to linguistic and cognitive benefits, recent studies have emphasized the collaborative and affective dimensions of debate-based learning. Team debates encourage peer support, shared responsibility, and accountability, while also reducing foreign language anxiety by shifting the focus from individual performance to collective achievement (Sukkaew et al., 2025). Supportive team dynamics have been shown to create psychologically safe environments that promote risk-taking and active participation. However, the literature also identifies challenges such as unequal participation, anxiety related to peer comparison, and the need for careful scaffolding and group organization (Kennedy, 2007).

Although debate-based pedagogy has been widely examined from linguistic, cognitive, and affective perspectives, its role in fostering intercultural competence remains underexplored. Most studies focus primarily on language development or critical thinking, while intercultural learning is rarely examined as a central outcome. This gap is notable given that debates often

involve global and controversial topics that naturally require engagement with diverse cultural perspectives.

2.3 Debates, collaboration, and intercultural learning

Research on cooperative learning suggests that collaborative classroom environments can foster empathy, perspective-taking, and negotiation of meaning. Cooperative learning has been associated with improved academic performance, stronger interpersonal relationships, and increased motivation (Gillies, 2014). Within this context, debates can be viewed as a form of structured academic controversy that requires learners to consider multiple viewpoints and engage in reasoned dialogue.

Debate activities involve evaluating evidence from diverse contexts, responding to opposing arguments, and communicating respectfully. These processes align closely with the objectives of intercultural education, particularly the development of perspective-taking and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). However, exposure to diverse viewpoints can also generate discomfort or anxiety, especially in heterogeneous groups (Yan & Horwitz, 2008). This dual effect highlights the need for pedagogical scaffolding and supportive learning environments. Existing research therefore suggests strong potential for debate-based intercultural learning, yet this relationship has not been systematically investigated.

2.4 Sociocultural theory as a framework for debate-based intercultural learning

To address this gap, the present study adopts Sociocultural Theory (SCT) as its primary theoretical framework. SCT emphasizes the role of social interaction, mediation, and collaboration in learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2006). From this perspective, knowledge is co-constructed through interaction with others and through the use of cultural tools such as language.

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the role of collaboration and scaffolding in learning. During debate preparation and performance, students work in teams, exchange feedback, and model communication strategies, thereby creating opportunities for scaffolded learning. Another key SCT concept is mediation, which refers to the role of language in shaping cognitive processes. Debate activities function as mediational tools because they require learners to use language for reasoning, negotiation, and meaning-making.

Sociocultural theory also highlights the importance of affective factors in learning. Collaborative learning environments can reduce anxiety and increase willingness to communicate by fostering a sense of belonging and shared

responsibility (Swain et al., 2002). This perspective is particularly relevant to intercultural learning, which often involves ambiguity and uncertainty. When carefully scaffolded, debate-based learning provides a supportive environment in which students can explore cultural differences while receiving peer support.

2.5 Conceptual framework of the study

Drawing on intercultural competence models and sociocultural theory, the present study conceptualizes debate-based learning as a socially mediated pedagogical approach that supports the development of intercultural competence through structured interaction, collaboration, and reflection.

The research and preparation phases of debates contribute to intercultural knowledge and skills of discovery. Team collaboration supports the development of openness and empathy. Live debate interaction promotes skills of interpreting, relating, and negotiating meaning. Finally, reflective activities foster critical cultural awareness. This integrated framework ensures coherence between the theoretical foundation, research design, and interpretation of findings, providing a strong basis for examining the role of debates in developing intercultural competence in EFL contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and methodological approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The choice of a mixed design was guided by the research objective of examining both the measurable development of intercultural competence and the classroom processes through which such development occurs. Intercultural competence is widely recognized as a multidimensional construct involving cognitive, behavioural, and affective components; therefore, relying on a single method would provide only a partial understanding of the phenomenon. The quantitative component enabled the measurement of changes in students' intercultural competence over time, while the qualitative component provided in-depth insights into students' experiences, perceptions, and interactional processes during debate-based learning.

More specifically, the study employed a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design complemented by qualitative classroom research. This design allowed the researcher to evaluate the impact of a structured debate intervention while also exploring how students experienced intercultural learning within collaborative classroom settings.

3.2 Research design

The study was implemented over a twelve-week teaching cycle within an undergraduate EFL course. A debate-based instructional intervention was integrated into the course using a structured debate cycle that included preparation, research, team collaboration, debate performance, and reflective activities. The design followed a one-group pre-test/post-test structure in which students' intercultural competence was measured before and after the intervention. The research process consisted of four phases:

1. Pre-intervention phase: administration of the intercultural competence questionnaire and collection of baseline data.
2. Intervention phase: implementation of three structured debate cycles focusing on global and intercultural topics.
3. Post-intervention phase: administration of the post-test questionnaire and collection of reflective journals and interviews.
4. Analysis phase: quantitative and qualitative data analysis and triangulation.

This design supported the aims of the study by enabling the evaluation of both outcomes (changes in intercultural competence) and processes (students' experiences and classroom interaction).

3.3 Participants and sampling

The study involved undergraduate students enrolled in an English language course at university “Aleksandër Moisiu”. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, as the study required learners engaged in academic English and collaborative classroom activities.

The sample consisted of 48 students aged between 19 and 22 years. All participants had an upper- intermediate level of English proficiency and had previously experienced traditional language instruction with limited exposure to debate-based learning. Participation in the research component of the study was voluntary, and students were informed that their course grades would not be affected by their decision to participate.

The relatively homogeneous linguistic level of the group ensured comparability of results, while the diversity of academic backgrounds provided opportunities for exposure to different perspectives during debate activities.

3.4 Instruments and data collection procedures

Multiple instruments were used to ensure triangulation of data.

Intercultural competence questionnaire: A pre- and post-intervention questionnaire was administered to measure changes in students' intercultural competence. The questionnaire was based on established intercultural

competence frameworks and included Likert-scale items addressing attitudes, knowledge, skills of interaction, and critical cultural awareness.

Reflective journals: Students completed reflective journals after each debate cycle. These reflections focused on perspective-taking, cultural awareness, collaboration, and communication challenges experienced during the debates. Reflective writing provided insight into students' evolving attitudes and self-awareness.

Semi-structured interviews: A subset of twelve participants participated in semi-structured interviews conducted after the intervention. The interviews explored students' experiences with debate-based learning, perceived intercultural growth, and challenges encountered during the activities.

Classroom observation protocol: Debate sessions were observed using a structured observation protocol focusing on interactional behaviors such as turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem-solving.

Procedure of the debate intervention: Students participated in three debate cycles, each lasting four weeks:

Week 1: topic introduction, intercultural background input, and research tasks

Week 2: group preparation and argument development

Week 3: formal debate sessions and peer feedback

Week 4: reflective activities and debriefing discussions

Debate topics addressed global and intercultural issues such as cultural identity, globalization, media representation, and migration.

3.5 Data analysis methods

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests to examine changes in intercultural competence before and after the intervention.

Qualitative data from reflective journals, interviews, and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed a systematic multi-step procedure: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, development of themes, and refinement of thematic categories. This process enabled the identification of patterns related to intercultural learning, collaboration, and classroom interaction.

Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced the validity and reliability of the results by allowing comparison across multiple data sources.

3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants received detailed information about the purpose of the study and

provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifying information from all data. Participation was voluntary, and students were free to withdraw at any stage without consequences. The study complied with institutional ethical guidelines for research involving human participants.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative results: changes in intercultural competence

The first research objective was to examine whether participation in structured classroom debates influenced students' intercultural competence. Pre- and post-intervention questionnaire results indicated a statistically significant improvement across all measured dimensions of intercultural competence.

Overall intercultural competence scores increased from a pre-test mean of 3.21 to a post-test mean of 3.78 on a five-point Likert scale. Paired-sample t-tests indicated significant gains in four dimensions:

Attitudes (openness and curiosity): students reported greater willingness to consider different cultural perspectives and increased comfort engaging in intercultural discussions.

Knowledge (awareness of cultural perspectives): students reported increased awareness of global issues and diverse viewpoints.

Skills of interaction and perspective-taking: students reported improved ability to discuss controversial topics respectfully and consider opposing viewpoints.

Critical cultural awareness: students showed increased ability to question stereotypes and reflect on their own cultural assumptions.

The strongest gains were observed in perspective-taking and critical cultural awareness, suggesting that debate-based learning had a particularly strong impact on higher-order intercultural outcomes.

4.2 Qualitative results

Qualitative analysis of reflective journals, interviews, and classroom observations revealed four major themes aligned with the research questions.

Theme 1: Development of perspective-taking and empathy

Students reported that debates required them to examine issues from multiple viewpoints and sometimes defend positions different from their own beliefs. Many reflections indicated that this process helped them understand how cultural background influences opinions and values.

Theme 2: Growth of critical cultural awareness

Students reported increased awareness of stereotypes and bias. Reflective writing showed that learners became more conscious of the limitations of

single-perspective thinking and more attentive to the complexity of global issues.

Theme 3: Collaborative intercultural learning through peer interaction

Observations and interviews highlighted the role of teamwork in facilitating intercultural learning. Students frequently described how group preparation encouraged the sharing of different perspectives and promoted respectful dialogue.

Theme 4: Emotional safety and willingness to communicate

Students reported that the team-based structure of debates reduced anxiety and increased confidence. Peer encouragement and shared responsibility contributed to a supportive learning environment that facilitated risk-taking and participation.

4.3 Discussion

The findings confirm that debate-based learning can function as an effective pedagogical tool for developing intercultural competence in EFL contexts. The significant improvement in intercultural competence scores supports the assumption that structured interaction and collaborative learning contribute to intercultural development. These results align with previous research demonstrating that active learning approaches foster critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills.

The strong improvement in perspective-taking supports the view that debates provide authentic opportunities for students to engage with multiple viewpoints. This finding extends existing research on debate-based learning by demonstrating that the benefits of debates extend beyond linguistic and cognitive outcomes to include intercultural growth. The results are consistent with sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of social interaction and mediation in learning. Through collaborative preparation and structured dialogue, students operated within their zone of proximal development, receiving support from peers and teachers while developing new communicative and intercultural skills.

The increase in critical cultural awareness highlights the importance of structured reflection within debate-based pedagogy. Previous studies have emphasized the role of debate in developing argumentation and critical thinking, but the present findings show that debates also encourage students to question assumptions and evaluate cultural perspectives critically. This suggests that debate activities can support the development of critical cultural awareness when accompanied by reflective tasks and intercultural scaffolding. The findings also confirm the importance of collaborative learning in reducing communication anxiety. Consistent with previous research, the team-based structure of debates created a supportive environment that encouraged

participation and risk-taking. The results highlight the importance of peer support and emotional safety in intercultural learning, which often involves uncertainty and ambiguity.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings demonstrate that debates can serve as an innovative teaching approach that integrates language learning, collaboration, and intercultural development. Debate-based learning provides an authentic communicative context in which students can practice argumentation, negotiation of meaning, and respectful engagement with difference. These outcomes are particularly relevant in digitally connected societies, where students must navigate diverse perspectives and communicate across cultural boundaries.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

5.1 Conclusion

This study investigated the role of classroom debates in developing intercultural competence in EFL contexts. The findings demonstrate that debate-based learning can significantly enhance students' intercultural attitudes, knowledge, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. The results further highlight the importance of collaborative learning, peer support, and reflective activities as key conditions for fostering meaningful intercultural development.

From a practical perspective, the study offers a structured and adaptable framework for integrating debates into EFL curricula, consisting of preparation, interaction, and reflection phases. At the same time, the findings indicate that the effectiveness of debate-based intercultural learning depends on intentional pedagogical design, as unstructured debate may risk reinforcing stereotypes rather than critically challenging them.

At a theoretical level, this study extends existing intercultural communicative competence frameworks by demonstrating how debate-based learning operationalizes abstract intercultural dimensions, such as perspective-taking and critical cultural awareness, through structured classroom interaction. In doing so, it contributes to sociocultural perspectives on learning by illustrating how debates function as mediational tools that support intercultural development through collaborative and scaffolded engagement.

Moreover, debate-based learning supports the integration of language learning with key 21st-century competencies, particularly critical thinking, collaboration, and intercultural communication, which are essential in digitally mediated and globalized environments. The findings therefore address the persistent gap between intercultural education policy and

classroom practice by providing a concrete and scalable pedagogical model grounded in structured debate cycles.

The implications of this study are particularly relevant in the context of higher education internationalization, where the development of intercultural competence is a central outcome of both student mobility and “internationalization at home” initiatives. Overall, the study positions debate-based learning not merely as a language teaching technique, but as a transformative pedagogical approach that enables students to engage critically, collaboratively, and interculturally in an increasingly complex global landscape.

5.2 Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study was conducted within a single institution and involved a relatively small sample, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The duration of the intervention was limited to one academic semester, and long-term effects of debate-based learning were not examined. In addition, the study relied partly on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias.

5.3 Directions for future research

Future research should investigate the long-term impact of debate-based learning on intercultural competence and explore its effectiveness in different educational contexts and proficiency levels. Comparative studies examining different debate formats or online debate environments could provide further insights into the role of debate in digitally mediated learning environments.

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Institutional communication and translation in international higher education: translational asymmetry and student experience

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Abstract Internationalization has become a defining feature of contemporary higher education, yet the role of translation in shaping foreign students’ institutional experiences remains under examined. While universities increasingly present themselves as multilingual and globally oriented, institutional communication often operates through uneven and selective translation practices. This article adopts a Translation Studies–led perspective to examine how such practices shape the challenges faced by foreign students in host universities.

Drawing on an analytical auto-ethnographic case situated within the Albanian higher education context, the study conceptualizes universities as translation-dependent institutions and introduces the notion of institutional translational asymmetry to describe systematic imbalances in access to translated information. The analysis demonstrates how the absence or partial implementation of institutional translation contributes to uncertainty, reliance on informal mediation, and the externalization of translational labor onto students themselves.

By foregrounding translation as a form of institutional mediation embedded in power relations, the article reframes international student adaptation as ongoing translational work rather than individual linguistic adjustment. The findings contribute to Translation Studies by extending its analytical scope to higher education institutions and by highlighting the ethical and organizational implications of invisible translational labor. The article concludes by arguing for greater translational accountability as a core component of equitable internationalization in higher education.

Keywords: *Institutional translation, Institutional translational asymmetry, international students, Higher education internationalization, Translation and power*

1. Introduction

International student mobility has become a defining feature of contemporary higher education. Universities increasingly position themselves as international and multilingual institutions, presenting mobility as a pathway to intercultural exchange, academic enrichment, and global employability. Within this discourse, linguistic diversity is often treated as a given, implicitly resolved through the widespread use of English or through assumptions about the adaptability of mobile students. The everyday functioning of universities, however, reveals a more complex reality in which language mediation and translation play a central, yet frequently underexamined, role.

Universities operate through dense networks of institutional communication, including websites, administrative regulations, academic calendars, course syllabi, emails, and informal oral interactions. For foreign students, access to these communicative structures is rarely direct. Instead, it is mediated—often unevenly—through translation, partial multilingual provision, or informal linguistic support. When translation is absent or inconsistent, language becomes a site of institutional translational asymmetry, shaping access to information, degrees of autonomy, and positioning within the institutional hierarchy.

This article approaches the challenges faced by foreign students not primarily as issues of individual linguistic competence or cultural adjustment, but as outcomes of institutional translational mediation. Translation is understood here as a practice through which institutions regulate access to knowledge, participation, and authority. From a Translation Studies perspective, translation is never neutral: it distributes visibility, allocates responsibility, and reflects underlying power relations (Baker, 2018; Venuti, 2017). In multilingual universities, decisions concerning what are translated, how, and for who directly affect foreign students’ capacity to navigate institutional life. While research on international students has extensively addressed adaptation, intercultural communication, and acculturation processes, the translational dimension of institutional communication remains comparatively under-theorized. Translation Studies has increasingly examined translation in social, political, and institutional contexts, yet higher education institutions have received limited sustained attention as sites of systematic translational mediation. This article addresses this gap by conceptualizing universities as translation-dependent institutions and by examining how institutional translation practices—or their absence—structure the lived experience of foreign students.

The analysis is grounded in an auto-ethnographic case of a foreign student enrolled in a host university outside her country of origin, specifically within

the Albanian higher education context. Rather than functioning as anecdotal evidence, this experience is mobilized analytically to illuminate how institutional translation—or its absence—produces uncertainty, reliance on informal networks, and asymmetrical relations of dependence. The methodological approach, discussed below, treats lived experience as an analytical lens through which otherwise invisible institutional translation practices can be examined.

The article makes three main contributions. First, it foregrounds translation as a form of institutional mediation that underpins internationalization in higher education. Second, it introduces the concept of institutional translational asymmetry to describe systematic imbalances in access to translated information. Third, it demonstrates how foreign students routinely perform informal and unpaid translational labor, compensating for institutional gaps while simultaneously reproducing existing power relations. Through this lens, international student adaptation emerges not as a purely individual challenge, but as a structurally mediated process shaped by institutional translation choices.

Press reporting on European higher education indicates that administrative and institutional communication practices continue to pose challenges for international students, with language accessibility and clarity frequently cited as structural barriers affecting enrolment, integration, and retention (The PIE News, 2024).

2. Theoretical Framework

Translation as Institutional Mediation

Contemporary Translation Studies has moved decisively beyond narrow, text-centered definitions of translation toward a broader understanding of translation as a socially embedded practice. Translation is now widely conceptualized as a form of mediation situated within institutional settings, ideological frameworks, and power relations (Cronin, 2003; Baker, 2018). This shift is particularly relevant for analyzing organizations whose functioning depends on the circulation of information across linguistic boundaries.

In institutional contexts, translation does not merely transmit content from one language to another; it structures access to institutional knowledge and regulates participation. As Koskinen (2008) observes, institutions rely on translation to maintain coherence and legitimacy yet often fail to recognize translation as a form of infrastructural labor. When translation is partial or inconsistent, institutions implicitly shift responsibility for meaning making

onto individuals, transforming translation into an informal and individualized task.

Universities exemplify this dynamic. Despite their international orientation, many universities operate on the assumption of a dominant institutional language, with translation offered selectively or symbolically. From a Translation Studies perspective, such selective mediation produces asymmetrical communicative conditions in which foreign students must navigate institutional life through fragmented and often unreliable translational resources.

Institutional Multilingualism, Asymmetry, and Power

Institutional multilingualism is frequently invoked as an indicator of inclusivity and global engagement. In practice, however, multilingual provision in higher education often follows uneven patterns, privileging certain communicative domains—such as teaching or research—while neglecting others, particularly administrative and organizational communication. This uneven distribution gives rise to institutional translational asymmetry, whereby access to essential information is stratified along linguistic lines.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power, language can be understood as a resource that confers legitimacy and authority within institutional spaces. Translation, when systematically implemented, has the potential to redistribute this power by broadening access. Conversely, when translation is absent or treated as secondary, linguistic hierarchies are reinforced rather than mitigated.

Venuti’s (2017) concept of the invisibility of translation is particularly relevant in this context. In higher education institutions, translation often remains invisible precisely because its absence is normalized. Foreign students are expected to compensate by relying on bilingual peers, independently interpreting institutional texts, or engaging in ad hoc oral translation. This informal mediation, while essential to institutional functioning, remains largely unrecognized as labor.

Comparative research across European higher education institutions confirms that these patterns are not exceptional. Studies show that multilingual provision is often symbolic rather than operational: English-language versions of institutional websites frequently prioritize promotional content, while practical information related to academic calendars, enrollment procedures, and administrative regulations remains accessible primarily in the national language (Lønsmann, 2014; Solomidou Ierodiakonou, 2015). Such selective translation reinforces institutional translational asymmetry by granting unequal access to essential information.

Empirical research on language policy further demonstrates that translation practices are closely tied to institutional power relations. Studies of Anglicization in European universities indicate that while English is often adopted as a language of instruction, administrative and governance domains remain linguistically closed, privileging local language users (Hultgren, Gregersen, & Thøgersen, 2014). From a Translation Studies perspective, translation thus functions as a mechanism through which access and authority are unevenly distributed.

Translation, Uncertainty, and Organizational Sense-Making

Although Translation Studies provides the primary analytical framework of this article, selected concepts from Organizational Behavior help elucidate the experiential consequences of translational asymmetry. Organizational research emphasizes the centrality of communication in reducing uncertainty and enabling sense-making within complex environments (Louis, 1980; Robbins & Judge, 2020). For organizational newcomers, uncertainty is a predictable condition—one that can be mitigated through clear and accessible communication.

For foreign students, uncertainty is intensified by translational gaps. Institutional rules and expectations must be interpreted not only across organizational boundaries, but across languages. When official translations are unavailable, students depend on informal explanations that may vary in accuracy and completeness. From a Translation Studies perspective, this uncertainty is not incidental but structurally produced by institutional communicative arrangements.

Importantly, Organizational Behavior concepts are employed here to trace the effects of translational asymmetry, not to displace translation as the primary explanatory framework. The source of uncertainty lies not in cultural difference alone, but in the uneven distribution of translational mediation within the institution.

Universities as Translation-Dependent Institutions

Taken together, these perspectives support the conceptualization of universities as translation-dependent institutions. Their international operations rely on continuous acts of mediation—textual, oral, and semiotic—that enables foreign students to participate meaningfully in academic and organizational life. When translation is treated as optional or supplementary, institutions effectively shift the costs of mediation onto individuals.

Foreign students thus emerge as key, though largely invisible, translational agents. They interpret institutional texts, negotiate meaning through informal networks, and engage in multimodal communication to compensate for

linguistic gaps. Recognizing this translational labor is essential for understanding both the challenges faced by foreign students and the broader implications of institutional multilingualism in higher education.

3. Methodology: Auto-Ethnography and Translation-Oriented Institutional Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative methodology combining analytical auto-ethnography with a translation-oriented institutional analysis. This approach is guided by the nature of the research object: institutional translation practices in higher education are frequently implicit, unevenly implemented, or entirely absent, and therefore difficult to capture through official documentation or quantitative indicators alone. Auto-ethnography enables the systematic examination of lived experience as a site where institutional translation—or its absence—becomes observable in practice.

Auto-ethnography has gained wide recognition as a rigorous qualitative approach for analyzing how individuals experience and interpret institutional structures from within (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). In its analytical form, it emphasizes reflexivity and theoretical engagement rather than personal narrative for its own sake. This orientation is particularly appropriate here, as individual experience is treated as an entry point for examining systematic patterns of translational mediation.

Within Translation Studies, reflexive and narrative methodologies have long been employed to investigate translation as a situated social practice. Pym (2014) highlights that much translational activity occurs outside professionalized settings and is often carried out by actors who do not identify as translators. Similarly, Koskinen’s (2008) ethnographic work demonstrates that institutional translation is frequently characterized by invisibility, partial regulation, and reliance on informal mediation.

The methodological framework is further informed by institutional ethnography, which focuses on how everyday experiences are coordinated through organizational texts and routines (Smith, 2005). From this perspective, institutional texts are active mechanisms that organize social relations. The absence of translated institutional texts thus constitutes a meaningful analytical object, revealing how access to institutional knowledge is unevenly distributed.

The empirical focus is an auto-ethnographic case of a foreign student enrolled in a host university within the Albanian higher education context. Data consist of systematically recorded reflective observations collected during the initial stages of academic and social integration, with attention to moments of uncertainty, information-seeking, reliance on informal mediators, and

multimodal communication. The analysis aims for analytical transferability rather than statistical generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Press-informed analyses of Albania’s engagement with the Bologna Process note that while formal alignment with European standards has advanced, practical challenges persist in the implementation of internationally accessible institutional communication (AB Academies, 2021).

4. Discussion: Translation, Power, and Institutional Responsibility

The analysis presented in this article demonstrates that the challenges faced by foreign students in host universities cannot be adequately explained through individual linguistic competence or cultural adjustment alone. Instead, these challenges emerge from institutional translational asymmetries embedded in the communicative infrastructure of higher education institutions. By approaching universities as translation-dependent institutions, the discussion reframes student adaptation as a process shaped by organizational decisions about language mediation, visibility, and responsibility.

Taken together, European press accounts suggest that language-related challenges faced by international students should be understood as structural features of institutional communication rather than isolated or context-specific problems (The PIE News, 2024; EAIE, 2023).

Institutional Translational Asymmetry as a Structural Condition

The case analysis illustrates how translation is unevenly distributed across institutional domains. While internationalization strategies frequently prioritize translated promotional materials or English-language teaching provision, administrative and organizational communication often remains linguistically restricted. This selective translation creates stratified access to institutional knowledge, producing asymmetrical conditions in which foreign students must operate with incomplete or unreliable information.

From a Translation Studies perspective, this asymmetry is not accidental. Decisions regarding what are translated, for whom, and to what extent reflect institutional assumptions about the “default” user of communication. In this sense, translation functions as a gate keeping mechanism, regulating participation through linguistic accessibility. The absence of translation, therefore, constitutes an active organizational choice with material consequences for those positioned outside the dominant linguistic group.

This finding aligns with existing Translation Studies research on institutional translation, which emphasizes that translation practices are shaped by power relations rather than purely communicative needs (Koskinen, 2008; Baker,

2018). In the university context, institutional translational asymmetry reinforces hierarchical distinctions between local and foreign students, positioning the latter as perpetual newcomers required to adapt to pre-existing communicative norms.

Coverage of higher education reform in Albania emphasizes ongoing challenges related to internationalization, including institutional coordination and communication practices that complicate the experience of foreign students navigating administrative and academic structures (AB Academies, 2021).

Foreign Students as Invisible Translational Laborers

One of the most significant insights emerging from the analysis concerns the role of foreign students as informal translational laborers. In the absence of systematic institutional translation, students engage in continuous acts of mediation: translating documents, interpreting oral instructions, negotiating meaning through non-verbal communication, and relying on informal networks to access information. This labor is essential for institutional functioning, yet it remains largely invisible and uncompensated.

Venuti's (2017) concept of translation invisibility is particularly useful for interpreting this phenomenon. Just as the labor of professional translators is often obscured in favor of fluency and transparency, the translational work performed by foreign students is normalized as part of “adaptation.” The burden of mediation is thus shifted from the institution to the individual, transforming translation from an institutional responsibility into a personal coping strategy.

This externalization of translational labor raises ethical questions that extend beyond the specific case analyzed here. If internationalization relies on the unpaid translational work of foreign students, then linguistic inequality becomes structurally embedded within higher education systems. Translation Studies, with its long-standing engagement with issues of power, visibility, and labor, offers a critical framework for interrogating these dynamics.

The externalization of translational labor onto foreign students documented in this study resonates with broader analyses of non-professional translation. Olohan (2016) demonstrates that translation in institutional settings is frequently performed by actors who are not recognized as translators, rendering their labor invisible within organizational structures. Similarly, Piller (2016) argues that linguistic inequality is systematically normalized when institutions frame language barriers as individual problems rather than structural conditions. These perspectives reinforce the view that informal translational labor is not incidental, but constitutive of how multilingual institutions function.

European media coverage of international education highlights that linguistic barriers extend beyond the classroom, shaping international students’ social integration and access to institutional resources, particularly where administrative communication remains predominantly monolingual (EAIE, 2023).

Informal Mediation, Dependency, and Unequal Access

The reliance on informal translation practices also produces differentiated outcomes among foreign students themselves. Those with greater linguistic capital, stronger social skills, or access to supportive networks are better positioned to navigate institutional asymmetries. Conversely, students who lack such resources may experience prolonged uncertainty, isolation, or disengagement.

While informal mediation can foster solidarity and mutual support, it also introduces variability and dependency. Information obtained through personal contacts may be incomplete, inconsistent, or contingent on goodwill. From a Translation Studies perspective, this variability underscores the limitations of informal translation as a substitute for institutional provision. Informal mediation may alleviate immediate difficulties, but it does not address the underlying structural asymmetry.

Moreover, the normalization of informal translation risks obscuring institutional accountability. When foreign students successfully navigate linguistic barriers through personal effort, the absence of institutional translation becomes less visible and therefore less likely to be addressed.

The reliance on informal translation observed in this case aligns with a broader body of research documenting how international students routinely compensate for limited institutional communication through peer mediation and personal networks. Sawir et al. (2008) show that international students frequently depend on informal interpersonal support to navigate administrative uncertainty, particularly during initial stages of mobility. Similarly, Marginson (2014) highlights how access to social capital becomes a crucial determinant of successful participation in international education systems. These findings support the argument that informal translation practices function as compensatory mechanisms, mitigating—but not resolving—structural translational asymmetries.

Reframing Adaptation through Translation Studies

The findings of this study invite a reconceptualization of international student adaptation. Rather than viewing adaptation as a linear process of linguistic and cultural adjustment, the analysis suggests that adaptation is better understood as ongoing translational work. Foreign students continuously interpret,

negotiate, and reconstruct institutional meaning across linguistic and semiotic boundaries.

This reframing has important implications for both Translation Studies and international education research. For Translation Studies, it extends the field’s analytical reach into higher education, highlighting universities as critical sites of translational mediation. For international education research, it shifts attention from individual deficits to institutional structures, emphasizing the role of translation in shaping inclusion and exclusion.

Research on multimodal and translingual communication provides further support for interpreting non-verbal interaction as a form of translational mediation. Studies in applied linguistics emphasize that meaning-making in multilingual environments often extends beyond verbal language, relying on gestures, routines, spatial practices, and embodied interaction (Canagarajah, 2013; Kress, 2010). These practices can be understood as forms of semiotic translation that enable communication in contexts of linguistic asymmetry. However, their prevalence also underscores the extent to which individuals are required to compensate for the absence of formal linguistic mediation.

5. Conclusion: Toward Translational Accountability in Higher Education

This article has examined the challenges faced by foreign students in host universities through a Translation Studies–led lens, foregrounding the role of institutional translation as a form of mediation embedded in power relations. By conceptualizing universities as translation-dependent institutions, the analysis has shown how the absence or uneven implementation of translation produces institutional translational asymmetry, shaping students’ experiences of uncertainty, dependence, and participation.

Through an auto-ethnographic case analysis, the study has demonstrated that foreign students routinely perform informal and unpaid translational labor to compensate for institutional gaps. This labor, while essential to everyday functioning, remains largely invisible and unacknowledged. The findings suggest that internationalization in higher education is sustained not only through policy and mobility programs, but through the continuous translational efforts of individuals navigating linguistically asymmetrical environments.

The theoretical contribution of this article lies in its integration of Translation Studies with the study of international student experience, offering a framework for analyzing how translation operates as institutional infrastructure rather than auxiliary support. By introducing the concept of

institutional translational asymmetry, the article provides a tool for examining linguistic inequality in higher education and beyond.

Research on language, inequality, and higher education increasingly highlights the ethical implications of institutional multilingualism. Scholars have shown that linguistic accessibility is closely linked to questions of equity, participation, and social justice in internationalized universities (Hultgren et al., 2014; Piller, 2016). Viewed through this lens, translation is not simply a technical service, but a matter of institutional responsibility. Addressing translational asymmetries therefore requires sustained attention to how linguistic mediation is organized, funded, and valued within higher education systems.

From a practical perspective, the findings point to the need for greater translational accountability within universities. Systematic and consistent translation of institutional communication should be recognized as a core component of equitable internationalization. Addressing translational asymmetries requires moving beyond symbolic multilingualism toward sustained investment in translation as an institutional responsibility.

Reports on European universities suggest that the adoption of English as a language of instruction does not necessarily entail comprehensive multilingual institutional communication, resulting in uneven access to administrative and organizational information for international students (The PIE News, 2024).

Future research could extend this analysis through comparative studies across different national and institutional contexts, or by examining the perspectives of institutional actors involved in translation decision-making. Such work would further illuminate the role of translation in shaping the lived realities of international higher education.

Media discussions across Europe increasingly frame linguistic accessibility as an institutional responsibility, particularly in the context of international student mobility and competition among universities for global enrolments (EAIE, 2023).

In conclusion, the challenges faced by foreign students are not merely linguistic or cultural, but fundamentally translational. Recognizing translation as a site of mediation, asymmetry, and power is essential for understanding—and ultimately improving—the conditions of international academic mobility.

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Ethical responsibility and scientific indifference in Kurt Vonnegut’s cat’s cradle

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Abstract: This paper examines the dystopian vision articulated in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*, focusing on the ethical implications of scientific development and the transgression of moral boundaries. Through the fictional substance Ice-Nine, Vonnegut constructs a critique of scientific practice detached from ethical accountability, where innovation is pursued for its own sake rather than for human well-being. The novel presents science not as inherently destructive, but as dangerously indifferent when separated from moral reflection and social responsibility. By employing satire and irony, Vonnegut challenges the illusion of value-neutral knowledge and questions the dominant narrative of inevitable scientific progress. The dystopian framework of *Cat’s Cradle* ultimately functions as a warning against unrestrained technological advancement. This paper contributes to interdisciplinary discussions on literature, science, and ethics, while encouraging critical reflection on ethical responsibility in modern scientific research, academic discourse, and contemporary higher education contexts worldwide today for future generations and global academic communities alike.

Keywords: *dystopia, scientific ethics, moral ethics, Ice-Nine, technological responsibility*

1. Introduction

The rapid development of science and technology has undeniably created significant benefits for society, from medical breakthroughs that save lives to innovations in communication that connect people across the globe. Yet these advances have also raised profound ethical questions that remain unresolved. Who is responsible for the consequences of scientific discoveries—the individual scientist, the institutions funding research, or society at large? Can science ever be truly neutral, or is it inevitably influenced by human values, political agendas, and cultural contexts? These questions are central to Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*, a novel that interrogates the relationship between knowledge and responsibility. Written during the Cold War, a time when scientific innovation—especially in nuclear technology—posed existential risks, the novel dramatizes the dangers of pursuing knowledge without moral consideration. Through its fictional narrative, Vonnegut examines the ethical void that emerges when science is divorced from responsibility, suggesting that neutrality in science is an illusion (Vonnegut, 1963).

Vonnegut’s critique is embodied most vividly in the invention of Ice-Nine, a substance that can freeze all water on Earth. Ice-Nine symbolizes the peril of scientific curiosity unchecked by ethical foresight. Dr. Felix Hoenikker, the fictional “father” of the atomic bomb, creates Ice-Nine not out of malice but out of intellectual playfulness, reflecting the archetype of the detached scientist. His indifference to the consequences of his discovery mirrors real-world debates about figures of the time, who were facing with the moral weight of their contributions to nuclear weapons. As one analysis observes, Vonnegut “illustrates how science’s relationship with morality is inescapable, showing that one is entwined with the other” (Reed, 1997, p. 42). The novel suggests that scientific progress cannot be separated from human values because discoveries inevitably carry implications for how they are used.

The Cold War context is crucial here. In the early 1960s, the world had just witnessed the Cuban Missile Crisis, which revealed how close humanity could come to nuclear annihilation. Scientific innovation was celebrated for its power but also feared for its destructive capacity. Vonnegut’s satire reflects this ambivalence, dramatizing the ethical negligence of scientists who claim neutrality. As critic Peter Reed notes, *Cat’s Cradle* “provides a critique of humanity’s destructive tendencies and the consequences of our actions” (Reed, 1997, p. 47). The novel’s absurd humor underscores the irrationality of treating science as detached from ethics, mocking the idea that technological advancement automatically equates to human betterment.

Vonnegut’s satire also extends to institutions and belief systems. The religion of Bokononism, with its emphasis on “foma” (harmless untruths), serves as a

counterpoint to the supposed rationality of science. By juxtaposing scientific discovery with religious absurdity, Vonnegut exposes the folly of assuming that science alone can provide meaning or guidance. His satirical tone forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths: progress without responsibility can lead not to salvation but to destruction. Scholars have noted that Vonnegut’s novel “displays the dual nature of science as both creative and destructive,” highlighting the tension between innovation and catastrophe (Klinkowitz, 1982, p. 63).

The question of neutrality is central. Science is conducted by humans, funded by institutions, and applied in contexts shaped by politics and economics. Even the decision of what research to pursue reflects values—whether to prioritize military technology, medical cures, or environmental sustainability. Ice-Nine illustrates this vividly: though conceived as a solution to a military problem (muddy battlefields), its existence threatens all life on Earth. Neutrality is thus revealed as an illusion; science is always embedded in human choices, and those choices carry ethical weight (Hayles, 1990).

Vonnegut’s warning remains relevant today. Modern fields such as artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and climate science raise similar questions about responsibility. Vonnegut’s message—that knowledge without responsibility is perilous—resonates in these debates. His novel reminds us that scientific progress must be guided by ethical reflection, lest we repeat the mistakes of the past.

In conclusion, *Cat’s Cradle* presents science as ethically indifferent when separated from moral responsibility. By analyzing the symbol of Ice-Nine, the role of scientists, and the use of satire, Vonnegut critiques the idea of neutral progress and underscores the dangers of knowledge pursued without foresight. Written during the Cold War, the novel reflects anxieties about nuclear technology but also offers timeless insights into the relationship between science and ethics. Today, as new technologies reshape society, Vonnegut’s message remains urgent: scientific discovery is never neutral, and responsibility for its consequences cannot be ignored. Progress without morality is not progress at all—it is peril.

2. Historical Context and Background

To understand the ethical message of *Cat’s Cradle*, it is important to consider its historical context. The novel was published in 1963, during a period of intense global tension. The Cold War created a competitive environment where scientific advancements were often driven by military goals rather than humanitarian concerns. The development of nuclear weapons is a key example. Scientists played a central role in creating technologies that had the

power to destroy entire cities. This raised important ethical questions about responsibility and accountability.

Vonnegut's experiences also influenced his writing. As a survivor of the bombing of Dresden during World War II, he witnessed the destructive power of modern technology. These experiences shaped his critical view of scientific progress.

In *Cat's Cradle*, this context is reflected in the character of Dr. Felix Hoenikker, a scientist who contributes to the creation of dangerous technology without considering its consequences. His character represents a broader critique of scientific culture during this period for the crime he had committed, but they also mentioned the people who had been lost in the war, as if he were guilty of all the deaths in the world.

Despite the absurdism in many of Vonnegut's novels, he remains comic and humanist at the same time. He is able to face the absurdity of life, but without forgetting his concern for the human condition, without losing his ability to joke. Perhaps the expression that best summarizes this paradox is found in the novel *Cat's Cradle* and is said precisely by Bokkonon: "Maturity is a bitter disappointment, for which there is no medicine, unless it is laughter that can really cure something." (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 134)

3. The dystopian world and the dystopian narrative

Dystopian prose has often been seen as an integral part of the science fiction genre. Booker notes that, although science fiction and dystopian prose have many things in common, there are still important elements that distinguish them. "There is much overlap between dystopian and science fiction prose, and many texts belong to both categories. But in general, dystopian prose differs from science fiction in the specification of the attention of social and political criticism." (Booker, 1994, p. 20) In fact, this element seems a bit dismissive, but it is actually what makes dystopian literature unique and attractive. Dystopias set their stories in the future, in imaginary worlds, but they are also determined to speak of the present. Readers thus connect their own experiences with those in the novel. A good deal of science fiction prose contains elements of social and political criticism. These novels, including Vonnegut's, thus criticize a mechanized world that destroys everything that has to do with humanity. For this reason, many critics believe that dystopian texts have proven more true to the present than to the future. The essence of the dystopian narrative lies in making the reader aware of the truth and reality of his/her life, in the call to wake up from the lies and untrue aspects of our lives.

Vonnegut often said that he enjoyed utopian conversations, speculating about what our planet should be like, and expressing anger about the state it is in. Through various research and studies, scholars have found that Vonnegut offers contemporary readers universal views on the complexity of the human condition (such as the insistence on free will, for example) and his works create "alternative universes" that are mirrors of our real world, often focusing on people who create their own suffering, due to the weakness of their own nature.

In a century of war and terror, uncontrolled technological and scientific developments and the use of the atomic bomb, after World War II, Vonnegut appears to us as a pacifist, with the opinion that art is the one that should make the greatest criticism of problematic social issues.

What we notice in the narrative of Kurt Vonnegut, it seems that the problem with this "utopian America", in which all needs and desires are fulfilled by the wisdom of technocratic engineers and managers, returns us to the old question of the meaning of life. Or as a character in the novel "God bless you, Mr. Rosewater!" puts it: "What the hell are people for, then?" (Vonnegut, 1965, p. 21) Most of the people in the novel are cast aside, they have no work to do, but on the other hand they have no problems either. Thus, they have become machines, without any value, but they insist on existing. As Robert T. Tally notes, "the man-machine antagonism seems to be a false alternative, both in the novel's conclusion with the failed revolution, but also in the broader sense that people and machines have more in common than Paul Proteus (if not Vonnegut) thinks." (Tally, 2011, p. 25)

If Renaissance humanists, including Thomas Morin, envisioned a utopian world that offered freedom and made possible the existence of human beings with all their faculties, including reason, for Vonnegut this is impossible. "From dreams of a collective utopia or an ideal society, Vonnegut's protagonists are drawn inward, to psychological fantasies or non-places. The typical American utopia, represented in the Puritan rhetoric of a return to the wild, the political discourse of freedom and equality, and the noble goals of creating another world, is here turned inward, becoming more personal or individualistic (perhaps another typically American characteristic) than social or collective." (Tally, 2011, p.35)

Another aspect of Vonnegut's use of science fiction is his social criticism of society, and among the most common themes in his works are those of dehumanization and apocalypse. He notes that American society is increasingly being taken over by machines, as most economic, financial, communication, etc. activities are carried out by computers or other mechanized devices.

Vonnegut believes that the development of technology, computer culture, turns people into cogs in machines in an industrialized society. The individual is no longer desired for who he is, as a human being, but only for some skills that one has. When there are machines that do everything faster and better, then why do we need people? Vonnegut seems to finally believe that the development of modern Western society is based solely on technology. Consequently, man is used as a means and not as an end, and it seems that the greatest goal is simply to get rich. Mass production of products has provided people with material goods. In an interview, Vonnegut notes: "Machinery is important. We have to write about it." (Allen, 1988, p. 157) But for Vonnegut, the theme of machines serves to tell the reader that machines and technology are or should be means through which man can achieve his freedom and not lose it. Machines should not be ends in themselves.

Materialism has led to the dehumanization of the individual, due to the heavy dependence on machines and what Vonnegut calls in his works "technocracy". In observing technological civilization, Vonnegut finds the same truth that exists in the scientific world. For him, it is not knowledge that is considered harmful or threatening, but the misuse of this knowledge. In the technologically advanced world, machines are indispensable, but it is engineers and managers who misuse them. Those who possess this knowledge are precisely the scientists, and Vonnegut directs his greatest criticism of dehumanization to them. The work that best demonstrates this is *"Cat's Cradle"*. In search of data to write a book about the day the world ended, the narrator meets the children of the scientist who participated in the creation of the atomic bomb. The scientist Hoenikker had three children, and each of them is a grotesque figure, because they "have grown up more with curiosity for science than with love". (Vonnegut, 1963) Newt, the youngest, is a dwarf and he draws pictures that show the meaninglessness of life. Frank is an irresponsible man who refuses any kind of responsibility for ice-9, the substance that ends life on earth, and prefers to work better for an electric generator just to make more of a name for himself. Meanwhile, the daughter, Angela, is a housewife who has been denied all the pleasures of adolescence by her selfish father. Newt says that his father was a man who had no interest in human life at all, because he simply "wasn't interested in people". (Vonnegut, 1963) According to critic Schatt, what "annoys" Vonnegut most about scientists is their justification that their research is done in the name of discovering the truth. Perhaps the best illustration of Vonnegut's attitude towards irresponsible scientists is the response given to Hoenikker by a young colleague who watches the successful test of the first atomic bomb and declares: "Science has already recognized sin". Hoenikker responds by asking very seriously: "What is sin?" (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 20) These scientists are

presented in *"Cat's Cradle"* as irresponsible "brats" for the consequences of their discoveries. Even in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Dr. Hoenikker states: "I stand before you today because I have never stopped wondering, like an eight-year-old on his way to school on a spring morning. Everything makes me stop, look, and wonder, and sometimes even learn. I am a very happy man." (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 25) Hoenikker sees science as his own game, "like chocolate chip cookies" (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 50) that are baked in the kitchen, because that is how he also produced the substance that would bring about the end of the world, ice-9. According to Vonnegut, this substance was created because many high-ranking military officials in America viewed the scientist as a magician who would make a country powerful with the snap of his fingers. Even Pope Monzano, before dying from a piece of ice-9, ironically said that "science is magic that works." (Vonnegut, 1963, p.178)

Vonnegut gives us a picture of these scientists, who have not only lost their souls, but have also caused humanity to suffer from their dehumanization. What angers the writer most is that it is these same scientists who naively believe in the progress of society.

Vonnegut's critique of industrialized society comes because not only the economy, but all social institutions and every aspect of life has now been "invaded" by a technological mindset. Modern technology and industry have already begun to create a model and an image of the institutions within which they operate.

Vonnegut seems to be highlighting another major problem with scientific development, and that is the use of this new knowledge to fuel war. In the twentieth century, man has seen what the First and Second World Wars have caused, the experiments carried out on humans by the Nazis, the Cold War, the creation and use of substances harmful to humanity and nature. Critic Klinkowitz states that Vonnegut's call for scientists to be more responsible has been part of his "personal ethics" since before the war, since before the Great Depression, since he took civics classes in school, which stated that "a democracy like America's needed an army enough to defend itself." (Klinkowitz, 1998, p. 22)

Vonnegut ironically addresses this idea in his novel *"Cat's Cradle,"* when he says that "whatever scientists were inventing, it would eventually turn out to be a weapon, one way or another." (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 32) Instead of seeing science used for selfish or insane purposes, the writer wants man to find goals that bring peace through these scientific developments. It must be said that, although Vonnegut admires the curiosity and skill of scientists, he condemns "their inability to see through their microscopes all the consequences of scientific discoveries." (Marvin, 2002, p. 21) On the other hand, researcher Marvin does not see Vonnegut's stance as completely anti-technology. He

notes that the writer acknowledges the fact that human beings are curious about the world around them and he appreciates all the enthusiasm for new inventions or discoveries. Referring to the writer's recent interviews and speeches, the researcher states that "he acknowledges that today's scientists are deeply concerned about the social and cultural implications of their discoveries and he hails this as a step forward for humanity." (Vonnegut, 1963, p.21) However, Vonnegut's criticism of scientists is strong. He sees them as people with poor health, humorless, and who overlook things that are very important to humanity. This makes Vonnegut see them as "heartless, conscienceless, callous, indifferent to the fate of the rest of the human race or perhaps not part of the human race at all." (Vonnegut, 1963, p.41) He gives the most complete portrait of irresponsible scientists through the figure of Felix Hoenikker:

"I believe it should be considered a great betrayal to call a dead, ungrateful, ignorant, backward, anti-intellectual and very famous man like Felix Henniker a son of a bitch. I know very well that he should have been harmless, simple and dreamy, that he wouldn't kill a fly, that he wouldn't care about money, power, nice clothes, cars and other things, that he wouldn't be like the rest of us, that he would be better than the rest of us, that he would be innocent, almost like Jesus, except for the part that he wouldn't be the son of God... How the hell can a man who helped invent something like the atomic bomb be innocent?" (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 63). The day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Dr. Hoenikker was sitting at home playing with a piece of yarn, making a cat's cradle. He suddenly threw it in the face of his young son, Newt, saying: "Do you see it? Do you see it? Do you see the cat's cradle? Do you see where the little cat sleeps? Meow. Meow." (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 21)

Thousands of people were dying from the release of the atomic bomb, a devastating instrument of war, which Hoenikker had created himself, while he was busy creating games with a yarn. Many years later, his son remembers the scene and to him science is as "lying: as the cat with the yarn. According to him, "it's no wonder children grow up and go crazy. A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of flies in a man's hands and little children look at it, look at it, look at it... And? No damn cat and no damn cradle." (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 140) For Newton, science is as deceptive as the game with the yarn. In fact, in the novel, the game becomes a symbol of the "meaninglessness of science". Hoenikker is not only the inventor of the atomic bomb, but he has also invented another substance, ice-9, which endangers the future of the entire globe. However, he still does not accept the importance of the consequences of his inventions and the responsibility he must take on. Such "innocence" is deadly. Felix plays with science, as he plays with a thread, like a child. His

youngest son even describes it in an even crueler way, when he talks about the day his father leaves to receive the Nobel Prize in Sweden.

4. Moral paradox and Black humor in "Cat's Cradle"

Some critics of black humor have argued that satire is no longer an opportunity to talk about the horrors of the twentieth century. Even postmodern views exclude objective truths, especially regarding morality. However, many postmodern writers, including Vonnegut, try to convey moral messages to the reader through their work. Some critics "misinterpret" the postmodern novel, seeing the narrator and the writer as sharing the same perspectives. Both are often criticized for lacking a moral foundation from which to build the narrative. Black humor is also often characterized by a certain rebellion against literary norms. In "Circus of the Moving Mind", Lance Olsen shows how postmodern humor is revolutionary in its movement. He argues that "the thrust of postmodern humor is to disarm pomp and power. The postmodern creator becomes an aesthetic and metaphysical terrorist, a player in an intertextual universe, where no text has any more or less authority than another." This lack of authority thus calls into question the author's own position. According to Olsen, the reader often senses the complexity and subtlety of tone, but because the postmodern creator "manipulates a system of personal and non-public norms, his or her ultimate position remains uncertain. Because of this, his or her text exists to be interpreted in completely different, even contradictory, ways." (Olsen, 1990, p. 18) While Olsen's approach destroys the role of the writer as a final authority, Harry Levin proposes a different perspective on how we might interpret postmodern humor in relation to the postmodern text. He argues that there is a base from which the author creates humor, especially satire. "Every satirist, however negative, must launch missiles from a platform that releases relief." (Levin, 1987, p. 196) Levin attempts to illustrate how a satirist creates both private and public norms and expressing them openly.

The discussion of moral norms in the works of satirists has been seen as problematic, since some critics argue that satire relies on moral norms precisely because of its usefulness in narrative. The greatest difficulty lies precisely in defining moral norms. According to critic Leonard Feinberg, "many satirists consider their work to be moral precisely when it contradicts the satire of other writers, who also moralize it." (Feinberg, 1967, p. 9) However, leaving aside the contradictions and problems, Feinberg accepts that satire relies on norms. He thinks that when someone criticizes and says something is done wrong, "the writer has implied that there is another way to do it right." (Feinberg, 1967, p.11) Critic Levin argues along the same lines,

stating that a satirist can convince the reader when something is wrong by choosing a certain idea and then satirizing that same thing, thus creating moral value. "Again the satirist has to convince the audience that, when something has gone wrong or gone wrong, there has been a departure from a certain character. It is easier for him when the norms of that character have been accepted by convention. Otherwise, it becomes part of his job to instill those norms—in other words, to preach to the unconverted. He must be provocative before he is bitter, as Bernard Shaw does in the prefaces of his dramatic pieces." (Levin, 1987, p. 197)

In Vonnegut's prose, as in that of his black humorist contemporaries, the reader is not given a certain moral certainty, which is characteristic of postmodern satirists. The black humorist does not claim a superior position as traditional moralists do. He does not even try to emphasize other times or customs as bearers of moral values or any other values' system. But, on the other hand, we notice that Vonnegut mocks the horrors of our days and thus this contradicts the criticism against him.

This is Vonnegut's moral paradox, and it is precisely the narrative form that gives him the most opportunity to present it to the reader. Vonnegut's novels are always in motion, with unexpected changes in plot, with unstable characters and phrases that give life to his prose. This prose has the same norms as the characters or the plot. According to scholar Robert Scholes, "it [Vonnegut's fable] is deceptively simple, suggestive to the point of being commonplace, yet capable of unexpected twists and turns. He uses the rhetorical potential of the short sentence and the short paragraph better than any other writer of the time, often to comic or dramatic effect..." (Scholes, 1966, p.210)

The novel that best reflects the connection between moral paradox and narrative form is *"Cat's Cradle"*. The narrative is set in the future, which in many ways it resembles the present, except the world is on the verge of destruction. In the 127 chapters or impressionistic scenes of the novel, Vonnegut displays the paradoxical image of twentieth-century belief systems, creating an imaginary world and an imaginary faith, which mocks some specific aspects of faith, without diminishing the values of the goods that come from the morality that this faith embraces. Vonnegut implores readers in *"Plam Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage"* to "use what has poisoned us, knowledge" and to embrace "the moral code so desired". He has so much faith in his humanism that in one of his writings on faith he concludes with the words: "You just heard an atheist thank God, not once, but twice" (Vonnegut, 1999)

"Cat's Cradle" is an attempt by the narrator to write a book about "the day the world ended". Jonah or John begins as a Christian, but during his journey he

ends up as a Bokononist, after being introduced to this new philosophy. "*Cat's Cradle*" ultimately appears to us as Bokonon's apocalyptic image of how the whole world would end. The word "Bokonon" is the pronunciation of the name Johnson in the English dialect of the island of San Lorenzo, a small island under a dictatorship in the Caribbean. Johnson is the surname of a black bishop from Tobago, who, together with Earl McCabe, tries to convert the island of San Lorenzo to a utopian faith. For a time, Johnson had the conviction that "someone was trying to take him somewhere for a specific reason." (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 76) So when he and McCabe landed on the island, trying to reach Miami, they decided to stay there. The success of their experiment was built on the principle of the dynamic tension between religion and government. Bokonon understood well that by confronting good with evil and keeping "the tension between them as high as possible" (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 74) was what they needed to build their "utopia."

As noted above, Jonah is searching for information to learn more about the man who created the atomic bomb and learns that he also created ice-9, a deadly substance. The end of the world comes precisely from this substance. The absurdity of a world that destroys itself by trying to make war easier and of a religion that believes in a kind of organized disappointment is presented to us through the *reng-reng*. Robert Scholes summarizes this confrontation that Vonnegut makes between science and religion in this way: "While scientists find the truth that kills, the prophet seeks a saving lie. (Scholes, 1966, p.8) The day the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Dr. Felix Hoenikker was making a cat's cradle out of twine.

On the other hand, a prisoner, trying to write a novel, asks the scientist for advice on how he could end the world in his story. However, Bokononi insists that everything in his religion is "foma," which means "harmless untruths." Despite the "mad" scientists and "inciters of lies," (May, 1972, p. 32) Jonah's novel and research seem like a "joke". In the fourteenth book of Bokonon, the title is "What can a thinking man hope for humanity on Earth, considering the experience of these one million years?". The answer is "Nothing" (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 164) and this is the beginning and an observation of Bokonon on reality, where everything is a lie.

This novel also raises other moral issues, such as the struggle between good and evil. Vonnegut builds most of the humorous scenes on one of the most negative characters he presents in the story, and he is himself scientist Dr. Hoenikker. The scientist is put at the center of the satire in the story to make the distinction between virtue and "sin", which the scientist has not yet accepted, even after the death of thousands of people from what he himself has created. The scientist, in the name of science and its progress, has ignored any moral issues. In modern times, when science has become part of our lives

and especially at the time when Vonnegut wrote the novel, science had taken the place of a belief. Scientists were seen as people with vision and conscience, who tried their best to discover the truths, for the good of humanity. In "*Cat's Cradle*" the reader is offered an intelligent character, who is very detached from the true purpose of science and is so focused on pursuing his curiosity that he can forget all the consequences that stem from his actions. One of the most meaningful and grotesque scenes at the same time is the one described by Hoenikker's son. "For example, do you know what Dad did the day the Alamogordo bomb was tested? After it exploded, after they were convinced that America could wipe out a city with just one bomb, a scientist turned to Dad and said, 'Science has now recognized sin.' Do you know what Dad said? 'What is sin?'" (Vonnegut, 1963, p. 14)

5. Conclusion

Cat's Cradle offers a powerful critique of scientific indifference and the idea of value-neutral knowledge. Through the symbol of Ice-Nine and the character of Dr. Hoenikker, Kurt Vonnegut shows the dangers of separating science from ethics.

The novel suggests that scientific progress is not inherently good or bad, but depends on how it is guided and controlled. Without ethical responsibility, innovation can lead to harmful consequences.

These ideas remain highly relevant in today's world. As technology continues to develop, it is essential to consider its impact on society. By promoting ethical awareness in education and research, it is possible to create a more responsible approach to scientific advancement.

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Digital tools and reading instructions: why pedagogy matters in EFL classrooms

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Abstract: Nowadays, a lot of people think that technology naturally improves reading comprehension because more and more EFL classrooms are employing digital tools. However, both empirical research and classroom observations demonstrate that mere access to digital texts does not guarantee improved reading outcomes. This research examines the reasons digital reading environments frequently do not perform optimally in EFL contexts, particularly in secondary schools. The paper addresses significant deficiencies in teaching that hinder the effectiveness of digital reading training, based on research in reading comprehension, digital literacy, and foreign language education. These include reading texts without really thinking about them, being too busy to think clearly, and not being taught how to think critically about online information. It emphasizes that teachers need to help students learn how to read digitally and that students cannot only rely on their supposed digital skills.

The research suggests that in the digital age, good reading teaching depends on teachers working together, making assignments with a purpose, and modeling ways clearly. By moving the focus from technology use to pedagogy, EFL teachers can help students understand, think critically, and read strategically better. The paper concludes by pointing out how important it is to make sure that digital tools are in line with strong reading teaching approaches in order to have good learning results.

Keywords: *digital reading, EFL classrooms, reading comprehension, digital literacy, pedagogy*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly transformed reading practices in education, reshaping how learners access, process, and engage with information. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms,

students increasingly interact with online articles, multimedia texts, hyperlinked resources, and interactive platforms rather than relying solely on printed materials. This shift reflects broader global trends toward digitalization in education and has generated considerable optimism among educators and policymakers, who often assume that digital tools automatically enhance student motivation, engagement, and learning outcomes (OECD, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2023).

However, international evidence suggests that access to technology alone does not automatically lead to improved academic performance. Considerable studies, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (OECD, 2019), indicate that increased use of digital devices is not consistently associated with higher reading achievement. Similarly, meta-analytical research has shown that reading comprehension outcomes in digital environments may, in some cases, be lower than those achieved through print reading, particularly when tasks require deep understanding and sustained attention (Delgado et al., 2018). These findings challenge the assumption that digital tools are inherently beneficial for reading development.

Reading comprehension itself is a complex cognitive, linguistic, and metacognitive process involving the interaction between the reader, the text, and the purpose for reading (Snow, 2002; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Effective comprehension requires not only decoding skills but also higher-order processes such as inferencing, monitoring understanding, integrating information, and evaluating meaning (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). In digital environments, these processes become more demanding due to additional factors such as navigation decisions, multimodal integration, and exposure to fragmented information (Coiro, 2011; Mayer, 2009). As a result, digital reading requires learners to manage both traditional comprehension processes and new forms of cognitive engagement simultaneously.

These challenges are particularly pronounced in EFL contexts. Learners must process texts in a non-native language while also navigating complex digital environments. This dual demand increases cognitive load and may hinder comprehension if not supported by appropriate instructional strategies (Sweller, 2011; Mayer, 2009). Furthermore, research on digital literacy emphasizes that online reading involves additional competencies, such as locating information, evaluating credibility, synthesizing multiple sources, and constructing meaning across texts (Leu et al., 2013; Coiro & Dobler, 2007). These skills are not automatically acquired through exposure to technology and require explicit instruction and guided practice (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009).

Despite these realities, classroom practices often emphasize the use of digital tools rather than the pedagogical frameworks necessary to support effective

reading. In many cases, technology is integrated at a superficial level, focusing on access and engagement rather than on strategy development and comprehension processes (Hockly, 2012; Dudeney, Hockly, & Pegrum, 2013). Evidence from the Albanian educational context indicates that although digital tools are increasingly present in schools, their use in reading instruction remains largely tool-oriented and lacks systematic pedagogical integration (Kiri & Osmani, 2024). This gap between technological availability and pedagogical effectiveness raises important questions about how digital reading should be approached in EFL classrooms.

Considering this fact, this paper adopts a conceptual and analytical perspective to examine the relationship between digital tools and reading comprehension in EFL contexts. Specifically, it seeks to explore why digital technologies alone do not automatically improve reading outcomes and to identify the key pedagogical factors that influence effective digital reading instruction. By synthesizing research from reading theory, cognitive psychology, and digital literacy, the paper aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of digital reading as a complex, strategy-driven process (Mayer, 2009; Leu et al., 2013). The contribution of this paper lies in shifting the focus from technology as a solution to pedagogy as the central determinant of learning outcomes. Rather than viewing digital tools as automatically beneficial, the analysis emphasizes the importance of structured instructional approaches, explicit strategy teaching, and teacher mediation (Snow, 2002; OECD, 2019). In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions in EFL pedagogy and digital education, particularly in emerging contexts where digitalization is expanding but pedagogical models remain underdeveloped.

2. Theoretical Framework: Digital reading in EFL

Digital reading differs fundamentally from traditional print reading in both structure and cognitive demands. Unlike linear printed texts, digital texts are typically nonlinear, multimodal, and constructed within complex networks of hyperlinks and interconnected information. Readers are required to make continuous decisions about where to navigate, which links to follow, and which information is relevant to their reading purpose (Coiro, 2011; Leu et al., 2015). This nonlinearity transforms reading from a primarily sequential process into a dynamic and interactive activity, where meaning is constructed across multiple sources rather than within a single, stable text.

From a cognitive perspective, digital reading significantly increases demands on working memory. According to cognitive load theory, working memory has limited capacity, and when learners are required to process excessive or competing information simultaneously, comprehension can be negatively

affected (Sweller, 2011). In digital environments, readers must not only decode and interpret linguistic input but also manage navigation, multimedia elements, and decision-making processes. Mayer’s (2009) cognitive theory of multimedia learning further explains that while multiple channels of information can enhance learning, poorly designed multimedia can overload cognitive processing and hinder understanding.

For EFL learners, these cognitive demands are even more pronounced. In addition to managing digital navigation, learners must process unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural references in a second language. This dual processing requirement, language comprehension, and digital navigation place significant strain on cognitive resources and increase the likelihood of fragmented understanding. As a result, digital reading may become more cognitively demanding than traditional print reading, rather than more efficient.

Multimodality is another defining feature of digital reading environments. Digital texts often combine written language with images, videos, animations, and interactive elements. According to Kress (2010), multimodal texts require readers to interpret meaning across different semiotic systems, not just written language. When effectively integrated, these elements can support comprehension by reinforcing key ideas and engaging multiple cognitive channels (Mayer, 2009). However, in the absence of pedagogical guidance, learners may rely disproportionately on visual cues, neglecting detailed textual analysis. This can lead to superficial understanding, where students grasp general meaning but fail to process linguistic details essential for language development.

Furthermore, digital reading requires the development of new literacy practices that extend beyond traditional reading skills. Online readers must locate relevant information, evaluate the credibility of sources, compare multiple perspectives, and synthesize information across texts (Leu et al., 2013). These competencies are often referred to as “new literacies” and are essential for navigating the digital information landscape. Importantly, these skills are not acquired automatically through exposure to technology. Research consistently shows that students require explicit instruction and guided practice to develop effective digital reading strategies. (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009; Coiro & Dobler, 2007).

In EFL contexts, the need for explicit instruction is particularly critical. Learners may lack both linguistic proficiency and digital literacy skills, making it difficult to engage critically with online texts. Without structured support, students may focus on surface-level features of digital texts while struggling to construct deeper meaning. Therefore, understanding digital

reading as a complex, cognitively demanding, and strategy-driven process is essential for designing effective pedagogical approaches.

3. Pedagogical gaps in Digital Reading instruction

3.1 Surface-level engagement

Digital environments tend to promote rapid interaction with texts, encouraging behaviors such as scanning, skimming, and browsing rather than sustained, reflective reading. The structure of online texts, characterized by hyperlinks, headings, and multimedia elements, invites readers to move quickly between sections rather than engage deeply with content (Liu, 2005; Carr, 2010). As a result, students often process information at a superficial level, focusing on isolated words or phrases instead of constructing coherent meaning.

Research indicates that students frequently overestimate their understanding when reading digitally, equating familiarity with the format to comprehension (OECD, 2019). This phenomenon is particularly problematic in EFL contexts, where learners already face linguistic challenges. Instead of engaging in inferencing, integrating ideas, and monitoring comprehension, learners may rely on partial understanding, leading to fragmented knowledge construction. As Snow (2002) emphasizes, effective comprehension requires active processes that generate meaning, which are often weakened in digital reading environments that prioritize speed over depth.

3.2 Increased cognitive demands

Digital reading environments impose additional cognitive demands beyond those required for print reading. Readers must simultaneously process linguistic input, navigate hyperlinks, interpret multimedia elements, and make decisions about relevance and credibility. According to cognitive load theory, working memory has limited capacity, and when it is overloaded, learning is negatively affected (Sweller, 2011). Research on hypertext reading further confirms that nonlinear structures increase cognitive load and can hinder comprehension (DeStefano & LeFevre, 2007).

For EFL learners, this challenge is intensified. They must decode vocabulary, interpret grammatical structures, and construct meaning in a non-native language while also managing digital navigation and multimodal input. This dual processing requirement increases the risk of cognitive overload, which can result in reduced comprehension and inefficient learning (Mayer, 2009; Coiro, 2011).

Moreover, frequent shifts between different sources of information, such as switching from text to video or from one hyperlink to another, can disrupt cognitive continuity. Instead of building a coherent mental representation of

the text, learners may experience fragmented understanding. Without structured guidance, digital environments may therefore hinder rather than support deep comprehension.

3.3 Limited strategy instruction

Online reading requires a set of strategies that differ significantly from those used in traditional print reading. These include locating relevant information, evaluating sources, synthesizing content across multiple texts, and navigating complex digital structures (Leu et al., 2013; Coiro & Dobler, 2007). However, classroom instruction often assumes that students naturally acquire these skills through exposure to technology.

Research suggests that this assumption is unfounded. Digital familiarity, such as the ability to use devices or navigate websites, does not equate to strategic reading competence (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009). Without explicit instruction, students may struggle to identify relevant information, misinterpret sources, or fail to integrate ideas across texts.

In many EFL classrooms, reading instruction remains focused on traditional comprehension questions, without addressing the specific demands of digital reading. As a result, students lack the metacognitive awareness and strategic tools necessary to navigate digital environments effectively. This gap highlights the need for explicit modeling, guided practice, and scaffolding of digital reading strategies.

3.4 Overreliance on digital tools

Digital tools such as translation applications, automatic summaries, and instant dictionaries can support comprehension when used appropriately. However, excessive reliance on these tools may reduce active engagement with the text and limit language development.

When students depend heavily on translation tools, they bypass essential cognitive processes such as inferencing, contextual guessing, and semantic mapping. These processes are crucial for vocabulary acquisition and long-term language development (Nation, 2013). Research on computer-assisted language learning also suggests that excessive dependence on digital support tools may reduce deeper processing of language and limit retention (Chun, 2011). Instead of constructing meaning independently, learners may rely on immediate solutions, leading to shallow processing and limited retention.

In EFL contexts, this overreliance can hinder the development of linguistic competence. While digital tools can facilitate short-term comprehension, they may discourage learners from engaging deeply with language structures and meaning. As a result, students may become passive recipients of information rather than active readers.

3.5 Weak critical evaluation skills

Digital environments expose learners to vast amounts of information, much of which varies in quality, reliability, and credibility. Unlike traditional print sources, digital texts often lack clear editorial control, requiring readers to actively evaluate the accuracy and trustworthiness of information.

Research shows that students frequently struggle with these tasks. Wineburg and McGrew (2017) found that even digitally experienced learners rely on superficial cues, such as website design or visual appearance, rather than critically evaluating sources. Similarly, algorithm-driven content systems can create “filter bubbles,” limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforcing existing beliefs (Pariser, 2011). Large-scale studies also confirm that students demonstrate weak critical reading skills in digital environments, particularly when evaluating online information (OECD, 2019).

In EFL contexts, these challenges are compounded by language barriers, which may prevent learners from fully understanding or evaluating complex texts. Without explicit instruction in critical digital literacy, students may accept unreliable information or fail to recognize bias.

Developing critical evaluation skills is therefore essential not only for academic success but also for informed participation in digital society. Digital reading instruction must include strategies such as source verification, cross-checking information, and evaluating author credibility.

4. Methodological approach

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual-analytical approach, drawing on existing literature in reading comprehension, digital literacy, and EFL pedagogy. Rather than collecting primary empirical data, the paper synthesizes theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to identify recurring patterns and pedagogical gaps in digital reading instruction. Conceptual research of this type is particularly valuable in educational studies, as it allows for the critical examination and integration of existing knowledge to generate new insights and frameworks (Creswell, 2014; Snyder, 2019).

The analysis is guided by key theoretical frameworks that explain how learning occurs in digital environments. These include cognitive load theory (Sweller, 2011), which emphasizes the limitations of working memory and the impact of excessive cognitive demands on learning; the cognitive theory of multimedia learning (Mayer, 2009), which explains how learners process verbal and visual information through dual channels; and new literacies theory (Leu et al., 2013), which highlights the evolving nature of reading in digital contexts, including skills such as information navigation, evaluation, and

synthesis. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive lens for examining how digital environments influence reading processes and comprehension outcomes. In addition to these theoretical perspectives, the study draws on empirical research in digital reading and EFL contexts to support the analysis of pedagogical practices.

Previous studies have demonstrated that digital reading requires distinct strategies and instructional support, particularly in second language contexts where learners face both linguistic and cognitive challenges (Coiro, 2011; Afflerbach & Cho, 2009). By integrating findings from multiple strands of research, the paper identifies key areas where current instructional practices fail to address the specific demands of digital reading.

This analytical approach allows for a critical evaluation of current classroom practices, particularly the tendency to prioritize technology use over pedagogical design. It also enables the identification of underlying assumptions that shape digital reading instruction, such as the belief that technological familiarity equates to reading competence. Through this synthesis, the study contributes to the development of pedagogically grounded recommendations that emphasize strategy instruction, teacher mediation, and the integration of digital literacy with language learning (OECD, 2019).

Overall, the methodology supports a deeper understanding of digital reading as a complex, multidimensional process and provides a theoretical foundation for improving instructional practices in EFL classrooms.

5. Implications for EFL teaching and teacher training

Effective digital reading instruction requires a shift from the simple use of technological tools toward the development of pedagogically grounded instructional practices. One of the key elements of such instruction is purposeful task design. Teachers need to design reading activities that go beyond surface-level interaction with digital texts and instead promote interpretation, analysis, and critical thinking. Tasks should encourage learners to engage actively with content by making inferences, comparing perspectives, and synthesizing information across multiple sources (Snow, 2002; OECD, 2019). Without clearly defined learning objectives and structured tasks, digital reading risks becoming a passive activity focused on navigation rather than comprehension.

Another essential component is the explicit teaching of reading strategies adapted to digital environments. Unlike traditional reading, digital reading requires learners to develop additional skills such as navigating hyperlinks, evaluating the credibility of online sources, and integrating information from multiple texts (Leu et al., 2013; Coiro & Dobler, 2007). These strategies are

not acquired automatically and must be systematically taught through modeling, guided practice, and feedback. Teachers should demonstrate how to approach digital texts strategically, helping students develop metacognitive awareness and control over their reading processes (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009). Teacher mediation also plays a central role in supporting effective digital reading. In digital environments, students are often exposed to large amounts of information that can be overwhelming or misleading.

Teachers must act as facilitators who guide students through complex texts, scaffold their understanding, and support them in managing cognitive load (Mayer, 2009; Sweller, 2011). This includes selecting appropriate materials, structuring reading tasks, and providing ongoing support to ensure that learners remain focused on meaning-making rather than becoming distracted by irrelevant features of digital content.

At the same time, digital reading instruction must maintain a strong focus on language development, particularly in EFL contexts. Vocabulary acquisition, syntactic processing, and inferencing remain central to comprehension and should not be overshadowed by the use of digital tools. Research emphasizes that active engagement with language, through processes such as contextual guessing and semantic mapping, is essential for long-term language learning (Nation, 2013). Therefore, digital tools should be used to support, rather than replace, these processes. Finally, the integration of critical digital literacy is essential in modern reading instruction. Students must be equipped with the skills to evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and bias of online information.

This includes practices such as cross-checking sources, identifying authorship, and assessing the reliability of content (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017; OECD, 2019). In an era of abundant and often unreliable information, these skills are crucial not only for academic success but also for informed participation in society. Given these demands, teacher education and professional development programs must place greater emphasis on digital pedagogy. Teachers need practical training that goes beyond technical skills and focuses on how to integrate digital tools into effective reading instruction.

This includes developing instructional models, sharing best practices, and fostering a deeper understanding of how digital environments influence reading processes (Hockly, 2012; Dudeney et al., 2013). Without such support, the potential of digital tools to enhance learning will remain underutilized.

6. Discussion

The findings of this conceptual analysis suggest that the effectiveness of digital tools in EFL reading instruction depends primarily on pedagogical

design rather than technological availability. While digital environments provide access to a wide range of multimodal and interactive materials, their impact on learning outcomes is not automatically positive. Research consistently shows that technology integration without pedagogical alignment may fail to improve, and in some cases may even hinder, reading comprehension (OECD, 2019; Delgado et al., 2018). These findings reinforce the argument that digital tools function as mediating instruments, whose effectiveness depends on how they are embedded within instructional practices (Mayer, 2009).

In contexts such as Albania, where digitalization in education is expanding but structured pedagogical integration remains limited, these challenges are particularly evident. Existing studies indicate that digital tools are often used in a fragmented and tool-oriented manner, without clear instructional objectives or strategy-based frameworks (Kiri & Osmani, 2024). As a result, classroom practices tend to emphasize engagement and access rather than deep comprehension and critical thinking. This pattern reflects a broader issue identified in international research, where technology adoption outpaces the development of effective pedagogical models (Hockly, 2012; Dudeney et al., 2013).

The analysis further highlights the need to reconceptualize digital reading as a complex literacy practice that extends beyond traditional comprehension skills. Digital reading requires the integration of cognitive, linguistic, and strategic competencies, including navigation, evaluation, and synthesis of information across multiple sources (Leu et al., 2013; Coiro, 2011). Without explicit instruction and guided practice, learners may default to surface-level processing strategies, resulting in shallow comprehension and fragmented understanding. From a cognitive perspective, unstructured digital environments may also increase cognitive load, limiting learners' ability to process information effectively (Sweller, 2011; Mayer, 2009).

Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of teacher mediation in digital reading environments. Teachers play a crucial role in scaffolding students' interaction with digital texts, modeling effective strategies, and guiding learners toward deeper engagement with content (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009). In the absence of such support, students may rely on inefficient strategies or become overly dependent on digital tools, which can undermine both comprehension and language development (Nation, 2013).

These findings align with broader international research, which consistently demonstrates that technology alone does not improve learning outcomes unless it is integrated within pedagogically sound instructional frameworks (OECD, 2019). Effective digital reading instruction, therefore, requires a shift from technology-centered approaches to pedagogy-driven models that

prioritize strategy instruction, cognitive support, and critical literacy development.

7. Conclusion

Digital technologies are transforming reading practices in profound ways, reshaping how learners access, process, and engage with information. However, the findings of this paper demonstrate that the presence of technology alone does not guarantee improved reading comprehension. On the contrary, without appropriate pedagogical support, digital environments may increase cognitive demands, fragment attention, and encourage superficial engagement with texts (Delgado et al., 2018; OECD, 2019).

This paper has argued that effective digital reading instruction requires a fundamental shift from technology centered approaches to pedagogy driven models. Rather than focusing on the tools themselves, educators must prioritize instructional design, strategy development, and teacher mediation. By integrating reading strategies, language development, and digital literacy, teachers can support learners in developing deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and independent reading skills (Leu et al., 2013; Mayer, 2009).

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of viewing digital reading as a complex and multidimensional process that requires explicit instruction and sustained support. In EFL contexts, where learners face additional linguistic challenges, the need for structured and strategic instruction is even more critical.

Future research should move beyond theoretical discussions and focus on empirical classroom-based studies that examine the impact of pedagogically grounded digital reading interventions. Such research would provide valuable insights into how specific instructional strategies influence comprehension, engagement, and language development in digital environments. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, future studies can contribute to the development of more effective and context-sensitive approaches to digital reading instruction.

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Integrating artificial intelligence in grammar instructions: a study on pedagogical impact and learner autonomy

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Abstract: This study examines the role and impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in the teaching and learning of grammar in foreign language education, with particular emphasis on the transformation of teacher and student roles within AI-supported learning environments. Adopting a mixed-method research design, the study combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of 120 participants (20 teachers and 100 students) regarding the use of AI tools in grammar instruction. Data were collected through structured questionnaires incorporating Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, while analysis involved descriptive statistics for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative responses.

The findings reveal generally positive attitudes among both students and teachers toward the use of AI, particularly due to its capacity to provide immediate feedback, support personalized learning, and enhance student autonomy. However, the study also identifies potential challenges, including the risk of overreliance on AI tools and the possible reduction of critical thinking and metalinguistic awareness. Furthermore, the role of the teacher is found to shift from a knowledge transmitter to a facilitator and interpreter of AI-generated feedback, remaining essential in fostering deeper grammatical understanding and linking accuracy to meaningful communication.

The study concludes that the effective integration of artificial intelligence in grammar teaching requires a balanced approach that combines technological innovation with sound pedagogical practices. Rather than replacing teachers, AI should function as a pedagogical partner that supports the creation of personalized, reflective, and communicative learning environments.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence; grammar teaching; foreign language learning; student autonomy; teacher roles; personalized learning.*

1. Introduction

Technological developments have played a crucial role in shaping educational systems throughout history. From the introduction of printed books to the emergence of digital learning platforms, technological advances have continuously transformed how knowledge is produced, distributed, and acquired. In the twenty-first century, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most influential technological forces affecting education worldwide.

Artificial intelligence refers to computer systems that perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, including reasoning, pattern recognition, language processing, and decision-making. The concept of AI dates back to the mid-twentieth century, when researchers began exploring the possibility of creating machines capable of simulating human cognitive processes (Russell & Norvig, 2021). In recent decades, advances in machine learning, natural language processing, and computational power have significantly expanded the capabilities of AI systems.

In education, AI technologies are providing intelligent learning methods that adapt to students' needs and offer personalized educational experiences. According to Holmes, Bialik, and Fadel (2019), AI systems can analyze data related to student performance and provide appropriate feedback that helps students improve their understanding of complex concepts. These technologies have been applied in various areas of education, including automated assessment systems, intelligent tutoring platforms, learning analytics tools, and virtual learning environments.

Language education is also part of AI-driven technological developments. The teaching and learning of foreign languages have always brought methods that facilitate the development of communication, and artificial intelligence has expanded these possibilities by enabling the creation of sophisticated language-learning applications capable of analyzing linguistic structures and providing immediate feedback. However, is teaching grammar, as a fundamental component of language competence, supported by methods

offered by AI? In our previous studies, we discussed traditional methods of teaching grammar at length and concluded that explaining rules, memorization, and repeated exercises should be combined with more contemporary methods that help students develop communicative skills. Therefore, this study aims to examine the pedagogical opportunities and challenges associated with AI-supported grammar teaching.

2. Literature review

Grammar teaching has long been one of the most debated areas in language pedagogy. Some scholars support the explicit teaching of grammatical rules and the use of structured exercises, where the teacher plays a central role in the instructional process. In contrast, other scholars advocate for communicative approaches that prioritize meaning-making and the authentic use of language in real-life contexts.

The development of technology has transformed this approach by creating more interactive, flexible, and personalized environments for grammar learning. Researchers emphasize that artificial intelligence (AI) systems in education are capable of analyzing large amounts of data generated through student interactions, identifying patterns of errors, and providing immediate and personalized feedback (Chen, Chen, & Lin, 2020; Luan et al., 2020). This is particularly important in grammar learning, as it requires continuous practice and frequent correction of errors.

Empirical studies have further supported the benefits of learning through AI. For instance, Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) suggest that AI technologies can support student-centered learning models by providing adaptive feedback and personalized learning pathways. Similarly, Tang (2024) highlights that AI technologies contribute to the development of “intelligent learning environments,” where digital resources, multimedia tools, and adaptive algorithms interact to deliver dynamic and interactive learning experiences that respond to students’ performance. Such an approach enables a shift from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward more flexible and responsive educational models. Likewise, studies on automated writing evaluation systems have shown that AI-based feedback can improve students’ grammatical accuracy in writing tasks. Mayol et al. (2026) report that teachers perceive AI grammar tools as useful for identifying surface-level grammatical errors and supporting students during the revision process. These tools can provide immediate feedback, allowing students to correct errors more quickly compared to traditional teacher feedback, which typically requires more time. Intelligent tutoring systems can detect errors in the use of verb tenses, syntactic structures, and morphological relationships, and provide corrective

suggestions in real time (Chen et al., 2020). This makes the grammar learning process more dynamic and tailored to individual student needs. Instead of all students progressing at the same pace and working on the same level of exercises, AI systems can adapt activities based on each learner's progress and difficulties, thereby enabling differentiated learning (Luan et al., 2020). As a result, these systems can also improve language learning outcomes (Kovalenko & Baranivska, 2024).

However, despite these optimistic perspectives, the integration of artificial intelligence in educational contexts has also generated significant debate. Critics argue that the increasing reliance on automated technologies may unintentionally weaken essential aspects of the learning process. One of the main concerns highlighted in the literature is that students may become overly dependent on AI tools, thereby reducing their ability to solve problems independently and to think critically. For example, Seo et al. (2021) report that students who frequently use automated writing tools may become less inclined to analyze their own language production, often accepting AI-generated corrections without fully understanding the grammatical rules behind them. Such findings raise important questions about the long-term cognitive implications of AI-supported learning environments. Research by Li, Link, and Hegelheimer (2015) found that automated writing evaluation systems improved students' grammatical accuracy but had limited impact on overall writing quality or rhetorical development. Similarly, Ranalli, Link, and Chukharev-Hudilainen (2017) observed that learners using automated grammar tools tended to focus on correcting specific errors rather than developing deeper metalinguistic awareness.

Bozkurt et al. (2021) emphasize that enthusiasm for technology should be accompanied by critical reflection on its pedagogical implications. If the use of AI is limited to automated exercises and mechanical error correction, there is a risk that grammar learning will be reduced to a purely technical process, losing its communicative and reflective dimensions.

Based on these contrasting perspectives, it can be argued that technology should be used in combination with pedagogical strategies that promote the use of grammar in authentic and communicative contexts. Language use involves not only the correct application of grammatical rules but also the ability to interpret contextual meaning, rhetorical intent, and cultural nuances. AI systems, which primarily rely on statistical analysis of language patterns, often struggle to capture these more complex aspects of language.

Nevertheless, artificial intelligence can go beyond simple error correction and contribute to the development of students' reflective and analytical skills. Ouyang and Jiao (2021) propose three paradigms of AI integration in education: AI-directed, AI-supported, and AI-empowered. In grammar

learning, the AI-directed model involves systems that guide students through grammar exercises and provide automated responses. In the AI-supported model, technology serves as a supportive tool for both teachers and students during the learning process. In the AI-empowered model, students use technology to explore language structures and develop metalinguistic awareness.

In this way, the use of artificial intelligence in grammar teaching is not seen as a replacement for the teacher’s role, but rather as a pedagogical partner that supports interaction between teachers and students and contributes to the creation of a more effective and personalized learning environment.

2.1 Student’s role

An important element in this research is the role of the student in AI-supported foreign language grammar learning environments. Studies on student-centered learning environments indicate that intelligent technologies can increase student engagement by creating more active and interactive learning experiences (Zhao et al., 2022). In the context of grammar learning, this means that students are no longer passive recipients of rules, but active participants in the process of discovering and correcting language structures. Through AI platforms, students can analyze their own errors, receive immediate feedback, and experiment with different language forms. This process helps them develop a deeper understanding of how grammar functions and how it is used in different communicative contexts.

2.2 Teacher’s role

In traditional approaches to grammar teaching, the teacher is often seen as the authority who explains rules and evaluates their correct use. In AI-supported environments, this role evolves into a more facilitative and guiding one. Tang (2023) argues that a truly student-centered approach requires teachers to create conditions in which students construct their own understanding through interaction and reflection. In this sense, artificial intelligence does not replace the teacher but supports them in creating a learning environment where students can explore and practice grammar more autonomously.

The role of the teacher becomes even more critical when considering the pedagogical interpretation of AI-generated feedback. Although AI systems can identify grammatical errors with high accuracy, they cannot always understand the pedagogical context or the learner’s cognitive process. Therefore, teachers must intervene to explain the reasons behind errors and to connect automated feedback with underlying grammatical concepts. Salas-Pilco, Xiao, and Hu (2022) emphasize that the effective use of AI in education

requires teachers to develop new competencies in interpreting learning data and integrating technology into pedagogical strategies.

In conclusion, the literature review suggests that artificial intelligence has significant potential to transform the way grammar is taught and learned, making the process more interactive, personalized, and responsive to students' needs. However, this potential can only be realized if technology is integrated in a balanced way with pedagogy and with the role of the teacher. The teacher remains a key factor in interpreting feedback, guiding students toward a deeper understanding of grammatical structures, and designing activities that connect grammar with authentic communication. At the same time, students must take an active role in using technology to explore and reflect on the language they are learning.

3. Methodology

This research investigates the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the teaching and learning of grammar in foreign language education, with particular emphasis on the evolving roles of teachers and students within AI-supported learning environments. To address the research objectives, the study adopts a mixed-method research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

The quantitative component of the study was employed to examine participants' perceptions and attitudes toward the use of AI tools in grammar instruction and learning. Meanwhile, the qualitative component aimed to provide deeper insights into participants' experiences, challenges, and reflections regarding the pedagogical use of AI in grammar learning.

The adoption of a mixed-method design is consistent with previous research in educational technology, which suggests that the impact of AI in education should be examined not only through measurable learning outcomes but also through pedagogical interaction, learner engagement, and the evolving roles of teachers and students (Chen et al., 2020; Ouyang & Jiao, 2021; Salas-Pilco et al., 2022).

This approach therefore allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how AI-supported tools influence grammar learning processes.

3.1 Participants

The study involved a total of 120 participants, consisting of 20 foreign language teachers and 100 students in upper secondary education, private and public schools. The participating teachers were actively engaged in teaching grammar and had experience incorporating digital tools into their instructional practices. The student participants were learners of a foreign language who

had prior experience using AI-based tools or digital platforms to support grammar learning.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, as the research required individuals who had direct exposure to technology-enhanced learning environments. The inclusion of both teachers and students was considered essential for capturing multiple perspectives on AI integration in grammar instruction.

Previous research emphasizes that the effectiveness of AI in education is shaped by the interaction between technology, teachers, and learners within the instructional process (Yang et al., 2021; Tang, 2023).

3.2 Research Instrument

The primary data collection instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire developed based on the themes identified in the literature review. Two separate questionnaires were designed: one for teachers and one for students.

The questionnaires consisted mainly of closed-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from:

1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree. Teachers' questionnaire addressed the following dimensions: perceived usefulness of AI in grammar teaching; the impact of AI on the teacher's pedagogical role; the effectiveness of AI-generated feedback; student engagement and autonomy in AI-supported environments; perceived challenges and limitations of AI integration.

Students' questionnaire focused on: the frequency of AI tool usage for grammar learning; perceptions of immediate automated feedback; the impact of AI tools on motivation and engagement; the development of independent learning skills; the continued importance of teacher guidance. In addition to Likert-scale items, the questionnaires included open-ended questions that allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of AI in grammar learning.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected through the distribution of an online questionnaire. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and were assured that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The online format facilitated efficient data collection and allowed participants sufficient time to complete the questionnaire while reflecting on their experiences with AI-based grammar learning tools.

3.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies, percentages, and mean values, in order to identify patterns in participants' responses.

Qualitative responses obtained from open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved identifying recurring themes related to the benefits, challenges, and pedagogical implications of AI integration in grammar instruction.

This analytical approach enabled the researchers to triangulate the findings and to develop a comprehensive interpretation of the data.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study reveal generally positive attitudes among both teachers and students toward the integration of artificial intelligence in grammar teaching and learning. Participants largely agreed that AI-based tools provide significant support in identifying grammatical errors and delivering immediate feedback.

Students' Perceptions of AI in Grammar Learning: The results indicate that a considerable proportion of students regularly use AI-based tools to check and improve their grammatical accuracy. Many participants reported that immediate automated feedback helped them identify errors quickly and revise their written work more efficiently. Students also indicated that AI tools enabled them to learn at their own pace and practice grammar independently. These findings support previous studies suggesting that AI technologies facilitate personalized learning environments and increase student autonomy in language learning (Zhao et al., 2022; Ouyang & Jiao, 2021). However, some students acknowledged that they occasionally accept AI-generated corrections without fully understanding the grammatical principles behind them. This finding aligns with previous research that warns about the potential risk of overreliance on automated writing tools, which may limit the development of deeper metalinguistic awareness (Seo et al., 2021; Ranalli et al., 2017).

Teachers' Perception on AI Integration: Teachers generally perceived AI as a valuable support tool in grammar instruction. They highlighted several advantages, including faster identification of grammatical errors, reduced time spent on correcting student assignments, and increased opportunities for individualized practice. Nevertheless, teachers emphasized that AI cannot replace the pedagogical role of the teacher. According to the participants, teacher intervention remains essential in explaining grammatical rules, clarifying complex linguistic structures, and connecting grammatical accuracy with meaningful communication. These findings reinforce Tang's (2023)

argument that in student-centered learning environments teachers assume a more facilitative role, guiding students toward deeper understanding rather than merely transmitting knowledge.

The findings suggest that AI does not diminish the importance of the teacher but rather transforms the teacher’s role. Instead of acting primarily as providers of grammatical explanations, teachers increasingly function as facilitators, mentors, and interpreters of AI-generated feedback. This perspective aligns with the concept of human-centered AI in education, which emphasizes that technological systems should support and enhance human pedagogical processes rather than replace them (Yang et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the most effective use of AI in grammar learning occurs when technological tools are integrated with pedagogical guidance and meaningful language practice.

5. Conclusions

This research indicates that artificial intelligence has significant potential to support the teaching and learning of grammar in foreign language education. AI-based tools provide immediate feedback, facilitate the identification of grammatical errors, and support personalized learning experiences. At the same time, the results highlight that the successful integration of AI in grammar instruction depends largely on the balanced interaction between technology, teachers, and students. While AI can assist students in improving grammatical accuracy and developing independent learning strategies, the role of the teacher remains fundamental. Teachers play a crucial role in interpreting feedback, explaining grammatical concepts, and ensuring that grammar learning is connected to authentic communicative use of language.

Furthermore, the research suggests that students must be encouraged not only to accept automated corrections but also to critically reflect on them in order to develop deeper grammatical awareness.

In conclusion, the future of grammar teaching lies not in replacing teachers with technology but in creating collaborative learning environments where artificial intelligence, teachers, and students work together to enhance language learning outcomes.

6. Limitations of the Study

Despite providing valuable insights into the role of artificial intelligence in grammar teaching and learning, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

First, the study is constrained by the relatively small sample size (N = 120), consisting of 20 teachers and 100 students in upper secondary education. While sufficient for exploratory analysis, this sample limits the generalizability of the findings to broader educational contexts.

Second, the research focuses on perceptions and attitudes toward AI rather than directly measuring improvements in students’ grammatical competence.

Third, the study does not fully explore the long-term impact of AI use on learners’ metalinguistic awareness and critical thinking skills.

Lastly, the study is situated within a specific educational and cultural context, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other settings.

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The integration of artificial intelligence in second language acquisition: pedagogical effectiveness and classroom innovation in secondary education

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies has begun to reshape contemporary educational environments, including second language classrooms. While AI-supported tools promise personalized instruction, automated feedback, and expanded opportunities for interaction, sustained empirical research examining their pedagogical effectiveness in authentic secondary school contexts remains limited. This study investigates the impact of structured AI-assisted instruction on vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and oral fluency among 120 intermediate-level secondary students over a 12-week period.

A mixed-method quasi-experimental design was employed, combining quantitative pre- and post-test statistical analysis with qualitative learner reflections and interviews. Results demonstrated statistically significant improvements across all measured language domains ($p < .05$), with moderate to large effect sizes. AI engagement frequency emerged as a meaningful predictor of post-intervention performance, though it did not function independently of teacher mediation. Qualitative findings revealed increased learner motivation, improved confidence in speaking tasks, and strengthened self-regulated learning behaviors.

The findings suggest that AI tools are most effective when systematically embedded within structured pedagogical frameworks and supported by active teacher guidance. Rather than replacing the teacher, AI functions as a complementary instructional instrument capable of extending practice opportunities and supporting differentiated instruction. The study contributes classroom-based empirical evidence to ongoing discussions on responsible

digital innovation and offers practical recommendations for sustainable AI integration in secondary language education.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Second Language Acquisition, AI-Assisted Instruction, Secondary Education, Self-Regulated Learning*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The acceleration of technological innovation has altered not only economic and social structures but also the organization of learning itself (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). Schools increasingly operate within digitally mediated environments in which students engage daily with intelligent systems, algorithmic platforms, and automated services. Within this broader transformation, Artificial Intelligence has emerged as one of the most influential and debated technologies in Education (Selwyn, 2019).

AI applications in learning environments range from adaptive tutoring systems and automated writing evaluation to speech recognition and conversational agents (UNESCO, 2020). These systems promise efficiency, personalization, and scalability (OECD, 2021). However, their integration into formal schooling raises fundamental pedagogical questions: Does AI meaningfully enhance learning? Under what conditions does it support rather than distract? How does it reshape the role of the teacher?

Such questions are particularly relevant in the domain of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), where interaction, feedback, and repeated practice are central to development. Unlike subjects that rely primarily on factual recall, language learning requires continuous communicative engagement and cognitive processing (Long, 1996). Therefore, the introduction of AI into language classrooms cannot be evaluated solely in technical terms; it must be examined pedagogically and socially.

This study originates from sustained classroom experience and responds to the need for empirically grounded analysis within authentic secondary school contexts.

1.2 Research Problem and Objectives

While enthusiasm surrounding AI in education has grown rapidly, empirical evidence remains uneven. Many existing studies focus on university students or short-term experimental conditions (Selwyn, 2019). Secondary education contexts, particularly in developing or transitional educational systems, remain underrepresented in longitudinal research.

Moreover, research often isolates individual variables—such as vocabulary retention or error correction—without examining how technological integration interacts with motivation, anxiety, autonomy, and teacher mediation (Zimmerman, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Language learning is multidimensional, and any meaningful evaluation of AI must consider cognitive, affective, and social dimensions simultaneously.

This study therefore seeks to provide a holistic evaluation of AI-assisted instruction within a structured secondary school curriculum over a sustained period.

This study addresses the following objectives:

1. Evaluate whether structured AI integration significantly improves vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and oral fluency in secondary-level learners.
2. Examine the relationship between AI engagement frequency and students' linguistic performance.
3. Investigate students' perceptions of AI-supported learning, particularly in relation to motivation, confidence, and learner autonomy.
4. Identify the pedagogical conditions necessary for the effective and sustainable integration of AI in secondary language classrooms.

1.3 Relevance to the Conference Theme

This study directly responds to the conference theme "Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society." Rather than adopting a purely technological perspective, the research critically examines how innovation can strengthen pedagogical practice. By situating AI within structured classroom instruction, the study contributes to contemporary debates regarding responsible digital integration and the evolving role of teachers in technology-enhanced learning environments. The findings aim to inform evidence-based educational innovation and support sustainable digital transformation in secondary education.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Critical Review of Relevant Literature

AI in education is frequently framed as a disruptive innovation capable of transforming traditional teaching models (Selwyn, 2019). Advocates emphasize personalization, data-driven decision-making, and scalable feedback systems. However, educational theorists caution against technological determinism—the assumption that technology itself drives improvement. Research suggests that digital tools tend to amplify existing pedagogical practices rather than automatically improve them (OECD, 2021).

If instruction is poorly structured, AI may simply digitize inefficiencies. Conversely, when embedded within clear learning objectives and supported by reflective practice, technology may enhance depth and engagement. Thus, AI should not be viewed as inherently transformative; its impact depends on pedagogical context.

Vocabulary development requires repeated exposure, contextual application, and meaningful processing. Adaptive AI systems frequently utilize spaced repetition algorithms designed to optimize memory retention (OECD, 2021). While research demonstrates benefits for recognition-based learning, productive lexical competence requires integration into communicative contexts. In classroom practice, vocabulary retention improved most noticeably when AI practice was linked directly to thematic units and followed by communicative tasks. This suggests that technology supports consolidation but must be embedded within broader discourse-based instruction. Automated writing evaluation systems provide immediate correction of grammatical errors. Students often appreciate the speed and clarity of such feedback. However, research indicates that passive acceptance of automated corrections may limit deeper understanding (UNESCO, 2020). During the intervention, grammar improvement was most substantial when automated feedback was followed by teacher-led analysis. Students reported that system corrections highlighted errors, but teacher explanation clarified reasoning. This layered feedback structure appears pedagogically significant. Oral fluency remains one of the most challenging competencies in foreign language education. Anxiety, fear of peer evaluation, and limited speaking time frequently restrict practice opportunities. AI conversational simulations offer extended speaking time in low-pressure environments (Selwyn, 2019). In interviews, several students reported feeling more comfortable practicing digitally before speaking publicly in class. This suggests that AI may function as an intermediate step between silent rehearsal and live interaction. However, it does not replace authentic interpersonal communication.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives:

Sociocultural Theory

Learning is mediated through cultural tools and social interaction. AI functions as a mediational artifact; however, development occurs within guided participation. The teacher remains central in structuring meaningful engagement.

Interaction Hypothesis

Language develops through negotiation of meaning and corrective feedback. AI provides corrective input but cannot fully simulate socio-pragmatic

complexity. It serves as supplementary interaction rather than authentic discourse replacement.

Self-Regulated Learning Theory

AI analytics may strengthen metacognitive awareness by allowing learners to track progress. Students who actively monitored their performance demonstrated stronger improvement, suggesting interaction between digital tools and autonomy development.

Together, these frameworks conceptualize AI as supportive but dependent on pedagogical scaffolding.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method quasi-experimental research design to examine the pedagogical impact of Artificial Intelligence integration in secondary-level English instruction. The quasi-experimental structure was selected due to the practical constraints of classroom-based research, where random assignment was not feasible. The mixed-method approach was selected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Quantitative data allowed measurement of linguistic performance changes over time, while qualitative data offered insight into learner perceptions, classroom experiences, and motivational factors. Combining these approaches helped reduce the limitations associated with relying solely on numerical or subjective data.

The intervention was conducted over a 12-week period within normal instructional schedules, ensuring that AI integration reflected authentic teaching conditions rather than artificial experimental settings. The study focused on structured implementation rather than sporadic or optional use of technology, as consistency was considered essential for evaluating pedagogical effectiveness.

3.2 Participants and Sampling Strategy

The participants of the study were 120 secondary school students enrolled in intermediate-level English courses at Sami Frasheri High School in Albania. The students were between 15 and 17 years old and represented different academic performance levels within the same educational environment. The sample was selected based on accessibility and continuity of participation throughout the intervention period. All participants were studying English as a foreign language under the same curricular framework. Efforts were made to ensure that the sample reflected a realistic classroom composition, including students with varying degrees of language proficiency.

Participation in the study was voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from both students and their parents or legal guardians. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of the activities involved, and their right to withdraw from participation at any time without academic consequences. To protect privacy, all collected data were anonymized before analysis. Student identities were replaced with numerical codes during statistical processing and qualitative interpretation.

3.3 Intervention Design and Instructional Procedure

The instructional intervention consisted of the structured integration of AI-supported activities into regular English language lessons over a 12-week period. AI tools were implemented as supplementary pedagogical resources rather than as replacements for teacher-led instruction. This approach ensured alignment with the study's objective of evaluating AI as a mediated instructional support within authentic classroom conditions. The intervention followed a consistent weekly instructional cycle to ensure procedural stability and replicability.

Stage 1: Lesson Introduction and Concept Presentation

Each lesson began with teacher-led introduction of the targeted linguistic content, following the national curriculum framework. New vocabulary and grammatical structures were presented through explanation, modeling, guided examples, and classroom discussion. This stage established conceptual foundations prior to digital engagement.

Stage 2: Guided AI Practice

Students engaged in AI-assisted activities directly aligned with the lesson objectives. These activities included:

- Adaptive vocabulary exercises based on repetition and reinforcement principle
- Grammar tasks incorporating automated error detection and corrective feedback
- Structured conversational simulations for guided speaking practice
- Pronunciation and fluency rehearsal activities

Students interacted with the AI platform within defined classroom or homework timeframes to ensure consistent exposure across participants. Usage logs were recorded to monitor engagement frequency and duration.

Stage 3: Monitoring and Teacher Mediation

This mediation component was grounded in the study's theoretical framework, particularly Sociocultural Theory, which conceptualizes learning as socially mediated and scaffolded. The structured teacher involvement ensured that AI functioned as a supportive cognitive tool rather than an autonomous instructional agent.

Stage 4: Reflection and Consolidation

At the end of each weekly cycle, students completed short reflective activities. They were asked to identify:

- Difficulties encountered during practice
- New vocabulary or structures learned
- Areas requiring further improvement

Reflection exercises were intended to support metacognitive development and self-regulated learning behavior.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibility was an important component of the research design. Participation was voluntary and did not affect students' academic evaluation. Data were stored securely and used exclusively for research purposes. Students were informed that AI tools were used as educational aids and not as surveillance mechanisms. Transparency regarding data collection helped maintain trust between participants and researchers.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Multiple instruments were used to ensure methodological triangulation.

Standardized Language Tests

Pre-tests were administered during the first week of the study to establish baseline proficiency levels. Post-tests were conducted at the end of the 12-week intervention. Tests evaluated three primary language domains:

- Vocabulary knowledge and usage
- Grammar accuracy in written tasks
- Oral fluency and communicative expression

The testing instruments were aligned with the school curriculum and designed to measure practical language competence rather than only theoretical knowledge.

Oral Fluency Assessment

Oral fluency was evaluated using an analytic rubric considering several dimensions:

- Speech continuity and hesitation frequency
- Pronunciation clarity
- Ability to express ideas coherently
- Use of appropriate vocabulary in spontaneous speech

Students performed short speaking tasks in controlled classroom conditions.

AI Engagement Logs

The study also collected data on AI usage frequency. Engagement logs recorded:

- Number of completed exercises
- Time spent interacting with AI tools
- Types of activities performed

These logs were used to explore correlations between practice intensity and learning outcomes.

Questionnaires and Reflective Surveys

Students completed structured questionnaires designed to capture motivational and affective dimensions of learning. The survey included statements related to:

- Interest in English learning after AI integration
- Confidence in speaking English
- Perceived usefulness of automated feedback
- Willingness to continue using digital learning tools

Responses were recorded using a Likert-scale format.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A smaller group of students participated in semi-structured interviews to provide deeper qualitative insight. Interview questions focused on personal learning experiences, emotional responses to AI-assisted activities, and perceived advantages or challenges of the intervention. The interview format allowed students to express opinions in their own words rather than restricting responses to predefined categories.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analyzed using standard statistical methods appropriate for educational research. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare pre-test and post-test performance scores across linguistic domains. This method was selected because the same group of students was measured before and after the intervention. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine relationships between AI engagement frequency and academic performance. Multiple regression analysis was also applied to estimate the extent to which engagement variables predicted learning outcomes.

Qualitative data from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed using thematic coding. Responses were reviewed repeatedly to identify recurring ideas related to motivation, autonomy, confidence, and learning experience.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Findings

All linguistic domains showed statistically significant improvement. Effect sizes ranged from moderate to large, indicating practical educational

relevance. Regression analysis showed that AI engagement explained approximately one-third of performance variance. This indicates meaningful contribution but also confirms that additional variables—including teacher mediation and learner motivation—played important roles.

Significant improvements were observed across all domains ($p < .05$ for all paired-sample t-tests):

Language Domain	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Effect Size (d)
Vocabulary	68.4	79.6	0.72
Grammar	65.2	76.8	0.69
Oral Fluency	62.7	74.9	0.75

Table 1. Language Domain Pre/Post Test Results

As shown in Table 1, all post-test means exceeded pre-test scores, with moderate to large effect sizes, indicating substantial practical significance. Correlation analysis revealed moderate positive relationships between AI engagement and performance. Regression analysis indicated that AI engagement accounted for approximately 32% of performance variance.

4.2 Qualitative Findings: Student Perceptions and Learning Experiences

Beyond quantitative measures, qualitative data revealed rich insights into how students experienced and perceived AI-assisted learning. Thematic analysis of interviews and reflective surveys identified four primary themes: increased motivation and engagement, enhanced confidence in speaking, improved self-regulated learning, and perceived pedagogical value of teacher-mediated AI integration.

Theme 1: Motivation and Engagement

Students consistently reported heightened motivation when engaging with AI tools. One student (S-47) reflected: "I used to feel bored with traditional grammar exercises, but the AI system makes it feel like a game. I want to complete more exercises because I can see my progress immediately." Another participant (S-63) noted: "The AI doesn't judge me like I worry my classmates might. I can make mistakes and try again without feeling embarrassed. This makes me want to practice more."

The low-stakes nature of AI interaction appeared to reduce anxiety associated with traditional classroom participation. Student S-82 commented: "Before, I would never volunteer to speak in class because I was afraid of making mistakes in front of everyone. With the AI, I can practice speaking as many times as I need. Now I feel more ready when the teacher asks me to speak."

Theme 2: Confidence in Speaking Tasks

Oral fluency improvements were accompanied by qualitative reports of increased confidence. Student S-15 stated: "The speaking practice with AI helped me feel less nervous. I practiced the same dialogue many times until I felt comfortable. When I had to present in front of the class, I wasn't as scared because I had already practiced so much."

Another student (S-91) described the progression: "At first, I was very uncomfortable hearing my own voice recorded. But after a few weeks, I realized the AI was helping me notice my pronunciation mistakes. Now I can hear the difference between my pronunciation and the correct one. This makes me more confident when speaking."

The scaffolding effect of AI practice was evident in student reflections. S-28 explained: "The AI lets me practice difficult words and sentences in private before I have to use them in class. It's like a bridge between learning and real speaking."

Theme 3: Self-Regulated Learning and Metacognitive Awareness

Students demonstrated emerging metacognitive awareness through engagement with AI analytics and progress tracking. Student S-54 reflected: "I can see exactly which vocabulary I'm weak in and which grammar rules I still struggle with. This helps me know what to focus on. I don't waste time on things I already know well."

The ability to monitor progress independently appeared to foster autonomy. S-76 noted: "I like that I can check my own progress without waiting for the teacher to grade my work. I know immediately if I got it right or wrong. This makes me feel more in control of my learning."

Student S-39 described how AI engagement supported metacognitive reflection: "When I see my mistakes on the AI system, I can think about why I made that mistake. Sometimes the AI explains the rule, and sometimes I have to ask the teacher. But either way, I'm thinking more carefully about my learning."

Theme 4: Perceived Value of Teacher-Mediated Integration

Importantly, students consistently emphasized the irreplaceable role of teacher guidance. When asked whether AI could replace teachers, all interviewed students responded negatively. Student S-61 stated: "The AI is helpful, but I still need my teacher. The teacher can explain things in a way that makes sense to me. The AI just tells me I'm wrong; it doesn't always help me understand why."

Another student (S-88) elaborated: "The AI is good for practice, but the teacher is important for real learning. When I don't understand something, I need to ask the teacher. The AI can't really have a conversation with me like my teacher can."

Student S-44 articulated the complementary relationship: "The AI helps me practice a lot, and then when the teacher explains something, I understand it better because I've already practiced. They work together—the AI gives me practice time, and the teacher helps me really understand." This finding strongly supports the theoretical framework emphasizing teacher mediation and sociocultural scaffolding. Students did not view AI as autonomous instruction but rather as a tool that enhanced their learning when embedded within teacher-guided instruction.

4.3 Discussion

The findings indicate that structured AI integration can meaningfully enhance core language competencies. Vocabulary gains align with research on adaptive learning systems, particularly studies highlighting the effectiveness of spaced repetition and immediate feedback mechanisms (Selwyn, 2019; OECD, 2021). Grammar improvements support previous findings on automated feedback effectiveness, although the moderate effect size suggests that AI functions most effectively when complemented by teacher explanation (UNESCO, 2020). Fluency development may reflect reduced anxiety in AI-supported speaking environments, a result consistent with research emphasizing low-stakes digital interaction contexts (Selwyn, 2019).

Importantly, students reported greater satisfaction when AI activities were clearly contextualized within lesson objectives. This supports sociocultural interpretations emphasizing teacher mediation, reinforcing the view that digital tools operate most effectively within guided instructional frameworks rather than as autonomous systems (Vygotsky, 1978; Long, 1996; Zimmerman, 2002).

The qualitative findings reveal that AI's pedagogical value extends beyond linguistic gains to encompass affective and motivational dimensions. The low-pressure practice environment reduced language anxiety, a well-documented barrier to SLA (Horwitz et al., 1986). The ability to monitor progress independently supported self-regulated learning, aligning with theoretical predictions that digital tools can enhance metacognitive awareness (Zimmerman, 2002).

These findings contribute to ongoing debates regarding responsible AI integration by demonstrating that measurable linguistic improvement depends on structured pedagogical embedding. The results partially align with previous higher-education studies but extend the literature by providing sustained, classroom-based evidence from a secondary school context (Selwyn, 2019).

From a practical perspective, the results suggest that AI tools should be systematically aligned with curriculum goals and accompanied by active teacher scaffolding. At a theoretical level, the findings support an integrated

framework combining sociocultural mediation, interactional feedback processes, and self-regulated learning mechanisms (Vygotsky, 1978; Long, 1996; Zimmerman, 2002).

Nevertheless, the study is limited by its single-institution context and 12-week duration, which may restrict generalizability. Future research should examine longitudinal effects and comparative group designs to further validate these findings (OECD, 2021).

5. Conclusion and Limitations

This study demonstrates that AI-assisted instruction, when systematically embedded within structured secondary education curricula, can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, and oral fluency. Beyond measurable linguistic gains, AI-supported learning fosters increased motivation, confidence, and emerging self-regulated learning behaviors. The qualitative findings underscore that these improvements are not attributable to technology alone but rather to the thoughtful integration of AI within pedagogically sound frameworks. Students consistently emphasized the irreplaceable role of teacher guidance, viewing AI as a complementary tool rather than an autonomous instructional agent.

However, AI does not replace the teacher. Its effectiveness depends on thoughtful integration, clear instructional purpose, and active pedagogical guidance. Technology serves best not as an autonomous instructor but as a complementary tool within human-centered education.

In shaping the future of language education, innovation must remain grounded in pedagogy, ensuring that digital transformation enhances rather than diminishes the relational and cognitive dimensions of learning.

This study is limited by its single-institution context and 12-week duration. A longer intervention may provide deeper insight into retention and sustained motivation. Future research could incorporate control groups or cross-cultural comparisons to strengthen generalizability. Additionally, further investigation into teacher training and digital literacy would provide valuable insight into how educators can effectively mediate AI integration.

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Intervention program as a tool of developing implicit meaning comprehension in french language texts

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Abstract: The presented article deals with the issue of developing reading comprehension in French as a foreign language through pedagogical intervention. The main impulse for the proposal of the subject was the successful application of an intervention program for the development of reading comprehension in French at the upper secondary level of education in Slovakia. The title of the article touches on three main areas, which are gradually developed. The first of them concerns reading literacy, or reading comprehension as a key communicative competence. Based on the results of some international measurements, it can be stated that students have the greatest problems with solving tasks that require linking information coming from different parts of the text, grasping information that is not explicitly presented in the text, and finally with its interpretation itself. The second key area of our research concerns the dealing with implicit meanings in the text. We can observe that a text's difficulty correlates directly with the amount of implicit information that students, particularly beginners, struggle to comprehend, interpret, and apply effectively in specific contexts. The third mentioned area details the development and conceptualization of an intervention program, validated through pedagogical experimentation as a highly motivating and effective French language tool for enhancing the language proficiency of upper secondary school students in the Slovak school environment.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, intervention, implicit meaning, text, French language*

1. Introduction

Within a plurilingual societal framework, both mother-tongue reading literacy and foreign-language reading comprehension are essential aspects of education. Reading is a ubiquitous daily activity whose quality profoundly

affects various dimensions of an individual's life, including material, spiritual, cultural, societal, social, political, and familial aspects. Reading can be characterized as a complex array of strategies, skills, and knowledge that enable an individual to engage with written documents commonly encountered in everyday life. It involves not only the formal ability to read texts but also the capacity to comprehend them, locate and synthesize relevant information, accurately evaluate and compare their contents, and ultimately, effectively communicate and interpret the material.

Reading comprehension in a foreign language constitutes one of the four fundamental language skills as delineated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020). The complexity of acquiring this skill is influenced by multiple factors. This process is significantly dependent on the mastery of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and intercultural particularities inherent to a specific foreign language. However, in a broader context, it represents a more intricate process, influenced not only by the student's level of foreign language proficiency but also by their cognitive, social, and personality variables. The variables in question are called *predictors*. They significantly influence the comprehension of a foreign language text. These predictors encompass elements such as *attention, concentration, memory process, perception, cognitive structuring, inferential thinking, divergent thinking, tolerance for ambiguity, critical thinking, and reflection or self-reflection*. The listed predictors constitute a foundational concept in our intervention program. The reading comprehension intervention program in question represents a specific educational tool that strategically develops the comprehension of a read text in the French language in connection with the development of a specific predictor. It is focused on facilitating and implementing reading strategy procedures that teachers can apply when working with students in individual reading processes, such as working with the reading experience and motivation to read.

2. Theoretical background

The conceptual framework of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (known as PISA) has continuously developed the definition of *reading literacy* in cycles when *reading* was the main domain of this international comparative study. While early definitions (PISA 2000) focused on understanding and reflecting, later iterations (PISA 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018) explicitly added "evaluating" and "engaging" to adapt to the digital age (Zápotočná et al., 2021). Since 2018, reading literacy is defined as *an individual's capacity to understand, use, evaluate, reflect on and engage with texts in order to achieve one's goals, develop one's knowledge and*

potential, and participate in society. It emphasizes active, critical engagement with both digital and print texts beyond simple decoding. Active engagement goes beyond simple comprehension to include "engaging with" texts, reflecting on them, and evaluating their quality and credibility. Literacy is not just a skill, but a tool used for personal, educational, and professional goals. It is essential for functioning in a modern, information-rich society (OECD, 2023). In the field of foreign language education, *reading comprehension* is recognized as a fundamental component of reading literacy and contributes to an individual's plurilingual competence. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) defines the reading comprehension as *a receptive language activity where learners receive and process written text to understand its meaning.* It involves not just decoding words, but interacting with text to grasp main ideas, information, or arguments, with proficiency ranging from A1 (basic phrases) to C2 (complex texts). Various aspects of reading comprehension in a foreign language are specified in detail using descriptors for all levels of language competence.

2.1 Process of text comprehension in foreign language

The phenomenon of *reading comprehension* is a complex process that can be viewed from various perspectives. Bertocchini and Costanzo (2008) conceptualize this process through three distinct dimensions:

- reading as a combination of physical and mental activity,
- reading as a cognitive activity associated with the awareness of meaning,
- reading as an interaction.

The first dimension represents the reading process as a physical and mental activity, conditioned by the functioning of *visual perception* and *memory*, which are very closely interconnected. The subsequent dimension addresses the process of text comprehension, which necessitates an understanding of the linguistic code in which the text is written. Additionally, it requires the possession of knowledge and personal experiences that can activate cognitive processes, enabling the reader to relate text sequences to pre-existing knowledge, recognize the formal characteristics of the text associated with its type and function, and comprehend the text's structure. The third dimension conceptualizes reading as an interactive process between the reader and the text. The reader possesses specific knowledge, reading habits, and approaches the text with particular intentions. Conversely, the text is characterized by its own structure and content. This interaction between the text and the reader manifests in the process of reading comprehension, which comprises two interrelated stages: the *anticipatory stage*, involving the identification of phenomena within the text and the formulation of assumptions, and the

verification stage, which entails confirming or rejecting these assumptions, formulating new ones, and drawing conclusions.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) delineates four stages of the reading process:

- *planning*, or contextualization, wherein the scope of internal representation of the world is selected, patterns are activated, and expectations are formulated;
- *realization*, during which key signals are identified and meaning is inferred from them;
- *evaluation*, where hypotheses are tested, meaning that key signals are assigned to patterns;
- and *correction*, or revision of hypotheses, if necessary.

Facilitating students' ability to discern and articulate the meaning of a text is contingent upon adhering to the appropriate sequence of the reading process, thereby selecting tasks that effectively engage the student. In pedagogical practice, the following phases are recognized in the context of reading comprehension (Cuq & Gruca, 2003): pre-reading activities (pre-text activities), activities during reading, and post-reading activities. This structure is rigorously followed in the implementation of our intervention program.

According to Nassaji (2013), linguistic deficiencies prevent the development of the reading comprehension process and the limited linguistic maturity causes inefficient text processing. The level of students' language proficiency influences the time it takes to decode the message from the text, or word recognition in text.

Nassaji (2013) recommends focusing on automating word recognition in text. He considers this moment to be one of the key factors in acquiring a foreign language reading comprehension skills. Reading in a foreign language depends more on lexical-semantic processing than on syntactic processing (Stranovská, 2011).

When searching for the contextual meaning, word order is not as important as word automation is. Syntactic processing is essential in the process of understanding the sentence composition.

Another important factor that greatly affects the development of reading comprehension is cultural knowledge. Numerous studies have shown positive correlations between reading comprehension and cultural knowledge (Brantmeier, 2003, Erten & Razi, 2009); the better the reader's cultural insight in a foreign language, the better their ability to understand the text. When readers read texts in a foreign language with unknown cultural patterns, they often use a habit of interpreting texts based on their established cultural norms from their mother tongue, which can lead to misunderstandings.

2.2 Implicit meanings in a foreign language text

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages / CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) defines reading comprehension not just as understanding literal text, but as the ability to infer implicit meanings. The very simplified term "reading between the lines" is often used. Reading and understanding the implicit becomes a core requirement at independent and proficient levels (B2–C2). It involves recognizing attitudes, emotions, tone, and cultural allusions that are suggested rather than directly stated.

Table 1. Implicit meaning in reading across CEFR levels

Basic User (A)	Independent User (B)	Proficient User (C)
<i>Mostly explicit information in text.</i>	<i>Growing ability to understand the implicit information.</i>	<i>Advanced inference. At this level, learners are expected to grasp implicit meanings as a matter of course.</i>
At the A1 (Breakthrough) and A2 (Waystage) levels, comprehension is focused on recognizing familiar words and phrases for concrete, immediate needs. While learners can make basic predictions about text content from headlines, they typically rely on explicit information. Learners are also led to understand the meaning of some unknown words from the context of a short read text.	B1 (Threshold) Learners are primarily focused on understanding the main points of straightforward, factual texts. They can identify the main conclusions in argumentative texts but may not grasp the finer implicit details. B2 (Vantage) Learners can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed. They can "recognise when a text provides factual information and when it seeks to convince readers of something," which requires	C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) Learners can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts and "recognise implicit meaning". They can understand attitudes, emotions, and opinions in various text types, such as emails or blogs, especially if they can reread the text. C2 (Mastery) Learners can understand with ease virtually all forms of written language, including appreciating "subtle distinctions of style" and implicit meaning in literary and non-literary texts.

	interpreting the author's implied purpose. They can also follow complex lines of argument, though they might struggle with low-frequency idioms.	

Furthermore, key components of implicit meaning can also be listed. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2020) emphasizes that understanding implicit meaning requires learners to use:

- contextual clues which is connected to deducing the probable meaning of unknown words or phrases from the surrounding text and descriptive words (already on level A1+);
- ability to identify the author's tone and attitude (e.g., ironic, critical, optimistic, detached);
- cultural allusions to understand references that are specific to the culture of the language being learned;
- signs of structure and cohesion to recognizing how connectors signal the logical relationship between ideas, even if the final conclusion is only suggested.

The previous table (Table 1) shows that although dealing with implicit information starts primarily at the threshold level B1+, preparing students to understand such information needs to be taken into account from the lowest levels. In this context, it is also necessary to talk about the effective use of *strategies* that involve students in understanding the text much earlier than they start learning a foreign language. Reading strategies that could help to access implicit meaning include:

- dealing with non-textual elements, identifying the text type (e.g., blog, news report, editorial) to gauge its reliability and potential bias;
- pre-reading strategies (e. g., predictions, introduction to the new vocabulary, engagement of existing knowledge);
- application of mental visualization, implementation of graphic organizers;
- using strategies like scanning to locate specific details and skimming to understand the general argument;
- formulating and responding to questions;
- using dictionaries to check interpretation of low-frequency vocabulary that carries significant, non-explicit weight.

One of the key aspects of implicit meaning comprehension is the concept of *inference*. In general, inference is understood as dealing with implicit information. According to Lalinská et al. (2020), inferential thinking is based on the analysis and synthesis of the read text, and on dealing with the main and secondary ideas. It concerns deduction, the ability to combine ideas and develop conclusions from certain data or information, to draw conclusions beyond the information obtained directly from the text, and to identify certain information that is not explicitly present in the text. Techniques that can be used to stimulate inferential thinking in the reading process include asking questions that require a degree of deduction and interpretation of specific information that may not be explicitly stated in the text. It is also possible to include tasks leading the student to formulate assumptions about the content or continuation of the text.

In current reading situations, proficient readers construct text representations that are both integrated and coherent. Inference making is an important part of this process. Inferences are necessary to link up ideas and fill in details that are not explicitly mentioned and proficient readers effortlessly make these inferences as needed (Cain & Oakhill, 1999). According to that, inference requires the reader to draw conclusions based on evidence, not explicit statements.

McNamara and Magliano (2009) state that in the field of text and discourse research, the term "mental representation" is commonly used to describe the result of text comprehension processes. The reader's mental representation consists of information from the text, information that is related to the text, and the inferences that are generated. Inferencing is the process of connecting information in the environment to information that is not in the current environment (e.g., subsequent representation of the text, world knowledge, or episodic knowledge from past events, including other texts or previous experiences). One type of inference connects current information to information that was previously encountered in the text, such as connecting the current sentence to a previous sentence. These are often called bridging inferences. Another type of inference connects current information to knowledge that is not in the text. For such knowledge-based inferences, the comprehender brings knowledge that is related to the text to the focus of attention, and by doing so, makes connections between the text and prior knowledge. These are often referred to as associative inferences or elaborations. Elaboration is the process by which the recipient relates information from a text to their prior knowledge and experience. The interaction of information results in a better understanding of new knowledge. The content of elaborations are ideas, associations, and representations (Stranovská & Ficzer, 2020).

Liptáková and Cibáková (2013) also think similarly and refer to inferences as partial deductions or conclusions that connect previous knowledge with new information. At the same time, they understand inference as the cognitive operations themselves, by which conclusions are created. The authors distinguish several types of inferences:

- *bridging inferences* are direct inferences and can be found literally in the text;
- *coherent inferences* are more complex and arise from the connection of information at the local and global levels of understanding of the text;
- *elaborative inferences* come from outside the text and connect information from the text with knowledge about the world or about other texts.

It can be noted that inferential thinking as a student skill consists of a very complex process. The student integrates textual information with existing cognitive schemes, subsequently articulating comprehension of the text's meaning. Inferential thinking goes beyond the boundaries of understanding the information provided in the text, forcing the reader to use their own scripts or cognitive schemes to achieve understanding. The student's inferential activity also depends on situational and communicative conditions. The task's wording, author's intent, textual strategies, and teacher's facilitation are influential, as are the student's interest and motivation. The low or high number of inferences made by the student also depends on the student's perspective of superficial or deep reading.

The reading process is also determined by linguistic processes, which are followed by interpretations. According to Stranovská and Ficzer (2020), interpretations, or inferences of meanings in the text, are limited because the student cannot assign all possible interpretations to a word. Behind the word are cultural traditions that the reader must respect and at the same time tolerate this ambiguity, stimulating intellectual flexibility and processes of divergent thinking.

At school, many pupils have difficulty grasping the implicit meanings in texts because these are rarely defined as objects to be taught. The teaching of implicit reading comprehension in the classroom falls into three fields: linguistics, literature, and reading didactics. Linguistics contributes to questioning the linguistic knowledge mobilised during reading. To define more precisely implicit meaning as an object to be taught, it is also necessary to address the particularities of the text. The didactic approach is the junction point between these theoretical fields, the place where the question of the difficulty of understanding implicit meaning in the classroom is raised.

The aim of the following section is to present and analyse our intervention program as a unique tool serving to develop (not only) students' inferential thinking in connection with reading a text in the French language from the reference level A2+. We assume that the intervention program in question will serve as inspiration for the research task of the currently ongoing project Comprehension at School: Implicit Meaning in Reading (CASIMIR 2025-1-FR01-KA220-SCH-000356910) approved within the Erasmus+ project scheme for the period 2025 - 2028. The aim of the project is to identify the notion of implicit meaning and to understand its role in the reading of literary texts to develop resources for the classroom and teacher training.

3. Intervention program in the view of texts' implicit meanings

Intervention programs are not, in principle, a new phenomenon. They belong to the group forms of education with the possibility of using various methods. They are based on the basic principles of interpersonal learning, group cohesion and dynamics. Their strength also lies in experiencing authentic emotions when processing the experience. The principle of learning lies in personal experience and its reflection. Therefore, the intervention program can also be called a variant of experiential and self-regulatory form of learning. In addition to interpersonal learning, we also develop individual work, which is very important in processing information and emotions (Lalinská et al., 2020). In connection with our intervention program, we focus on intervention in the teaching of French in secondary schools for students with the level A2. The intervention is applied in the form of two complementary lines:

1. *Predictor development*: stimulation and support of cognitive and metacognitive processes.
2. *Work with the text*: educational activities carried out before, during or after reading the text.

Before we started compiling the reading comprehension intervention programs, we researched which predictors (factors) participate in the development of reading comprehension, or which predictors support the understanding of a foreign language text. We found that the perception of language means, cognitive structuring and partly tolerance of ambiguity influence reading comprehension most (Lalinská, 2020). Subsequently, based on the cognitive theory of learning, we determined which cognitive processes precede the predictors with the greatest share of influence and which higher cognitive processes follow them. Based on these scientific procedures, we have determined which predictors we will continuously develop in our intervention program or which predictors we will use to intervene the comprehension of the read foreign text (see Table 2). Developing a predictor

means stimulating and supporting individual cognitive and metacognitive processes. In each model intervention unit, one or two consecutive predictors are developed by deliberately concentrating our activities and procedures on a given cognitive process. We proceed from lower processes to higher ones, i.e. *attention, concentration, memory, perception, cognitive structuring, inferential thinking, imagination, fantasy, divergent thinking, tolerance of ambiguity, critical thinking and self-reflection*. For example, in the first intervention unit, we start with the simplest cognitive process - attention and concentration. We develop it by simultaneously concentrating on the development of the given predictor in the intervention unit when working with the text. In the next unit, we add memory and thus proceed to the final stage connected with critical thinking. We pay considerable attention to metacognitive processes: knowledge of the limits in the process of understanding the French text, awareness of your strategy of working with the text, identification of problems that require solution, creation of plans and strategies, evaluation, self-evaluation and self-reflection.

Working with the text consists of educational activities carried out before, during or after reading the text. These activities are relatively well known from the didactics of teaching foreign languages, but also from pedagogical practice associated with the development of understanding of foreign language texts. In terms of intervention, our goal was to use these activities to develop understanding through the stimulation of motivation, creativity, previous (language or personal) experience and (affective) experience of the student based on what has been read.

The initial goal of our intervention programs is to strengthen and develop the communicative language competence of secondary school students in the field of reading comprehension and at the same time to develop social, sociolinguistic, (inter) cultural and personality variables that act together as indicators of language competence. The reading comprehension intervention programs themselves are designed to meet the following specific objectives, which can be divided into three areas: *linguistic, psychological and pedagogical*.

The linguistic goal is related to the continuous development of reading comprehension skills, which includes: overall (global) reading comprehension, reading for general orientation, selective reading to identify explicit or implicit information in the text, reading leading to an awareness of the language means present in the text and their functioning in the given context (linguistic, social and intercultural), reading leading to the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the elements present in the text.

The psychological goal of the intervention program is mainly related to the stimulation, support and development of the following cognitive and metacognitive processes of students: attention and concentration, memory

processes (memory and working memory), perception and cognitive structuring, inferential thinking, divergent thinking, ambiguity tolerance or thought flexibility, critical thinking, metacognitive processes (strategic work with the text, identifying problems and finding solutions, evaluation, reflection and self-reflection).

The pedagogical goal of the intervention program is focused mainly on the following areas: to develop students' reading strategies, to develop students' ability to identify the main features and functions of individual types of text, to create a space where students can discover and express their reading habits and preferences, to create space for creative work of students with text, to motivate students to read texts in a foreign language.

The framework structure of the intervention program been designed to take into account the above objectives and to sufficiently cover the range of texts that would be appropriate for the development of established predictors affecting reading comprehension. Each intervention program consists of ten model intervention units, which are designed in the form of 45-minute lessons. The program includes texts for intensive and extensive reading, literary (artistic) texts, factual texts (journalistic, newspaper, professional, popular, administrative) and user texts, which can be further classified as linear public texts (announcements, instructions, advertisements, leaflets), linear private texts (text messages, e-mails, chat, letters, blogs) and non-linear texts, which most often occur in the form of graphs, tables, pictograms, programs, brochures and various types of infographics. The framework structure of the intervention units takes into account the gradual development of predictors (from lower cognitive processes to higher ones) with regard to the appropriate type of text. Its overall concept is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Design of the intervention program for reading comprehension

Intervention unit	Predictor	Type of text
1	Attention and concentration	Factual text
2	Attention, concentration and memory processes	Public user text (e.g. ads, menu, timetable, announcements, instructions, manuals)
3	Perception and language means	Private user texts (e.g. letter, e-mail, text message)
4	Perception, cognitive structuring and language means	Factual / professional text

5	Perception, cognitive structuring and language means	Factual / professional text
6	Inferential thinking	User popular text (e.g. rap, slam)
7	Inferential thinking	User popular text
8	Divergent thinking and tolerance for ambiguity	Literary text
9	Divergent thinking and tolerance for ambiguity	Literary text
10	Critical thinking, reflection and self-reflection reflexia	Literary text

In connection with the structure of the intervention unit, this is not a classic lesson. The intervention unit is designed in three stages:

1. *Introduction (introductory stage)* - warming up of the group (warm-up and / or motivational activities). Warming-up activities are particularly important in the intervention. They are not always directly related to the topic of the text and often give the impression that they are detached from the context, but they support the development of the relevant predictor, they interconnect language and cognitive processes and activate the affective level of students and group work.
2. *Main part (intermediate stage)* - productivity of the group (work with text, assignments and activities before / during / after reading, where the information part is combined with the experiential one). During reading, we prefer silent reading, in which the student is best able to focus on the meaning, the main idea and the message of the text. In silent reading, we distinguish two forms: intensive (analytical) reading and extensive (synthetic) reading.
3. *Completion (final stage)* - dissolution of the group (technique inducing relaxation or activity aimed at completing the topic, closing emotional topics, or presenting the creative work of students).

In line with the title and aim of our paper, we will now continue with a brief analysis of the selected intervention units with regard to the key components of communication competence and presence of implicit meaning in texts. In the following table (Table 3) we offer examples of two selected intervention units focused on the development of the same predictor - *inferential thinking* which is most closely linked to the processing of implicit information in the text. It is stimulated through the texts of different nature - artistic and

infographic text. Both intervention units come from an intervention program for the French language (Lalinská et al., 2020).

Table 3. Examples of intervention units (predictor - inferential thinking)

Order	Predictor	Text type	Text title (topic)
6	Inferential thinking	User popular text (e.g. rap, slam)	L'appartement de célibataire (Housing. Description of the apartment in a humorous way.)
Objectives of the intervention unit <i>Language dimension:</i> - overall (global) understanding of the text (choose a suitable image that captures the essence of the text), - identify lexical fields on the topic of housing, household, - use keywords to name the author's intent, - express feelings evoked by slam-style poetry. <i>Sociolinguistic dimension:</i> - distinguish slang expressions and figurative words found in the text and look for their meaning, - express what is humorous in selected sequences of the poem. <i>Intercultural dimension:</i> - distinguish between clichés and stereotypes (pictures of different living styles to which the people must be assigned), - get acquainted with the specific style of slam, determine the main characteristics of this poetic stream on the basis of the heard performance, - get acquainted with the most famous French representative of this artistic direction (Grand Corps Malade). <i>Implicit components and techniques:</i> - context – slam poetry (poetic elements, metaphors, comparisons), - presence of humour, irony, sarcasm in the text, - cultural references: clichés, stereotypes, idioms, slang, - working with visual material that illustrates the main idea of the text, - warm-up activity - working with associations (associative chain), - creative activity - create a portrait of the man (occupant of the apartment) mentioned in the poem (age, employment, hobbies, relationships, etc. - information that is not explicitly present in the text).			

7	Inferential thinking	user text (informative nonlinear text - infographics)	Infographie: étude CREDOC sur le petit déjeuner des enfants (Having breakfast.)
Objectives of the intervention unit <i>Language dimension:</i> - train active reading of nonlinear types of texts (diagrams, graphs, tables), - develop vocabulary associated with the interpretation of statistical data, - understand the informative text (infographics) and be able to find the required information in it, - name and express their habits related to the central theme, - formulate and ask questions about the information document (group work on the set of infographics). <i>Sociolinguistic dimension:</i> - work with specific elements of non-linear type of text - way of marking information (visual processing of text and presentation of information). <i>Intercultural dimension:</i> - compare the phenomenon of <i>having breakfast</i> with regard to Slovak and French customs, - discuss the importance of having breakfast and a healthy lifestyle. <i>Implicit components and techniques:</i> - <i>contextual clues (linking visual representations and descriptive text)</i> - <i>working with specific visual material, infographics, statistics,</i> - <i>understanding and interpreting numbers, graphs, schemes, and tables,</i> - <i>text reconstruction, placement of titles in graphic designs,</i> - <i>author's tone: detached, formal.</i>			

Each intervention unit is designed to contain a worksheet for the student and a methodological sheet for the teacher, which contains a chronologically arranged overview of individual activities together with instructions (in Slovak and the relevant foreign language), possible attachments (visual material, diagrams, etc.) and the text. Several intervention units contain additional or alternative activities that the teacher chooses with regard to the language skills of his pupils. He may combine alternative activities as appropriate. They can also be used after working with the program to check the comprehension of the text, as well as to deepen the work with the text.

When selecting topics and texts in intervention programs, we proceeded according to criteria that take into account the grammatical and lexical aspects of the language, while the text should include appropriately known as well as unknown language resources. The texts also cover the various areas defined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (public, private, educational and professional texts) and are sufficiently representative of the type (narrative, descriptive, argumentative, literary, informative, etc.), are appropriate to the age and the language level of the target group. All texts included in the intervention program were selected with the ambition to arouse students' curiosity, desire to learn more and to stimulate them to discuss and formulate their own opinions.

4. Conclusion

The aim of language education is to prepare students to be able not only to communicate in different life situations, but also to teach them procedures and strategies that they can use in the lifelong acquisition and development of language competence in the relevant foreign language. The reality of the measured results in the Slovak foreign language context of education points to the fact that good knowledge of a foreign language is still an absent key competence. The question that is even more important is: where is an error in the system, which parameter is not well set, why, despite the social demand, despite the motivation, the result is unsatisfactory. The trend in foreign language teaching and learning in developed European countries, is to shift the focus of foreign language teaching to *non-formal education*, which shows much better results (Butašová, 2013). The implementation of linguistic intervention programs, which would be based on available knowledge and research in psycholinguistics and would appropriately combine educational aspects of language education as well as psychological and ontogenetic specifics and needs of students can also be a solution for the effective development of key language competencies.

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Italianità in gesture: teaching Italian culture through multimodal communication

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Abstract: Somatic communication is generally culturally conditioned, with gesture use representing one of its most variable components. The same gesture may convey different meanings across cultures, which often results in Italian gestures not being readily understood by speakers of other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The aim of this contribution is to highlight a key aspect of Italian gestural communication, namely its function as a carrier of culturally specific meanings. Gesture use is a particularly salient feature of Italian communicative behaviour, and insufficient familiarity with this gestural system frequently leads to intercultural misunderstandings or even to a breakdown in communication. Therefore, somatic communication – and gestures in particular – should be systematically incorporated into LS/L2 language teaching.

Keywords: *multimodal communication, gesture, language learning, language teaching*

1. Italian beyond the language

The study of communication within a specific linguistic and sociocultural system requires the consideration of a wide range of factors that reflect its inherently multidisciplinary nature. These factors encompass the fundamentals of social interaction, the structure of the verbal message, patterns of social variation and the codes through which they are expressed, as well as the underlying motivations of interaction. Equally important are the behavioural patterns characteristic of the culture in which the communicative act is produced. Such tendencies become particularly evident at the pragmatic level, especially when examining actual communicative practices – concrete instances of interaction – endowed with the full range of strategies that contribute to the success of each individual speech act. These strategies

operate in close relation to language, context, and their structural codifications (Sobrero 1993).

In the field of language teaching, the acquisition of a foreign language (FL) or a second language (SL) requires learners to assume active roles, to be performed in specific situations, within particular contexts, and in relation to defined domains of activity. The communicative approach to language learning, being inherently action-oriented, cannot be dissociated from the interdisciplinary perspective outlined above, as it draws on multiple dimensions of communicative competence. It extends beyond the mastery of linguistic structures based solely on verbal codes and engages a more complex system of non-verbal resources, which constitute essential components of the message exchanged between participants in the communicative act (Ciliberti 1994). The development of communicative competence thus inevitably involves an intercultural dimension, leading to an overlap of cultural frameworks that further diversify the already broad range of interactions to be integrated, reinforced, and adapted within the educational process.

Communicative competence has been defined as the ability to employ a full range of communicative codes (from verbal to non-verbal) in order to achieve the primary aim of any communicative act, namely the effective transmission of a message as intended by the sender, without ambiguity or misunderstanding (Balboni 1999). From this perspective, it is neither necessary nor appropriate to establish a rigid hierarchy among the various communicative codes; in particular, the verbal code cannot always be regarded as the sole or primary vehicle of meaning. Indeed, texts – regardless of their linguistic formulation – can rarely be considered fully self-sufficient. Their successful interpretation often presupposes knowledge that extends beyond the surface structure of the text, encompassing contextual, cultural, and pragmatic dimensions.

It should also be noted that non-verbal elements frequently play a crucial role in the initial interpretation of a message. This is particularly evident in the context of foreign language learning, where learners often rely on paratextual cues – elements situated “around the text” – to formulate preliminary hypotheses about meaning before engaging in a more detailed lexical analysis, despite the likelihood that some items will remain unfamiliar. The development of an interlanguage capable of integrating verbal components with non-verbal modes of communication (such as intonation and gesture) enables learners to better understand and focus on the meaningful use and content of linguistic expressions across different discursive and textual contexts.

It is evident that, just as linguistic codes are governed by norms shared within a given speech community, non-verbal codes are likewise based on

conventions that vary significantly across cultures. As a natural cognitive tendency, individuals often interpret unfamiliar communicative elements through the lens of their own cultural and communicative framework. This process may give rise to the well-known phenomenon of “false friends,” not only in strictly linguistic contexts – both verbal and non-verbal – but also at the broader cultural level.

What is evident, however, is that communication does not constitute a univocal structure, but is fundamentally shaped by the interaction of three key components: linguistic, paralinguistic, and kinesic (Poyatos 1992). These elements are inextricably interconnected and form the core of communicative events in their most comprehensive sense, encompassing language itself, the prosodic features of speech, and body movements which, in certain cultural contexts, may precede, accompany, follow, or even replace verbal expressions. Within this multimodal framework, the basic tripartite structure can be further expanded to include additional sensory and conceptual systems of considerable complexity. These dimensions and their potential interactions are governed by a rich array of somatic signals which convey culturally specific meanings (Poggi 1986).

These communicative and conceptual systems, rooted in socio-cultural factors and consolidated through processes of cultural stratification, are shared among members of a given community and transmitted across generations. Over time, they become encoded in clearly identifiable value systems, which are reflected in norms of behaviour and evaluation. Such norms contribute to cross-cultural variation in conceptual frameworks and give rise to distinct sets of linguistic and cultural conventions. These conventions, structured within specific spatial and temporal contexts, find their most direct expression in historically established extralinguistic communicative practices.

Communities of speakers may share a common linguistic code without significant difficulties; however, this does not imply a corresponding uniformity in the use and interpretation of non-verbal communicative codes. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the Italian context, where, despite the coexistence of standard Italian with regional dialects, non-verbal communication exhibits a higher degree of variation than the linguistic system itself, in which the standard variety generally prevails. Across different dialectal areas, gestural and proxemic behaviours often display marked differences and may be unfamiliar or even unintelligible to speakers from other regions. At the same time, there is an increasing tendency – particularly at the regional level – to emphasize the symbolic and semantic values of gestural language (Diadori 1992).

Non-verbal communicative behaviours have increasingly spread over time through the influence of mass media, initially via television and cinema, and

more recently through the pervasive impact of social media. These channels have facilitated not only the rapid circulation of such behaviours but also their transfer across cultural boundaries. As a result, gestures originally specific to particular cultural contexts have become integrated into the communicative repertoires of other societies, largely due to the sustained exposure to dominant cultural models. These processes – acting, as it were, as gateways to perceived authenticity – reinforce the need for communication-oriented language learning grounded in a practical, action-based approach and attentive to the socio-cultural dimension. This, in turn, highlights the growing importance of extralinguistic competences in relation to both the target language and its cultural context. Indeed, effective intercultural communication depends not only on the understanding of verbal meanings but also on the interpretation of behavioural patterns (Weidenhiller 1998).

From the perspective of a communicative and pragmatic approach to the teaching of a language such as Italian, an approach strongly shaped by the role of non-verbal cues in contextually rich communicative situations, it is essential to consider how meaning is made accessible and explicit to the recipient. Within this framework, specific kinesic patterns and bodily postures are employed to complement and enrich the spoken message. Through deliberate body movements, speakers not only reinforce verbal content but also intensify the expression of emotions. In the Italian sociocultural context, such behaviours are generally not subject to taboo; rather, they constitute a natural and accepted component of interaction. They facilitate interpersonal contact and reflect a communicative mode that readily incorporates corporeal and physical dimensions, even though these operate at a largely unconscious level (Tempesta 1994).

Within the domain of extralinguistic competences, gestures occupy a particularly significant position, given the range of communicative functions they fulfil. These functions encompass different categories of gestures, from symbolic or emblematic gestures – whose meanings are socially shared and not directly inferable from the form of the movement itself, as they may refer to objects, actions, or even complete phrases or abstract concepts – to mimetic gestures, which reproduce the form or dimensions of a referent or action. Further categories include deictic gestures, which indicate the spatial position of objects or individuals, and so-called batonic gestures, which serve to emphasize and enhance the expressiveness of spoken language by reinforcing rhythm and prosodic features (Ekman, Friesen 1969, in Kendon 1981).

It may be asserted that the use of gestures allows speakers to enhance both the intensity and the expressiveness of the emotions conveyed through verbal language, functioning as a form of physical projection toward the interlocutor. In this sense, gestures contribute to two fundamental dimensions of language:

the expressive dimension and the so-called dimension of “effort,” through which speakers fulfil the communicative need to express themselves in relation to others.

Moreover, patterns of non-verbal behaviour among Italian speakers have long been documented, and continue to be observed, at both regional and national levels, particularly with regard to the most frequently used symbolic gestures. These patterns are further reinforced and disseminated by mass media, which function both as a mirror and as a model of communicative practices within the Italian-speaking community across verbal and non-verbal domains. This is evident in various forms of media, including Italian cinema, print journalism (through both textual and visual content), advertising, literary production, and, more recently, digital platforms of communication and interaction.

2. A Typology of Gestures and Their Functions in Italian Communication

In principle, gestures are capable of conveying an extensive range of meanings, with some estimates suggesting the possibility of hundreds of thousands of semantic variations. In actual communicative practice, however, only a limited and conventionally established repertoire of gestures is consistently employed – one that remains intelligible within a given linguistic and cultural community. The use of gestures is largely automatic and often operates below the level of conscious awareness. As such, gestures constitute a combination of spontaneous, partially innate expressions and acquired behavioural patterns that individuals develop through social interaction, primarily via observation, imitation, and mirroring. This dual nature underscores the strong cultural conditioning of gestural communication: the meanings, frequency, and forms of gestures vary significantly across different cultural contexts.

Gestures thus constitute a fundamental component of non-verbal communication, encompassing bodily movements (particularly those involving the hands and fingers) that typically accompany or complement verbal expression. The hands, in particular, function as a primary contact modality through which speakers signal their stance toward the interlocutor. Through gestural behaviour, communicators may convey relational dimensions of interaction, such as friendliness or hostility, as well as markers of social status and hierarchy, including subordinate–superior relations.

As noted above, gestures can be classified according to multiple criteria, and their meaning and function become particularly salient in linguistic and cultural contexts characterized by a high degree of gesticulation, such as Italian. Within Italian communicative practice, gestures do not merely

supplement verbal expression but constitute an integral component of the meaning-making process; indeed, non-verbal signals may at times take precedence over verbal ones.

From the perspective of origin, gestures may be broadly divided into innate and learned types. Innate gestures are universal in nature, typically produced at a subconscious level, and only partially subject to voluntary control. These include, for example, smiling or crying as basic expressions of emotion that are common across cultures. In the Italian context, such gestures fulfil similar functions, often in combination with facial expressions and prosodic features, which further enhance their expressive value. By contrast, learned gestures are strongly shaped by cultural conventions and are particularly prominent in Italian communication. Italian culture is widely recognized for its extensive repertoire of conventionalized gestures, which carry established meanings and frequently function as autonomous communicative units. A notable example is the gesture commonly referred to as *mano a borsa* (formed by bringing the fingertips together and pointing them upward) which may convey questioning, disagreement, or emphasis, but also frustration, depending on the communicative context.

From a functional perspective, gestures can also be classified into initiative and reactive types. Initiative gestures are inherently directive and are used to prompt a response or action from the interlocutor: for instance, gestures of summoning or dismissing (e.g. *vai via*), which are particularly frequent in Italian communication and often more emphatic than in other cultural settings. Reactive gestures, by contrast, function as responses to a communicative stimulus and convey emotional or attitudinal meanings, such as agreement, disagreement, or surprise. In Italian discourse, these gestures are typically accompanied by expressive facial expressions and prosodic features, which further enhance their communicative impact.

From the perspective of semiotic function, semantic gestures – namely emblems that are capable of fully replacing verbal utterances – play a particularly prominent role in Italian communication. Emblems are both culture- and language-specific and must therefore be acquired through learning. They are unlikely to be correctly interpreted by individuals who are unfamiliar with the relevant cultural context, as they exhibit a high degree of conventionalization within Italian communicative practice and their meanings are generally shared among members of the speech community.

In addition to emblems, illustrators – also referred to as iconic gestures – constitute another important category. These gestures accompany verbal expression and enhance its expressive force. Typically produced at a largely unconscious level, illustrators display cross-cultural variation in both frequency and scope. Italians, and Southern Europeans more broadly, tend to

employ illustrators more extensively than Northern Europeans and citizens of Asian countries (Busà 2023). In Italian discourse, such gestures are often highly dynamic and closely synchronized with speech rhythm, thereby contributing to the vividness and expressive character of communication.

Italian gestural behaviour also exhibits significant regional and local variation, as gestures are closely linked to the geographical origin of the speaker. This variability is particularly evident in media contexts such as advertising and, above all, cinema, where the need for spontaneity across linguistic, paralinguistic, and kinesic dimensions brings such differences to the fore. In these settings, gestures must be interpreted in relation to the cultural background of the performers and the specific communicative contexts in which they are embedded. In contemporary Italian comedy, for instance, linguistic, proxemic, and gestural conventions associated with different regional traditions are variously foregrounded, depending on the performers – whether Roman, Tuscan, Neapolitan, or others. This results in a broad spectrum of non-verbal expression, ranging from the more expansive and emphatic gestures typically associated with southern regions to the more restrained gestural styles characteristic of northern Italy and Sardinia.

Generally speaking, the southern regions of Italy rely more extensively on gestural communication than the northern regions. In southern Italy, gestures tend to be more expansive, theatrical, and frequent, whereas in the North they are typically more restrained and formal. This regional distinction is also reflected in the history of gesture studies: the first systematic work on Italian gestural communication took the form of a dictionary of Neapolitan gestures (Munari 1999). From a broader perspective, it is possible to distinguish between a standard gestural repertoire (used across Italy from north to south) and regionally specific gestures, which are locally distributed and whose meanings and usage may vary depending on the geographical context (Chiefari 2021).

3. Teaching Italian Culture through Gestures

Given the central role of language in LS/L2 acquisition, it is essential to consider how gestures interact with speech (Diadori 2024). One relevant category is that of *co-speech gestures* (McNeill 1992, 2005), which are typically produced unconsciously and occur simultaneously with verbal expression. Another category comprises *speech-linked gestures* (Stam 2018), which may precede or follow verbal utterances or serve to fill pauses in speech (Diadori 2024).

Research has also demonstrated that L2 speakers tend to transfer non-verbal behaviours from their L1, relying on communicative strategies rooted in their

own cultural backgrounds (Collier 1995). Since many gestures are culturally determined, they must be explicitly learned; otherwise, the inappropriate use of somatic communication may lead to tension, misunderstanding, or communicative breakdown.

As Nobili (2021) observes, research on the teaching of language–gesture multimodality in the context of Italian as a first language (L1) or as a second/foreign language (L2/LS) presents a complex yet coherent set of perspectives, each associated with specific pedagogical objectives. These include:

- developing learners’ ability to engage in intersemiotic comparison between verbal language and gestures (i.e. identifying shared properties as well as distinguishing features of the two codes);
- fostering an understanding of the diamesic dimension of variation, particularly how gestures are represented across different modalities, from spoken interaction to written and recorded forms;
- enhancing learners’ cognitive capacity to reflect on and analyse gestures already present in their communicative repertoire, including their classification according to relevant parameters and categories;
- promoting intercultural competence by examining how the meanings of gestures vary across Italian and other linguistic and cultural contexts.

However, it appears that co-speech gestures – which accompany and illustrate simultaneous verbal expression – remain an underrepresented element in language teaching. Although these gestures are, by definition, iconic and partially codified, their interpretation tends to be more complex, even in the context of Italian as a native language (Nobili 2021). As Poggi (2006) notes, co-speech gestures are not typically associated with a fixed or canonical verbal equivalent, which makes their meaning more difficult to identify. By contrast, symbolic gestures are generally easier to interpret, as their meaning is more explicitly conventionalized within the culture and is often linked to a corresponding verbal formulation.

Drawing on his own research, Nobili (2021) demonstrates that, as language proficiency increases, learners’ ability to accurately decode more subtle and complex gestures – particularly co-speech gestures – tends to decline. Based on this, he proposes a vertically structured curriculum aimed at integrating language and gesture within a comprehensive model of linguistic education, spanning the first to the third year of university study. The curriculum is outlined through a set of progressive pedagogical objectives. In the first year, the focus is on the identification and verbal translation of symbolic gestures extracted from concrete contexts of use, thereby simplifying the task for learners. In the second year, attention shifts to a more detailed and contrastive

analysis of the signifiers of gestures, with the aim of achieving a more precise understanding of their meaning. This may involve, for example, exercises that require students to match carefully drawn representations of gestures (similar in certain aspects of their execution but differing in others) with verbal descriptions of their formal features, thus fostering the ability to process both verbal and visual representations of gestural signifiers. In the third year, instruction is oriented toward targeted activities designed to deepen both theoretical and practical knowledge of the variety and complexity of co-speech gestures. In general, it is possible to identify a range of gestures that are highly symbolic and representative of Italian body language. At the same time, one may posit the existence of a broadly shared gestural usage across Italy – a form of “standard repertoire.” While it is especially familiar among younger generations, it is also widely recognized and understood by older speakers, thereby constituting a shared cultural resource with established and collectively understood meanings. Such typical gestural patterns may, moreover, be systematically incorporated into the teaching of Italian as a second (L2) or foreign language (FL).

The schematic classification presented below is semantic-pragmatic in orientation and reflects a pedagogically driven approach rather than a strictly linguistic typology. Gestures are organized according to their communicative functions and their use in everyday spoken interaction, which makes them particularly relevant for L2/FL instruction as well as for intercultural studies. The classification progresses from social conventions to emotional states and feelings, followed by action-oriented expressions, questions and responses, and evaluations of personal characteristics, and concludes with the description of specific gestures associated with common communicative situations, as illustrated in the table below.

Category	Verbal expression accompanying or replacing the gesture	Physical description	Translation	Meaning
Gestures of incomprehension / question	<i>Ma che vuoi?</i> (mano a borsa)	Fingers joined, moving up and down	What do you want?	Incredulity, annoyance, request for clarification
	<i>Che dici?</i>	Hand moving from the mouth outward	What are you saying?	Incredulity, annoyance, request for clarification
	<i>Ma che cazzo dici?!</i>	Fingers joined in both hands,	What the hell are you	Aggressive gesture if used

Category	Verbal expression accompanying or replacing the gesture	Physical description	Translation	Meaning
	(mano a borsa)	moving up and down	talking about?!	with excessive emphasis
Gestures of evaluation / opinion	<i>Non mi interessa / Non me ne frega niente...</i>	Hand movement from the chin outward	I don't care / I don't give a damn...	Disinterest, rejection, indifference
	<i>Sei pazzo!</i>	Circular movement near the head / index finger rotating near the temple	Are you crazy?	Judgement about a person, commenting on strange behaviour
Gestures of uncertainty / ignorance	<i>Non lo so</i>	Shoulders raised, palms open upwards	I don't know	Lack of knowledge
Gestures of agreement	<i>Sì / perfetto</i>	“OK” gesture with the fingers	Yes / perfect	Approval
	<i>Va bene / D'accordo!</i>	Thumb raised upwards	All right / agreed!	Confirmation of agreement
	<i>Ho capito / Siamo d'accordo / Sta attento</i>	Index finger pulls down the lower eyelid slightly	I understand / we agree / But also: be careful	Warning / emphasis Usually, left index finger points at the threat
Gestures of disagreement	<i>No</i>	Side-to-side hand movement / index finger waved left to right	No	Disagreement
Emotional gestures	<i>Mamma mia!</i>	Hands near the head	Oh my God!	Surprise, astonishment
	<i>Disperazione</i>	Hands on the head	Despair	Strong emotions
	<i>Rabbia</i>	Biting the knuckle (usually index finger)	Anger	Strong emotions
Food-related gestures	<i>Che buono!</i>	Finger on the cheek	It's delicious!	Positive evaluation of food

Category	Verbal expression accompanying or replacing the gesture	Physical description	Translation	Meaning
	<i>Bere</i>	Fingers bent, thumb pointing toward the mouth	To drink	Drinking action
	<i>Fame</i>	Open hand tapping rhythmically on the side near the stomach	Hunger	Indicating hunger
	<i>Che buono!</i> (bacio del cuoco)	Kissing the fingertips, then opening the hand	Delicious / perfect / excellent	Positive evaluation
	<i>Un caffè!</i>	Index finger raised upward	One coffee	Ordering
	<i>Due caffè!</i>	Two fingers raised (index and middle)	Two coffees	Ordering
Directive / regulatory gestures	<i>Vieni qui!</i>	Hand moving toward the body	Come here!	Invitation
	<i>Vai via!</i>	Hand moving outward	Go away!	Command
	<i>Basta!</i>	Raised hand	Stop (it)!	Interruption
Gestures of secrecy / discretion	<i>Aumma aumma</i>	Hand with fingers downward, circular movement	Secretly / covertly	Informal, covert action
	<i>Acqua in bocca</i>	Finger on the cheek	Don't say anything	Secrecy
Attention gestures	<i>Attenzione!</i>	Raised index finger	Pay attention!	Warning
Symbolic cultural gestures	<i>Le corna</i>	Fingers shaped like horns (index and little finger extended)	Bad luck / betrayal	Context-dependent meaning. Very offensive if directed at a person
Gestures of contempt / rejection	<i>Non mi importa</i>	Movement from the chin outward	I don't care	Contempt, indifference

Category	Verbal expression accompanying or replacing the gesture	Physical description	Translation	Meaning
Gestures of quantity and intensity	<i>Così così</i>	Open hand oscillating horizontally, palm down	So-so	Mediocrity, uncertainty or a barely adequate quality
	<i>Un pochino</i>	Thumb and index finger close together	A little	Small quantity
	<i>Tanto / molto</i>	Arms spread or hands raised near the head	A lot / very much	Large quantity
Gestures for common situations	<i>Conto, per favore!</i>	Writing in the air with a finger	The bill, please!	Request
	<i>Denaro</i>	Rubbing thumb and index finger	Money	Reference to money
	<i>Calma / vai piano</i>	Open hand moving up and down	Calm down / slow down	Regulation
	<i>No, troppo caro</i>	Shaking hand	Too expensive	Refusal
	<i>Un momento</i>	Hand held still at head level	One moment	Request to wait
	<i>Silenzio</i>	Index finger in front of the mouth	Silence	Request for silence
	<i>Minaccia</i>	Hand moves horizontally across the throat	Threat	Threatening gesture

The table could be further expanded to include additional parameters, such as contexts of use and intercultural considerations as suggested by Nobili (2021), and ideally supplemented with graphic or GIF-based illustrations of the gestures in question. However, due to graphical and spatial constraints, the present study offers only a simplified version of the table. It may subsequently be employed as a pedagogical resource in gesture-based activities, such as the following:

- **Gesture recognition activity:** Students are invited to observe and interpret a selected gesture performed by the teacher or their peers. The gesture is demonstrated nonverbally, and learners are asked to infer its meaning. This activity may be supported by visual materials such as images, animated GIFs, or audiovisual excerpts from online platforms (e.g. YouTube) or cinematographic sources.
- **Individual gesture performance:** Each student is assigned a specific gesture along with its meaning. After familiarization, students are asked to perform the gesture in front of the class, while their peers attempt to identify its meaning. This activity fosters active engagement and reinforces the association between form and function.
- **Nonverbal sentence construction:** Once students have acquired a basic repertoire of gestures, they are encouraged to construct and present a complete “sentence” using gestures only, without verbal support. The aim is to promote awareness of the communicative potential of gestural systems and their role in conveying meaning.
- **Dialogue creation using gestures:** Students are instructed to create short dialogues based exclusively or predominantly on a set of gestures provided by the teacher. This task enhances their ability to integrate gestures into structured communicative exchanges.
- **Cross-cultural comparison of gestures:** Students compare Italian gestures with those used in their native language or cultural context, identifying similarities and differences in form, meaning, and usage. This activity promotes intercultural awareness and highlights the culturally conditioned nature of gestural communication.

However, it is also important to emphasize in the teaching process that Italian gestural communication is not limited to hand movements alone. Gestures are frequently accompanied by facial expressions and paraverbal cues, and are closely interconnected with (auto)haptics (communication through touch) and proxemics (the spatial distance between interlocutors).

Facial expressions play a fundamental role in completing the communicative message, as Italian speakers make extensive use of eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and even nasal movements to convey subtle nuances of meaning. At the same time, the interpretation of facial expressions is not always straightforward, as it is shaped by a range of factors, including etiquette, formal protocols, cultural norms, social conventions, and the potential inhibition of emotional display, when individuals may behave differently from what they internally experience. Effective interpretation further depends to a considerable extent on paraverbal features, such as rhythm, intonation, tone, and volume of voice, which together contribute to the overall meaning of the communicative act.

4. Conclusion

A distinctive feature of Italian communication is the high frequency of gesticulation, which is shaped not only by cultural factors but also by pragmatic considerations. Italian spoken discourse is characterized not only by the pervasive use of co-speech gestures, but also by a highly developed repertoire of emblems. These culturally specific gestural forms may prove opaque to non-Italian speakers or to individuals lacking familiarity with Italian communicative conventions. The richness and degree of codification of the Italian emblematic system are further evidenced by the proliferation of so-called “Italian gesture dictionaries,” available in both digital and print formats, which are designed to facilitate the comprehension of spoken interaction for foreign learners and visitors.

Gestures in the Italian context constitute a complex semiotic system that is closely intertwined with other forms of non-verbal, verbal, and paraverbal communication, as well as with cultural norms and patterns of social interaction. Their understanding is essential not only for the development of linguistic competence, but also for effective intercultural communication. In Italian, gestures do not merely serve a supplementary function; rather, they frequently convey key meanings and contribute to the organization of discourse.

This function becomes particularly salient in foreign language communication, where gestures often operate as supportive mechanisms for both comprehension and production. The pedagogical value of gestures is therefore considerable. Research indicates that gestures can facilitate lexical retrieval, support spatial thinking, make complex concepts more explicit, and aid the retention of information in working memory (Abner et al., in Diadori 2024). Moreover, gestures enhance comprehension by enabling learners to grasp the meaning of words and expressions prior to achieving full linguistic mastery. They also improve memorization through the association between verbal forms and physical movement. Finally, gestures contribute to increased learner engagement, making the learning process more dynamic, playful and entertaining, while simultaneously introducing students to a fundamental aspect of Italian linguistic and cultural practice.

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Artificial intelligence and literary interpretation in upper secondary education: A case study on critical thinking and human agency in an Albanian Grade 10 literature classroom

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Abstract: The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has reshaped students’ reading and writing practices, raising questions about interpretation, authorship, and human agency in literature education. This study, conducted with tenth-grade students, examines the integration of GenAI in upper secondary literature classes through a mixed-methods design combining student questionnaires (n = 43), a teacher survey (n = 5), and a classroom intervention (n = 29). Focusing on the myth of Prometheus, the intervention invited students to produce their own interpretations and then compare them with AI-generated analyses. Through guided reflection, students examined differences in analytical depth, use of textual evidence, and interpretive responsibility. Findings indicate that while GenAI supports comprehension and organization, it often lacks precise textual grounding. When used as an object of critical analysis rather than an authoritative source, GenAI fostered students’ critical thinking, ethical awareness, and sense of authorship.

The study suggests that its educational impact depends on pedagogical mediation. A critical integration of artificial intelligence can reinforce the humanistic mission of literature education in the digital age.

Keywords: *Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI); critical thinking; human agency; literary education; pedagogical mediation.*

1. Introduction

The development of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is transforming the way students read, write, give constructive and meaningful opinions, offering new opportunities for supporting learning, but also introducing risks related to dependency, superficial analysis, and ambiguity of authorship. In literary education, where interpretation requires argumentation, sensitivity to

the text, and intellectual responsibility, the use of GenAI raises fundamental questions about critical thinking, authorship, and human agency.

This study aims to analyze how pedagogical guidance, based on the comparison between “student interpretation versus GenAI analysis,” influences the development of critical thinking and the strengthening of human agency among tenth-grade students. The main research question is: “In what ways can GenAI be integrated into the subject of Literature as a didactic guidance tool, so that it strengthens text-based verification, evidence-based argumentation, and students’ intellectual ownership, without replacing the process of critical thinking?”

2. Theoretical Framework

Artificial intelligence is being rapidly integrated into teaching, creating a new didactic reality in which students can quickly access ready-made structures, summaries, and interpretations. Recent studies emphasize that AI tools can increase efficiency and support the organization of learning, but they can also weaken analytical effort when used without guidance, while increasing the risk of plagiarism and confusion regarding the source of ideas (Tripathi, 2025; Cotton, 2024). This places emphasis on the role of the teacher as a pedagogical mediator and on the need to use artificial intelligence in a conscious and critical manner, supported by clear guidance.

At the center of this study is the concept of human agency (Bandura, 2006), which relates to the individual’s ability to act with intention, self-regulation, and responsibility in learning. Bandura distinguishes between personal agency, mediated agency (e.g., the use of tools or external assistance), and collective agency.

In the context of GenAI, mediated agency can be productive when the student maintains control, verifies information, and argues with evidence, but it becomes problematic when the tool replaces interpretive judgment and diminishes intellectual ownership. For this reason, this study conceptualizes GenAI as a tool that can either strengthen or weaken agency, depending on how it is didactically integrated.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method approach with a descriptive–interpretive character, based on data obtained from three sources: an online student questionnaire (n = 43), an online teacher questionnaire (n = 5), and a classroom-based instructional practice (n = 29). The student questionnaire (Google Forms) included Likert-scale and open-ended questions on the frequency of GenAI use, practices of text-based verification, critical

evaluation, authorship, and ethical attitudes. The teacher questionnaire aimed to identify classroom use and perceptions regarding critical thinking and plagiarism.

The didactic activity was conducted over two class sessions on the topic “Prometheus, freedom, and the punishment of humankind.” In the first phase, students produced an individual interpretation supported by textual quotations. In the second phase, they compared their interpretation with a GenAI-generated analysis and wrote an improved version, identifying shortcomings, generalizations, and lack of evidence.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for closed-ended questions and thematic analysis for open-ended responses. Critical thinking was measured through text-based verification, use of evidence, and the formulation of counterarguments. Students’ ability to exercise control over their interpretations was assessed through ownership of interpretation, quality of textual revision, and reflection on the use of GenAI. The research process was conducted in accordance with ethical standards, ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent of participants. Responses on the rating scale were grouped as follows: 1–2 = Never/Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4–5 = Often/Very often.

3.1. Data and Analysis

The findings indicate that generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is present in students’ learning practices, although its use remains largely moderate and non-systematic. Many students use it for idea generation and clarification, but the data reveal significant tensions related to critical thinking, authorship, and ethical awareness.

The results show that a considerable number of students compare AI-generated responses with the literary text and are able to formulate counterarguments, suggesting the development of critical skills. However, a substantial portion acknowledge that GenAI sometimes leads to more superficial analyses or is accepted without verification. Most students report using GenAI as support rather than as a substitute; however, many do not feel authors of their own work when they incorporate artificial intelligence, indicating a fragile sense of ownership.

From an ethical perspective, most students believe that the use of artificial intelligence should be disclosed and acknowledge that it may provide inaccurate information, demonstrating awareness of the responsibility that accompanies its use. Overall, the results confirm that GenAI functions as a mediated tool, whose impact depends on pedagogical guidance.

4. Presentation of Questionnaire Results

4.1. Critical Thinking

The results show that the use of GenAI in Literature assignments is generally moderate and non-systematic. Some students use it for ideas and clarification, while practices of text-based verification (comparing GenAI responses with the literary source) appear inconsistent. A considerable percentage report being able to critically analyze GenAI responses and formulate counterarguments.

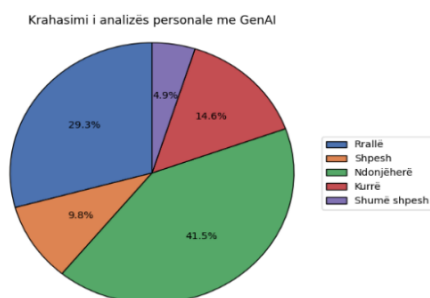


Figure 1. Frequency of GenAI use in Literature assignments ($n = 43$).

The results of the question regarding the comparison of GenAI responses with the original literary text show that this practice is not very widespread among students. A considerable proportion, around 30–35%, report that they never compare GenAI responses with the original text, while about 20–25% state that they do so rarely. Approximately 30% of students respond “sometimes,” indicating a moderate level of information verification. Only a smaller percentage, around 15%, report that they do this often or very often.

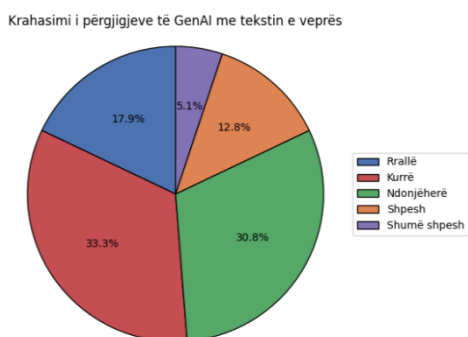


Figure 2. Comparison of GenAI responses with the original literary text.

The results show that a considerable proportion of students perceive the comparison between their own analysis and that of GenAI as an effective tool for developing critical thinking. Around 40% of students report that this process sometimes contributes to deepening their analysis, while 20–25% indicate that this happens often or very often, using comparison as a tool for reflection and interpretive revision. However, 30–35% of students state that this process has limited impact or is absent, suggesting an uneven level of critical engagement and reflective use of GenAI.

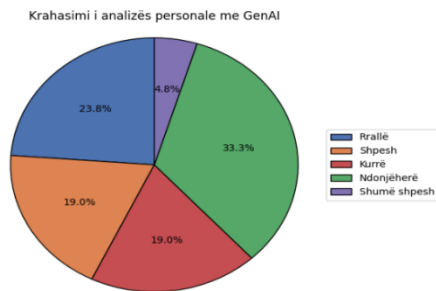


Figure 3. The impact of comparing personal analysis with GenAI analysis on critical thinking.

The results of the question regarding students' ability to provide counterarguments to GenAI analysis show that most of them feel relatively capable of maintaining a critical stance toward AI-generated interpretations. A considerable proportion of students (40–45%) report that they can challenge GenAI analyses often or very often, reflecting confidence in their own judgment. Meanwhile, around 40% do so only sometimes, indicating that this ability is not consistently applied, while a smaller percentage (10–15%) use it rarely or never.



Figure 4. Ability to formulate counterarguments to GenAI analysis.

The results of the question regarding the impact of GenAI on the depth of literary analysis show that students have differing perceptions on this issue. Around 35–40% of students report that the use of GenAI sometimes leads them toward a more superficial analysis, indicating that artificial intelligence may reduce personal effort for deeper analysis. A considerable proportion of students state that the use of GenAI often results in more general and less well-argued responses, while 30–35% do not perceive this as a barrier to developing in-depth analysis.

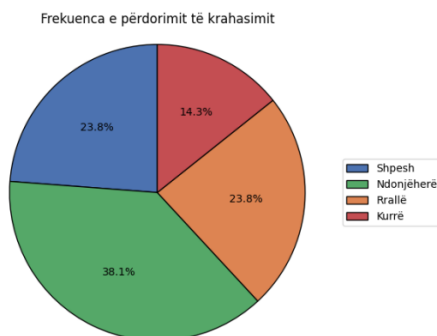


Figure 5. Perception of the risk of superficial analysis when using GenAI.

The results of the question regarding the critical evaluation of GenAI responses show that most students reflect only partially on the accuracy of interpretations generated by artificial intelligence. Around 50% of students report that they sometimes consider whether a GenAI interpretation is accurate or too general, indicating a moderate level of critical reflection. A

considerable percentage, approximately 25–30%, state that they do this often or very often, demonstrating a more active and critical stance toward AI-generated responses. Meanwhile, about 20–25% of students report that they do this rarely or never, suggesting that a portion of students tend to accept GenAI responses without analyzing them in depth.

4.2. Human Agency (Student Autonomy)

Table 1. Representation of human agency in the use of GenAI in Literature assignments

Question	Never/Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often/Very often (%)	Interpretation
Uses GenAI for ideas but writes independently	10	30	60	Assisted use with personal control
GenAI writes parts of the assignment	60	25	15	Partial delegation
Feels like the author of their own work	50	25	25	Fragile authorship

Note. Percentages are aggregated according to Likert scale categories.

The table shows that most students use GenAI primarily as support for generating ideas, while they complete the final writing themselves. Full delegation of assignments to artificial intelligence is not widespread, indicating that students generally do not entirely replace their own effort. However, when it comes to the sense of authorship, the situation is more complex; some students do not feel fully like the authors of their work when they use GenAI. This suggests that the use of technology affects not only how students write, but also how they perceive their role and responsibility in the learning process. For this reason, the main challenge is not only how often GenAI is used, but how to help students maintain a sense of control and ownership over their work.

4.3. Ethical Dimension

Table 2. Ethical awareness and trust in GenAI (n = 43)

Indicator	Never/Rarely (%)	Sometimes (%)	Often/Very often (%)
Using GenAI without disclosure is acceptable	85–90	5–10	5–10
GenAI may seem convincing but not accurate	15–20	40–45	35–40
Need for clear school rules	15–20	40–45	30–35

Note. Percentages are grouped according to Likert scale categories.

The results show that students are quite aware of the ethical dimension of using GenAI. Most believe that the use of artificial intelligence should be disclosed and view this as part of academic integrity. They are also aware that GenAI responses may appear accurate and convincing, but are not always reliable. The fact that they support the establishment of clear rules indicates that they understand that the use of this technology is not only a practical matter, but also a moral responsibility. Overall, GenAI is perceived as a tool that requires guidance and transparency, rather than as an absolute source to be accepted without question.

Teachers’ Level of Familiarity with GenAI

The results of the questionnaire with five teachers indicate that the level of familiarity with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is generally moderate. Most teachers (60%) report having an average level of knowledge, while 40% state that they feel very or highly familiar with these tools. This suggests that, although there is a foundational level of knowledge and experience, further development of digital competencies and structured training for the pedagogical integration of GenAI are needed.

Regarding the existence of clear rules for the use of GenAI in school assignments, 60% of teachers report having established specific guidelines, while 40% do not have formalized rules. This situation suggests that the use of GenAI is in the process of institutionalization, but a unified approach at the school level is still lacking.

In teaching practice, artificial intelligence is mainly used as a supportive tool for designing quizzes, preparing instructional materials, and clarifying lesson content. It is perceived as a functional tool that facilitates lesson organization and increases classroom interaction, but not as a central element of the teaching process.

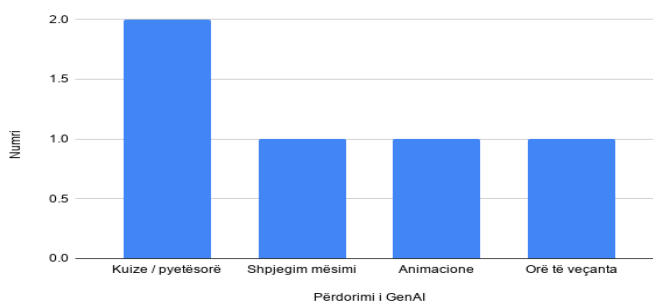


Figure 6. Ways teachers use GenAI in the classroom.

Regarding its impact on critical thinking, most teachers express concern that the uncontrolled use

of GenAI may reduce students’ analytical abilities due to reliance on ready-made responses. However, it is emphasized that, when used in a guided manner, it can serve as a stimulus for discussion and critical comparison.

These results indicate that its impact depends on pedagogical mediation and on how it is integrated into the classroom.

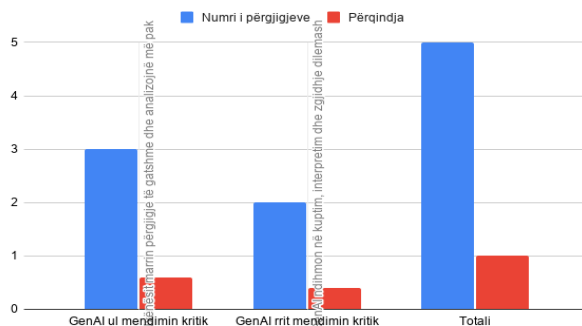


Figure 7. Teachers' perceptions of the impact of GenAI on critical thinking.

Regarding plagiarism, all teachers perceive GenAI as a factor that increases the risk of copying, assessing it as a high risk.

This highlights the need to rethink assessment methods and to design tasks that require personal argumentation and support with textual evidence.

Finally, teachers consider that the types of assignments most resistant to copying through GenAI are those that require personal reflection, active engagement, debate, and text-based analysis. This suggests that strategies grounded in student autonomy and individual experience represent the most effective way to maintain academic integrity in the era of artificial intelligence.

5. General Interpretation of the Experiment

The results show that the comparison between students' interpretations and GenAI analysis contributed to the development of critical thinking, evidence-based argumentation, and personal reflection. Students did not perceive artificial intelligence as an absolute authority, but rather as a source that must be analyzed and verified. The experiment demonstrated that GenAI can serve as an object of critical analysis, strengthening human agency and the active role of the student in literary interpretation.

Table 3. Experimental results by assessment domains (n = 29)

Assessment Domain	Indicator	Responses	n	%
Critical thinking	Evaluation of GenAI analysis	Very specific	3	10%
		Average	16	55%
		Very general	10	34%
Critical thinking	Agreement with GenAI	Yes	7	24%
		Partially	18	62%
		No	4	14%

Critical thinking	Identification of GenAI weaknesses	Identified GenAI weaknesses	19	66%
Evidence-based argumentation	Use of textual evidence	High	3	10%
		Limited	9	31%
		None	17	59%
Evidence-based argumentation	Weaknesses of GenAI analysis	Lack of citations	19	66%
		Generalized / lacking detail	5	17%
Human agency	Better interpretation	Student interpretation	25	86%
		GenAI analysis	1	3%
Human agency	Reflection on learning	Better understood the text	16	55%
		Identified their own weaknesses	12	41%
		Felt passive	1	3%
Perception of GenAI	Positive element	Explanation of the symbol	28	97%
Perception of GenAI	Main benefit	Clearer ideas	14	48%
Perception of GenAI	Main weakness	No citations	9	31%
		Too general	4	14%

The didactic experiment was conducted with 29 tenth-grade students, who compared their literary interpretation with a GenAI-generated analysis of the figure of Prometheus. The results showed a clear development in critical thinking and reflection on the quality of literary analysis. Most students evaluated the GenAI analysis as average or very general (89%) and highlighted the lack of textual evidence (90%), mainly identifying the absence of citations and the generalized nature of the interpretation.

At the same time, almost all students (97%) considered that GenAI explained the symbol of Prometheus well, viewing it as a useful tool for clarifying key ideas. The majority of students (86%) considered their own interpretation to be better than that of GenAI, indicating a strong level of human agency and confidence in personal interpretation.

The comparison with GenAI encouraged reflection on the learning process, as a large proportion of students reported that they identified GenAI's weaknesses (66%), understood the text better (55%), and recognized their own weaknesses (41%), while only a very small number felt more passive. Overall, the results indicate that comparing students' interpretations with GenAI analysis contributed to the development of critical thinking, evidence-based argumentation, and personal reflection, positioning artificial intelligence not as a final authority, but as an object of critical analysis that strengthens the student's active role in literary interpretation.

6. Conclusions and Limitations of the Study

This study analyzed the pedagogical integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in the subject of Literature in upper secondary education, focusing on its relationship with critical thinking and student autonomy. The findings show that GenAI is mainly used as a supportive tool rather than as a full substitute for students' work, while uncontrolled use may lead to more superficial analysis. The didactic intervention based on the comparison between personal interpretation and GenAI-generated analysis demonstrated that, when clearly guided by the teacher, this technology can promote critical evaluation, evidence-based argumentation, and reflection on authorship.

The contribution of the study lies in highlighting that the impact of GenAI on literary education is not predetermined, but depends on how it is integrated into the classroom. When positioned as an object of analysis rather than as an unquestionable authority, GenAI can reinforce the student's active role and intellectual responsibility in the interpretive process.

However, the study presents several limitations. The relatively small and context-specific sample limits the generalizability of the results. Part of the data relies on self-reporting, which may affect the accuracy of the expressed perceptions. Additionally, the didactic intervention was conducted within a single literary unit and does not include long-term measurements of its impact on the development of critical thinking. Future studies with larger samples, longitudinal designs, and applications across different disciplines could further deepen the understanding of the relationship between artificial intelligence and human agency in education.

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Topic of the Paper: Leadership and Innovation in the Digital Transformation of Education

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Abstract: Digital transformation is reshaping the way schools and universities are organized and led: online/hybrid learning, learning management platforms, and information systems make decision-making more data-dependent, while also increasing risks related to privacy and inequality. This paper presents a narrative review of the literature and policy documents on educational leadership in the platform age. By synthesizing transformational, instructional, distributed, and digital leadership, the paper argues that leadership effectiveness depends on the ability to connect technology with teaching quality, build organizational capacity, and establish data governance. Through three empirical examples (schools during COVID-19 and higher education), as well as illustrations from Albanian-speaking contexts, five themes are identified: vision and a culture of innovation, pedagogical coordination, distribution of roles, digital equity, and risk management (privacy, security, generative AI). Finally, a 12-18 month implementation roadmap for leaders is proposed, and the limitations of local evidence are discussed, suggesting research agendas for platform governance and the responsible use of AI in education.

Keywords: *digital leadership; instructional leadership; digital equity; data governance; hybrid education*

1. Introduction

Education in the digital age is characterized by the expansion of online and hybrid learning, the use of learning management systems (LMS), student

information systems, and analytics intended to improve decision-making and personalize academic support (OECD, 2023; European Commission, 2020). This reality places educational leadership before a dual task: (a) ensuring learning outcomes and well-being in diverse environments (classroom, online, hybrid), and (b) building staff capacity to govern technology, data, and risk (privacy, cybersecurity, inequality) (OECD, 2025).

At the European level, digitalization is treated as a policy for quality and inclusion, emphasizing that digital transformation has revealed - and at times increased - inequalities in devices, connectivity, and pedagogical readiness (European Commission, 2020). As a result, technology cannot be seen as a neutral intervention: it interacts with school culture, professional capacity, and the design of accountability systems.

For Albanian-speaking contexts, international reporting on Albania suggests significant gaps in devices and access; the pandemic made it clear that the availability and functionality of devices at school and at home are key factors for continuity of learning (International Telecommunication Union & UNICEF, 2021). At the same time, institutional reform has been accompanied by new information systems and digital parent-school communication tools (e.g., SMIP and the “Digital Communication Notebook”), making leadership increasingly dependent on data governance and the quality of organizational processes (Agjencia e Sigurimit të Cilësisë së Arsimit Parauniversitar, 2023; Agjencia Kombëtare e Arsimit Parauniversitar, 2025).

The problem addressed in this paper is how educational leadership can lead digital transformation without reducing it to mere “technology use,” but instead linking it to teaching quality, equity, and ethics. The objectives are: (1) to synthesize the main models of leadership in education and their relationship with digital leadership; (2) to identify the competencies and organizational practices that support the sustainable use of technology; (3) to discuss empirical findings and ethical challenges; and (4) to propose a practical implementation roadmap for educational leaders.

The paper is directly linked to the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society” because it addresses how technological innovation can be translated into measurable improvement in learning and into responsible data governance, while addressing the risks of digital exclusion and privacy violations (UNICEF, 2024; UK Department for Education, 2023).

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Leadership in education can be approached as (1) influence on people and culture, (2) coordination of teaching and learning, and (3) a practice

distributed across networks and different roles. In the digital age, these dimensions intertwine with the governance of technology, data, and relationships with platforms, expanding the leader’s role beyond classical administration (OECD, 2023; Sheninger, 2019).

2.1 Transformational Model

Transformational leadership aims to inspire performance “beyond expectations” by influencing values, motivation, and beliefs, and is associated with Bass’s classic work and the subsequent development of the concept (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). In the literature, it is operationalized in dimensions such as idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004).

In the digital age, this model is useful for creating vision and managing change (e.g., the shift to hybrid learning), but it risks remaining abstract if it is not accompanied by structures and concrete evidence regarding pedagogical impact (Fullan, 2001).

2.2 Instructional Model

Instructional leadership focuses on the academic mission, management of the instructional program, and the creation of a learning climate. Compared with more “cultural” approaches, synthetic evidence suggests that instructional practices tend to be more directly associated with improvements in student outcomes, especially when leaders coordinate teaching, professional development, and the use of evidence (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

The advantage of this model in the digital age is that it turns technology into a means rather than an end: investments (devices, platforms, analytics) are evaluated by their impact on the quality of learning and on the progress of pupils/students (OECD, 2023).

2.3 Distributed Model

In the distributed leadership perspective, leadership is understood as a practice “stretched” across different actors (principal, deputy principals, coordinators, teacher leaders) and organizational routines. This approach emphasizes that effectiveness does not come only from the “style” of one individual, but from the way roles, coordination, and professional learning are built within the organization (Diamond & Spillane, 2016).

In digital transformation, distributed leadership is especially valuable because change is cross-functional: it requires cooperation among pedagogy, IT, quality assurance, and data management.

2.4 Digital Leadership and “e-leadership”

Digital leadership in education can be seen as the integration of educational strategy with technology governance, a culture of innovation, and digital citizenship. In the organizational literature, the concept of “e-leadership” describes the way information technologies interact with leadership processes and with the coordination of work (Avolio, Kahai, & Dodge, 2000).

In practice, professional standards for educational leaders emphasize shared vision, a focus on equity, system design, a culture of innovation, and clear policies for privacy and security (International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE], 2018). Digital leadership approaches also describe the leader as a “change agent” who builds capacity, not merely as a “technology user” (Sheninger, 2019).

2.5 Comparative Table of the Main Leadership Models

Table 1 presents a comparative summary of the four main models discussed, emphasizing their focus, typical practices, and risks/limitations in the digital context.

Table 1

Comparison of the Main Leadership Models in the Digital Context

Model	Main Focus	Typical Practices	Strengths in the Digital Context	Risks / Limitations
Transformational	Culture, motivation, vision	Vision for change, staff mobilization, trust building	Helps adopt innovations (e.g., hybrid learning) and overcome resistance to change	May remain abstract; without a focus on teaching and data, it risks becoming “technology without impact”
Instructional	Teaching, curriculum, student progress	Academic goals, instructional supervision, professional development, use of evidence	Places technology in the service of learning; links devices/platforms with quality	May be burdensome for one leader alone; requires distributed capacity
Distributed	Leadership as a practice distributed across roles/situations	Professional networks, role of coordinators, organizational routines	Suitable for complex transformations; increases the sustainability of innovation	Risk of role confusion; requires clarity, legitimacy,

				and coordination
Digital / e- leadership	Strategy + technology + governance + data ethics	Digital plan, systems design, privacy policies, digital citizenship	Addresses equity, privacy, security, and the building of data ecosystems	Risk of “technology- centrism” if detached from pedagogy

2.6 Transformation of the Educational Leader’s Role in Digital Contexts

Digital change is not merely the addition of devices; it reconfigures the mechanisms of coordination, communication, and accountability. In many education systems, digitalization is accompanied by new standards, institutional self-evaluation, and greater use of data in decision-making (OECD, 2025; Devine, Kampylis, & Punie, 2015).

Leader of the pedagogical ecosystem (blended/hybrid): the leader must ensure that the organization of learning has didactic logic, is supported by professional development, and maintains curricular coherence in combined environments (Robinson et al., 2008; OECD, 2023).

Manager of data and evidence-based decision-making: digitalization brings more data (grades, attendance, progress, interaction on platforms). This creates opportunities for faster interventions, but only if clear rules exist for data quality, access, and use (UNICEF, 2024; UK Department for Education, 2023). Architect of infrastructure and processes: the leader guides teams toward minimum standards for equipment, maintenance, security, and regulatory compliance, avoiding dependence on ad hoc solutions (ISTE, 2018; OECD, 2025). Guardian of equity and digital citizenship: digitalization increases the risk of exclusion (families without devices/connectivity, students with special needs, rural areas). Therefore, equity of access and accessibility should become measurable objectives of the school (European Commission, 2020; ISTE, 2018).

2.7 Key Competencies for Educational Leaders in the Digital Age

Digital leadership competencies can be organized into six interdependent areas, aligned with European frameworks and professional standards (Devine et al., 2015; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2017; ISTE, 2018). Strategic and change competence: building vision, involving stakeholders, and managing resistance to change (Fullan, 2001).

Digital pedagogical competence: understanding the quality of digital/hybrid learning, assessment, and feedback on platforms (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2017).

Organizational design and capacity competence: creating roles (e.g., digital coordinator), professional routines, and coordination mechanisms (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Data, privacy, and security competence: data inventory, access rules, incident management, and transparency in data processing (UNICEF, 2024; UK Department for Education, 2023).

Digital equity and accessibility competence: measures for learners without access, accessible materials, and inclusive design (European Commission, 2020; ISTE, 2018). Ethics and partnerships competence: responsible relationships with platform providers, informed procurement, and ethical norms for the use of technology (Reuters, 2024).

2.8 Policy and Organizational Implications

At the system level, an important issue is the gap between the “supply” of training and the “obligation” to build institutional capacity: beyond seminars, standards, self-evaluation, continuous support, and data governance are required at both school and system level (OECD, 2025; Devine et al., 2015).

At the organizational level, the main pillar is data governance. In Albania, for example, the SMIP regulation defines rules for the use of information technologies in managing pre-university education data, making the leader’s role essential in standardizing practices and ensuring compliance (Agjencia e Sigurimit të Cilësisë së Arsimit Parauniversitar, 2023).

3. Methodology

This paper is a narrative literature review combined with conceptual analysis. Sources include peer-reviewed articles on digital leadership and technology integration in schools/universities, as well as policy documents and professional standards (e.g., OECD, European Commission/JRC, ISTE, UNESCO) that describe competency frameworks and governance requirements (OECD, 2025; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2017; ISTE, 2018; UNESCO, 2018).

The analysis was organized thematically into four blocks: (a) leadership models and their expected effects; (b) competencies and organizational capacities; (c) empirical evidence on technology integration; and (d) issues of equity, privacy, and AI. Because no primary data were collected from human participants, no formal ethics approval procedures were required; however, citation standards were respected and only verifiable public sources were used.

4. Results/Findings and Discussion

4.1 Empirical Evidence from Schools and Universities

Empirical studies suggest that digital leadership is associated with higher levels of teachers’ technology integration, especially in crisis situations such as the pandemic. A quantitative study in public primary schools in Kuwait found positive links between the principal’s digital leadership and teachers’ technology integration during COVID-19 (AlAjmi, 2022).

In a qualitative study with teachers during COVID-19, the role of the school’s technological capacity and the supportive role of leadership were emphasized in keeping distance learning functional; the findings suggest that “digital capacity” is an organizational condition, not merely a matter of devices (Karakose, Polat, & Papadakis, 2021).

In higher education, a study in Romania identifies relationships among institutional digitalization, leadership styles, and student engagement, suggesting that digital transformation may be associated with outcomes beyond infrastructure (Niță & Guțu, 2023).

4.2 Illustrations from the Albanian-speaking Context: Infrastructure, Platforms, and Data Governance

A summary by the International Telecommunication Union (in partnership with UNICEF) for Albania reports that television broadcasting was used during COVID-19 and distance-learning platforms were created, while significant gaps in devices, connectivity, and the functionality of equipment in schools were identified (International Telecommunication Union & UNICEF, 2021). These findings link digital leadership to two priorities: (1) equity of access and (2) management of the device life cycle (maintenance, replacement, standards).

For Kosovo, the European Training Foundation reports infrastructure gaps and challenges in aligning digital skills with labor market demands; in this context, the management of platforms and digital content becomes an important task of educational governance (European Training Foundation, 2019).

4.3 What Can Be Learned from the Cases

First, the relationship between digital leadership and technology integration appears consistent across different studies, but the main mechanisms are organizational: clear vision, support, professional norms, and capacity building. This brings digital leadership close to a combination of transformational leadership (for vision/culture) and instructional leadership (for focus on teaching) (Fullan, 2001; Robinson et al., 2008).

Second, evidence from resource-constrained contexts suggests that without policies for devices/connectivity and without data governance (EMIS), digital leadership risks being reduced to crisis management, without achieving sustainable impact on the quality of learning (OECD, 2025).

Third, distributed roles (digital coordinators, teacher leaders, data officers) increase the sustainability of transformation, because they turn innovation into an organizational routine rather than a temporary project (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; ISTE, 2018).

4.4 Challenges and Ethical Issues

Digital transformation increases the system’s capacity to collect and analyze data, but it also increases the risks of exclusion and violations of rights. Below are four areas of challenge with direct impact on leadership.

4.4.1 Equity, Inclusion, and the “Digital Divide”

Digital inequality appears on at least three levels: access (devices/connectivity), use (skills and habits), and benefit (the extent to which technology improves outcomes). European policies treat equity and inclusion as pillars of digitalization, emphasizing that without targeted interventions inequalities may be reinforced (European Commission, 2020). For leaders, this implies establishing indicators and mechanisms to identify and reduce access gaps.

4.4.2 Privacy, Data Protection, and Cybersecurity

The use of platforms, analytics, and digital communication tools makes the school a “data-dense organization.” Practical guidance emphasizes obligations for data minimization, transparency, access limitation, security measures, and incident procedures (UNICEF, 2024; UK Department for Education, 2023). Public debates on the role of major educational software providers (e.g., claims about shifting responsibility for data processing onto schools) increase the need for informed procurement and contractual control (Reuters, 2024).

4.4.3 Generative AI and Academic Integrity

Generative AI creates opportunities for personalized learning support, but also risks for academic integrity, dependence on tools, and exposure of data. A responsible approach requires clear policies for use in assignments, transparency about sources, as well as assessment that measures learning rather than merely the production of text (OECD, 2026). Digital leadership must balance innovation with the protection of rights and with quality standards.

4.4.4 Organizational Ethics and a Culture of Accountability

Digitalization increases the “trace” of processes (logs, reports, data) and potentially transparency, but without a culture of accountability it may produce formalism rather than improvement. For this reason, digital

leadership must build auditable and understandable procedures for staff, as well as ethical norms that connect technology with learning goals and with the well-being of pupils/students (Fullan, 2001).

4.5 Recommendations and Implementation Roadmap

The following recommendations are intended for school leaders and leadership teams (but are also applicable in faculties/universities). They are grounded in literature and standards that emphasize the link between technology and pedagogy, distributed roles, and data governance (Robinson et al., 2008; ISTE, 2018; OECD, 2025).

4.5.1 Practical Recommendations

Link technology to learning objectives: every investment should have a pedagogical objective, a success indicator, and a professional development plan (Robinson et al., 2008; OECD, 2023).

Create a digital transformation team with distributed roles: a digital coordinator, teacher leaders, a data officer, and a role for security/privacy, in order to avoid dependence on one individual (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; ISTE, 2018).

Establish data governance: an inventory of the data collected, access rules, retention policies, and incident procedures; ensure that practices comply with regulations and guidance (Agjencia e Sigurimit të Cilësisë së Arsimit Parauniversitar, 2023; UNICEF, 2024).

Treat digital equity as a performance indicator: measure the actual access of pupils/students and describe support measures (devices, connectivity, accessibility) (European Commission, 2020).

Invest in staff digital pedagogical competencies: training should be practice-based (not only “how the tool works,” but “how it improves learning”) and aligned with competency frameworks (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2017; UNESCO, 2018).

4.5.2 12-18 Month Implementation Roadmap

The roadmap below is designed as a cycle: diagnosis -> design -> implementation -> monitoring -> scaling (OECD, 2025).

Phase 1: Readiness diagnosis (0-2 months)

Use institutional self-assessment (infrastructure, staff skills, processes, culture) and map the access gaps of pupils/students (Devine et al., 2015).

Identify the main risks (privacy, security, compliance) and the state of existing policies (UNICEF, 2024).

Phase 2: Vision and objectives (0-2 months)

Define measurable teaching objectives (e.g., use of digital formative assessment, reduction of absences, increased engagement) and link them to the school plan (Robinson et al., 2008).

Communicate the vision and ensure stakeholder involvement (teachers, parents, pupils/students) (Fullan, 2001).

Phase 3: Governance and roles (2-4 months)

Formalize the digital transformation team and responsibilities (coordinator, data, privacy/security, pedagogical support) (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; ISTE, 2018).

Define work routines (data-based professional meetings, PD cycles, simple monitoring reports).

Phase 4: Implementation and capacity building (4-12 months)

Implement pedagogy-focused interventions (e.g., use of LMS for feedback and formative assessment) and support them with practical training (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2017).

Improve infrastructure according to minimum standards and create a maintenance/backup plan (OECD, 2025).

Phase 5: Monitoring and scaling (12-18 months)

Use a combination of data (EMIS/LMS), pedagogical observations, and pupil/parent feedback for course correction (OECD, 2025).

Review privacy, security, and AI policies based on experience and new developments (OECD, 2026; UNICEF, 2024).

5. Conclusions and Study Limitations

This review suggests that leadership in the digital age is less about “technology” and more about the governance of change: leaders must connect technology with teaching quality, build professional capacity, and establish clear rules for data, privacy, and security. In this sense, digital leadership functions as a combination of transformational (vision/culture), instructional (focus on learning), and distributed (roles/routines) approaches (Fullan, 2001; Robinson et al., 2008; Diamond & Spillane, 2016).

The paper proposes a 12-18 month roadmap that begins with readiness diagnosis and ends with monitoring and scaling. For Albanian-speaking contexts, the practical priorities appear to be linked to equity of access, building reliable data systems, and increasing digital pedagogical competencies (International Telecommunication Union & UNICEF, 2021; European Training Foundation, 2019).

The study’s limitations are related to its nature as a narrative review (rather than a meta-analysis), its reliance on secondary sources, and the absence of primary data from specific institutions in Albania/Kosovo. Moreover,

empirical evidence on digital leadership in Albanian-speaking contexts remains fragmented and is often oriented toward project reporting rather than impact evaluation.

For future research, further longitudinal studies are needed to measure how digital leadership affects student outcomes through mediators (professional culture, use of data, training quality). A clear agenda is also needed on platform governance and on the use of generative AI in assessment and teaching, balancing innovation with academic integrity and privacy (OECD, 2026).

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Longing for Liberation: The Concept of Freedom in Kate Chopin's Fiction

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to trace and analyse the concept of freedom in some of the works of the late nineteenth century American author Kate Chopin. She is widely considered today as a predecessor of the twentieth century feminism because of the many, strong, courageous, unconventional and self-assertive female characters that she has created during her short but impressive career in the 1890s American literature.

The concept of freedom is not only very important but also a central theme in many of Kate Chopin's works. Especially freedom as seen in relation to gender roles, marriage, societal expectations and personal identity. Chopin's exploration of freedom is multifaceted and sometimes even tragic. She portrays it as a personal longing that clashes with the rigid conventions of the late nineteenth century American society-marriage, motherhood and gender norms. Chopin's female characters that dare to reach for this freedom, often find that their society offers no support or space for them to exert that freedom. This study will focus on some of Chopin's short stories such as "Wiser than a God", "A Shameful Affair", "The Story of an hour" and on her masterpiece, the novel, *The Awakening*, where the author questions the cost of personal liberation in a world that is designed to suppress it. Kate Chopin one of the most daring American women authors of the 1890 that sought for free literary expression through heroines that demanded freedom and an authentic existence.

Keywords: *freedom, identity, gender norms, conventions.*

The late nineteenth century American author, Kate Chopin who is widely recognised and valued today as a predecessor of the twentieth century feminism in American Literature because of the many strikingly courageous and daring female characters in her short stories and novels. Some of these female characters were so unconventional and self-assertive for the late nineteenth century American literary scene that very often male editors of

magazines or of the main publishing houses would quite often turn her stories down. Even though not a political activist for women's rights herself, Kate Chopin started her writing career in the last decade of the nineteenth century, a decade in which the phenomenon of the New Woman was quite prominent. During this period, the New Women were actively no longer accepting the traditional female roles in the private and public scene. They were most importantly asking for women to have access in higher education as well as in many professions that for centuries had not been available to them but only to men. The American literary scene for the greatest part of the nineteenth century had been quite conservative, preserving the traditional values dictated by the religious morality and good social behaviour. In the Victorian era, it was strongly believed that women's lives had meaning only through marriage and devotion and care to their husbands and children, thus constrained only to the home sphere and focus on these important domestic roles. It was believed and accepted that in themselves women were nothing and only in relation to their husbands and children they could achieve fulfilment for their moral personality. At that time, marriage was also the only option women had to survive outside their parents' home because they could not work and earn their own living and be independent, because they didn't have access to higher education or to many professions as men did. Thus traditional behaviour and defined gender roles of men and women were what perpetuated the inequality and subordination of women during the nineteenth century. The feeling that women were nothing more than servants to their husbands led women to believe that they had no individuality and self outside these domestic roles. In regard to sexuality, the belief of the time was that it was a natural part of life, sanctioned only by marriage. For women it was believed that they had almost no sexual desire at all. Medicine at the time made a distinction between male sexual desire and female reproductive desire. For women, sexual intercourse was only to fulfill the desire for motherhood because the birth and the raising of children provided enough sexual pleasure for them. With the emergence of the science of sexology in the 1890s, the old doctrine of a congenital lack of sexual desire in women started to be challenged. The scholar Elaine Showalter in her study *A Jury of her Peers* (2010) states that New Women's attitudes towards female sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century were quite revolutionary for the time because the New Women believed that women's relative passionlessness as it had been portrayed up to that time in literature was something that was constructed rather than natural.¹

¹ Elaine Showalter, *A Jury of her Peers: American Women Writers from Anne Bradstreet to Annie Proulx*, (Virago Press, 2010), p.245.

Kate Chopin was a writer that dared to portray the taboo topic of female sexuality in her short stories and novel quite honestly and it was precisely because of this frank affirmation of female sexuality in Chopin's work that led many critics of her time to consider the author herself a violator of codes of conduct no less than her heroines.

Kate Chopin is known today for her extraordinary portrayals of women in her works. Women who often dare and challenge, women who try to find and know their own selves, but above all women who seek to define and decide for themselves their own destiny.

Obviously a writer isn't born in a vacuum, its environment will shape and form him or her, and Kate Chopin should have been a conservative writer based on the traditional American literary scene of her time, but she was not, she was almost an oddity, a unique case. And this is mostly and undoubtedly due to her unique family background. It is often said that a writer's biggest treasure is their childhood. Kate Chopin (born Kathryn O. Flaherty) had a childhood rich with opportunities to learn about women, marriage, and independent women². After her father's death when she was just five years old, Chopin grew up in a household with strong women, her great-grandmother, grandmother, and mother, all of whom had outlived their husbands. She did not grow up in a typical patriarchal home, where the husband ruled the household. Chopin learned from a young age to rely on women, and she listened to women's voices throughout her life. At home and at school, she saw women who did everything and were not afraid to speak their minds. Even though Kate Chopin did not study at university, she was educated for twelve years (1855-1867) at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, where the education was more academically challenging and more innovative in regard with the role of women. The nuns taught the girls to knit and crochet, but more important to them were French language and literature, history, and laboratory work in science class. This was a rare thing for girls at that time. There, students were encouraged to participate in intelligent conversations, write interesting letters, and discuss scientific discoveries and current events. Girls were asked to think and reason. Their minds were to be expanded. Sacred Heart students were not trained to be wives, at least not in the traditional American sense. They would become "intellectual companions of their husbands, mothers capable of their sublime faith, women who would courageously face the responsibilities of life." ³According to Chopin's

² For bibliographic information refer to Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980).

³ Emily Toth, *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, Jackson, Miss.:University Press of Mississippi, 1999, pp. 36-37.

biographer, Emily Toth, a nun at the academy named Mary Omera encouraged her to write with maturity and reasoning but also with grace and humour. Writing would allow her to listen, find, and use her own voice.

Like the women in her family, Chopin would become a widow at a young age. And when she began her writing career in 1888, her great-grandmother's stories, her own observations, and her reading had given her a broad awareness of the female psyche and a very personal perspective on women's existence, and she had a strong urgency and inclination to write openly about various aspects of it. Thus with talent, strong ambition, and a long history of intelligent and independent female advisors, Kate Chopin became the author of one of the most radical American novel of the 1890s.

Writers from New York and Boston had dominated the greatest part of the nineteenth century American literary scene, but after the Civil War, New Orleans also become an important literary center. The state of Louisiana had quite often been mythologized in the media as a utopic American space which because of its warm climate and weather had been associated with a more pronounced sensuality. New Orleans with its predominant Creole⁴ culture, its European lifestyle had a reputation for a hedonistic and a more sensual way of life than anywhere else in America. In the decade of the 1890s the number of women that wrote fiction in Louisiana, increased. These women writers were even creating their own literary salons. Kate Chopin was one of them. Chopin was one of the writers who chose Louisiana as the setting for her stories and novels. She is known for her excellent and exquisite depiction of the atmosphere of this state, as well as its ethnic and racial mix of Creoles, Acadians and Cajuns⁵ as well as the African-americans that were ex slaves. At that time in America, New Orleans was the most liberal place regarding the racial mix of peoples. And Kate Chopin captured this spirit and atmosphere of New Orleans quite beautifully and impressively in her short stories and novels even though she herself was born in St. Louis, Missouri but had moved to New Orleans when she got married to Oscar Chopin that came from a Creole background. It was precisely here that Chopin started her literary career and where she set the greatest part of her short stories and novels. Chopin beautifully emphasizes the linguistic differences between the French-speaking areas and the rest of America. Her use of dialects, mainly black, Acadian French and Creole French, is quite impressive and striking.

In the beginning of the 1890s decade, Kate Chopin published many short stories in well-known Eastern magazines such as *Vogue*, *Century*, and

⁴ Creoles who were rich white descendants of the early French and Spanish settlers.

⁵ These were descendants of French immigrants who had been expelled from Nova Scotia in Canada in the eighteenth century.

Atlantic. She achieved the highest recognition and public success with the publication of her first short story collection entitled *Bayou Folk* (1894). Kate Chopin was praised in dozens of press reviews as a young and distinguished writer of local prose, and this definition would follow her throughout her life, although her later works would reflect an increasingly self-confidence and boldness.

Even though Kate Chopin's fiction shares many characteristics with the Local Colour prose that was dominant after the Civil War in the United States because like many authors of this school, Kate Chopin focused on characters from a very specific part of the country, presenting them in their physical and social environment and undoubtedly the enchanting atmosphere of the American South described in her work is very alive and it almost touches our senses while reading, but at the same time if we compare Chopin's world, especially in her two collections of stories *Bayou Folk* (1894) and *A Night in Acady* (1897), with what can be found in other important collections of Louisiana stories of the same time, we find some differences in themes. Kate Chopin's range of stories is quite broad when we compare it with these authors, such as Sarah Orne Jewett, Mary W. Freeman. And this is because Kate Chopin was not interested in a civilization that was disappearing and had no desire to revive the past. Chopin was also not originally from Louisiana, she was born in the state of Missouri and thus did not have the spiritual connection with Louisiana's past, but this was not the only reason for her difference in vision. Kate Chopin's literary vision was broader and clearly went beyond the regional tradition of the late nineteenth century American Literary scene. Kate Chopin very soon transcended and went beyond the conventions of the local colour prose and began to write about what she truly loved and considered important: the drives found in men and women all over the world, primarily love and sexuality. For Chopin, it is only the significance of these essential and permanent desires, not local problems and characteristics, that can give literature a lasting value, and writers should be allowed to write freely about them. What Kate Chopin wanted was to describe post-Darwinian man, with the frankness of French writers. And French authors such as Gustave Flaubert and especially Guy de Maupassant had a very strong influence on her work. In her essay entitled 'Confidences' she admits this herself: "About eight years ago there fell accidentally into my hands a volume of Maupassant's tales... I read his stories and marvelled at them. Here was life not fiction.... Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he

saw...I even like to think that he appeals to me alone."⁶ Maupassant's influence is also evident in her early stories. Emil Tothi claims that Chopin's last story written in 1891, "After the Winter," about the devastating effects of an unfaithful wife on her husband, "seems more like something written by Maupassant than by someone from Missouri."⁷ Thus, although Chopin sold the story to a well-known magazine such as "Youth's Companion," the magazine never published it because the author had used a sentence that was acceptable in France but controversial in the United States. In the story, not only is it said that the hero has a adulterous wife (the first in Chopin's stories), but the narrator describes her as a common type: "Then there are wives and concubines with debauched thoughts; women who forget the importance of yesterday, the hopes of tomorrow in the momentum and confusion of the present."⁸ So the story was not suitable for American readers. This why the local color label was too strict for Kate Chopin and her work. Chopin was one of the first authors to set the literary standards of the era. While the publishers of the time said that the story should be pleasant, preferably a love story, and should avoid all notes of horror and allusions to shamelessness or immorality. Chopin in her first novel "At Fault" is among the first in American literature to mention an alcoholic woman, as well as among the first to deal with the subject of divorce and without moralizing about it.

The concept of freedom is very important and almost a central theme in many of Kate Chopin's works even though she herself was never active in any women's suffrage organization, as her aim was not to change the world but to describe it accurately, to tell people the truth about the lives of women and men in nineteenth-century America as she knew it. Especially freedom as seen in relation to gender roles, marriage, societal expectations and personal identity. Chopin's exploration of freedom is multifaceted and sometimes even tragic. She portrays it as a personal longing that clashes with the rigid conventions of the late nineteenth century American society-marriage, motherhood and gender norms. Chopin's female characters that dare to reach for this freedom, often find that their society offers no support or space for them to exert that freedom.

Some of Kate Chopin's memorable female characters that struggle with the idea of freedom are Paula Von Stoltz from the short story "Wiser than a God". Paula is a young woman who is also a very talented concert pianist who the

⁶ Kate Chopin, "Confidences", *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted, (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), pp. 700-701.

⁷ Emily Toth, *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1999, p. 132.

⁸ Kate Chopin, "After the Winter", *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted, (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p. 181.

moment when she receives a proposition for marriage, despite her love for her fiancé, she chooses her career because music to her is "something dearer than life, than riches and even than love."⁹ Another important female character that struggles is the concept of freedom is that of Madame Mallard in the short story "The Story of an Hour". The story describes the last hour of a woman's life, Mrs. Mallard, a devoted wife and a housewife in the true sense of the word. She is told, with great delicacy, because she has a weak heart, that her husband has been killed in a train accident. Instead of hearing the news of her husband's death, as many other women do, with a paralyzing inability to accept its significance, Mrs. Mallard weeps "with sudden outbursts" and, when "the storm of grief subsides,"¹⁰ she goes up to her room alone, where she sits for a while, locked in her grief. She soon begins to feel liberated and motivated: "Her pulse began to beat rapidly and the blood flowing through her veins warmed and soothed every inch of her body."¹¹ Going upstairs, Mrs. Mallard symbolically ascends to a spiritual world and it is here that her spiritual journey towards self-discovery begins. Symbolically, the open window in her room is full of signs of a new life. From the window, the green crowns of the trees can be seen, the fresh air can be felt, the sweet song of the birds can be heard. The blue patch of sky that can be seen from the window is filled with energy and vitality, symbolically impregnated with a new life. Up in her room, she is far from the things that are below and that symbolize the conventional reality of patriarchal society. Moreover, it is spring and the spring season is the time when flowers bloom, when the world is revived. The same thing begins to happen to Mrs. Mallard. She feels that something is approaching her, something almost tangible: "There was something approaching her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the colour that filled the air. Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognise this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will...When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!". She did not stop to ask if it were or not a monstrous joy that held her.... She saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely... There would be no one to live for her

⁹ Kate Chopin, "Wiser than a God" in *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p.46.

¹⁰ Kate Chopin, "The Story of an Hour", *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, ed. Per Seyersted, (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p. 352.

¹¹ Ibid.

during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence that with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it."¹²

Mrs. Mallard had loved her husband, but these thoughts of her in prospect of her newly acquired freedom through becoming a widow, tell us more about her and that her life in her marriage must have been oppressive despite the presence of love. As she says "She had loved him sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count in the face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognised as the strongest impulse of her being!"¹³ Despite its unhappy ending of this short story for the character of Mrs. Mallard, it tells us about the importance of freedom for women at a time when divorce was not easy to obtain, and life of a divorced woman not easy, that women would rejoice in becoming widows. Edna Pontellier from her final novel *The Awakening* in 1899 would also struggle with her personal freedom to choose and live for herself in a world that wants her confined and happy with the roles of wife and mother. When she comes to consciousness in her male-dominated world, after testing of freedom for women and refusing to compromise, by committing suicide in the end she achieves a for of freedom. Edna's story was that of a woman that was determined to have full integrity, personhood or nothing at all. Her story had a permanent value in American literature as both a warning and a confession. *The Awakening* is a very honest, perceptive and moving novel, but too daring for Chopin's time that it was soon banned and forgotten for over half a century to be revived only in the 1970s when the feminist movement were spreading with great force in the United States.

In conclusion we can say that through her short stories and novels, through the creation of several female characters that long for personal freedom, Kate Chopin was a strong advocate of personal freedom. Chopin challenged social mores in numerous ways, including smoking, walking alone in town and country, running her husband's business for a period after his death, and refusing to remarry. Kate Chopin was among the first American authors to write more truthfully about the hidden side of women's lives, about female sexuality, and about some of the complexities and contradictions in women's relationships with their husbands and with society. In her prose, Chopin often depicts women as seeking more than just to be wives and mothers. By creating heroines who tested the limits of women's freedom, Chopin challenged the

¹² Ibid, p. 353

¹³ Ibid.

dominant gender ideology of the time. Despite the fact that her stories were initially referred to as "local color" -the sub genre of realism in the late nineteenth century American Literature which emphasized the specific characteristics of a certain area, language, customs, charm etc. But Chopin found the label too restrictive because she would say "special problems, social environments, local color and the rest of it are not of themselves motives to ensure the survival of a writer who employs them."¹⁴ According to the Swedish scholar Per Seyersted "she disliked being compared to other local color women writers such as Grace King or Sarah Orne Jewett because unlike them she did not use an old woman as a narrator and because her interest was universal human nature rather than local color per se."¹⁵ Kate Chopin's vision went beyond the regional aspects of Louisiana and this can be easily observed in her strong, courageous and self-assertive heroines. She was probably the most daring American woman author of the 1890s that sought for free literary expression. As her first important scholar Per Seyersted states "what she really wanted to write about was the impulses which are found in men and women all over the globe, especially love and sexuality. Her particular ambition was to describe the woman, to give a true picture of the fundamentals of her existence."¹⁶ Kate Chopin with her stories and personal struggles in the American literary scene at the end of the nineteenth century is considered today as a predecessor of the twentieth century feminism in American Literature because of the many memorable, strong and unconventional female characters that Chopin has created throughout the career.

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¹⁵ Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p.83.

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AI Between Ethical Challenges and Inclusive Potential in the Training of Support Teachers

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Abstract: Given the growing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems in educational contexts, this study presents exploratory research conducted at two Italian universities as part of a specialisation course for support teachers. Using focus group interviews as a qualitative tool, the survey analyses the perceptions of future support teachers regarding innovative teaching practices, considering the great potential of AI to revolutionise the teaching-learning system. The aim is to investigate how educational AI applications and algorithmic personalisation can support inclusive design, facilitating the reduction of barriers to learning. This perspective highlights teachers’ awareness, motivations, skills and visions, both favourable and critical, regarding the impact of AI in the construction of contemporary inclusive educational contexts. In particular, the findings reveal a need for specific training that combines digital literacy with careful and balanced reflection on the use of data. In conclusion, the study outlines the role of AI as a catalyst for academic and social participation, emphasising the central role of the support teacher’s mediation in ensuring real, digitally assisted educational equity.

Keywords: *AI, support teacher, inclusive teaching, educational innovation, qualitative research.*

1. Introduction

It is more interesting and fruitful than ever to draw opportunities for pedagogical reflection from the presence and influence of AI in educational

contexts. The compelling educational and cultural challenge posed by computational intelligence certainly does not end with the adoption of new software; rather, it lies essentially in the ability to govern digital innovation while remaining anchored to traditional principles. It is precisely within these foundational values that real change can emerge. Starting from this ethical core, it is possible to trigger a digital transformation grounded in reflection, responsibility, and transparency. In this way, the foundations are laid for a school capable of navigating hyper-complexity and committed to acting inclusively and strategically, moving beyond the transmissive model toward the enhancement of problem-based learning. Rethinking the role of digital devices means embracing the idea of AI as a “dialectical interlocutor” rather than a mere content distributor. In this framework, AI can take on the role of a cognitive mirror capable of stimulating doubt, dialogue, and in-depth analysis. It thus becomes one of the many elements available to teachers to enhance the unique learning styles of each student, regardless of frailties or difficulties (Canevaro, 2015). If correctly oriented, AI can serve as a mediator capable of making the personalisation of teaching and learning a sustainable daily practice-rather than just a theoretical model-aimed at reducing barriers to participation. A desirable future envisions that the student is not passively guided by AI. On the contrary, through competent use of the tool, students are expected to become more responsible and self-determined in their own learning processes. Ultimately, educating for AI means providing young people with the compass to inhabit current and future technological-digital ecosystems with critical awareness, ensuring that technology remains a valid extension of human potential and not its substitute (Moriggi & Pireddu, 2024).

1. Theoretical Framework

Recent scientific literature on AI in education, often oscillating between techno-optimism and alarmism (Tapalova & Zhiyenbayeva, 2022; Oldfield, 2023), reveals an almost physiological polarization between digital acceleration and the challenge of filtering it through human capabilities. On one hand, AI can represent a valuable tool for reducing barriers to learning and participation; on the other, a critical resistance emerges, fearing the delegitimization of the teacher’s role, as well as the progressive weakening of students’ potential caused by widespread and sometimes indiscriminate use. The introduction of AI into learning processes appears to constitute a restructuring of the educational act, capable of profoundly changing its very nature. Reflections and research on the opportunities of AI in training contexts (Mancaniello & Lavanga, 2024) encompass both the perspective of full personalization – where generative tools are used by students as ‘ever-

available educational tutors’ – and the risk of intellectual “deskilling” at the expense of cognitive enhancement (Crowston & Bolici, 2025). Identifying, defining, and calibrating the fields of AI application in educational settings requires enriching and innovating pedagogy by introducing adaptive learning methods and experiences (Kessler & Massey, 2020). These are based on the use of conversational semantic AI technologies aimed at promoting inclusive educational pathways that respond to the cognitive skills, learning styles, preferences, and needs-both special and non-special-of each student. Currently, the integration of AI with pre-existing educational technologies offers a structural and synergistic contribution to the accessibility, simplification, and complexification of content, spaces, times, assessments, and methodological resources, as foundational aspects of inclusive design (d’Alonzo et al., 2023). Established digital tools (e-learning platforms, compensatory software, assistive technologies) find in AI an “adaptive engine” capable of acting as a significant transformative lever. This allows for the personalization of learning paths, the adaptation and simplification of content to meet students’ needs, and the provision of immediate feedback, making the educational process more flexible, inclusive, and effective.

2. Methodology

The study sample consists of 12 secondary school teachers (5 from lower secondary and 7 from upper secondary), originating from various Italian provinces and enrolled in the Specialisation Course for Support Teaching (TFA) during the 2024/25 academic year (IX cycle). The study stems from the increasingly significant role played by AI’s influence on digital technologies and the resulting profound transformation of the educational landscape, which is keen to adopt the wide range of innovative tools for inclusive pedagogy and Special Education (Montanari, 2026). The aim of the investigation was to explore the macro-area of the training needs and future perspectives of support teachers, in line with the following categories and related questions:

- a) AI and inclusive pedagogy: challenges and opportunities. What would you need to use AI for effectively inclusive teaching?
- b) Teachers’ training needs. Do you believe that specific training on the use of AI for school and social inclusion should be implemented? In which areas?
- c) How do you imagine school 5 years from now?

The initial data collection was filtered through the qualitative tool of the *focus group* (henceforth f.g.), which can investigate the social construction of meaning through narratives and discursive devices. Unlike individual interviews, the f.g. enhances each participant's contribution, triggering an “avalanche effect” (Merton & Kendall, 1946) among participants that

generates in-depth analysis, reflection, sharing, and systemic insights. Within this research, this methodology helped reveal teachers’ skills, proposals, anxieties, and cultural resistance regarding generative AI.

The survey involved three groups of teachers (4-5 people each) enrolled in the TFA at two Italian universities: *Link Campus University* and the *University of Tuscia*. The researchers, acting as facilitators of reflexivity, guided the exchange using a semi-structured outline focused on critical nodes such as the role of AI in teacher training and pedagogical innovation. The essential elements emerging from the f.g. highlighted how the activated reflections can have fertile repercussions on daily practices and, consequently, on the improvement of student learning, in addition to freeing teachers from routine tasks to restore them to their essential role as mentors and facilitators. By metacognitively engaging the participants, the f.g. – conceived as a “third space” between theoretical frameworks and classroom practices – functioned not only as a data collection tool but as an effective model of transformative research (Mezirow, 2016). This approach aims to innovate pedagogical visions and scenarios in response to the increasingly deep and challenging connections between AI and education, capable of activating development trajectories based on the dynamic synergy between *human agency* and AI, alongside the engaging experimentation of *prompt design* for inclusive lessons.

3. Results

The main findings are outlined below.

a) The responses obtained focus on two distinct areas: on the one hand, they highlight the central importance of teachers’ attitudes, as they are called upon, first and foremost, to recognise the potential of AI to facilitate meaningful teaching processes; on the other hand, they recognise that taking targeted action within the context is essential. This aspect emerges clearly from the analysis of the occurrences derived from the text analysis, using the IRaMuTeQ 0.8 software, as shown below:

Occurrences	Frequencies
School	16
Training	13
Teacher	11
Use	10
be able to	10
Student	9

artificial intelligence	9
Boy	6
Own	5
Support	5

Table 1. Responses to the question
“What would you need in order to use AI for effective inclusive teaching?”

The table shows that terms such as *school*, *training* and *teacher* are among the most commonly used, whereas references to AI appear less frequently. This suggests that AI is considered to be of lesser importance than the role of the teacher, understood as a professional working within a context in which training plays a central role. This aspect is confirmed by the analysis of similarities, illustrated in the following table:

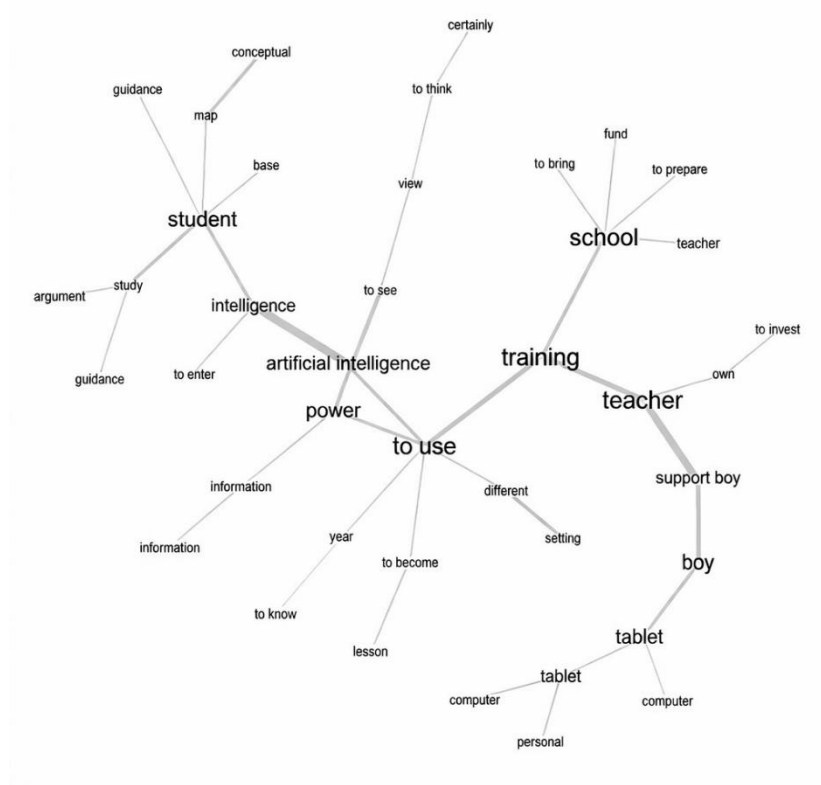


Fig. 1. Analysis of similarities in relation to the question
“*What would you need in order to use AI for effective inclusive teaching?*”

The analysis of co-occurrences provides further confirmation in this regard. Indeed, the presence of central nodes such as *to use*, *training*, *teacher*, *school*, *student*, and *artificial intelligence* highlights that the recourse to AI must be

integrated into approaches that allow for personal reflection and the student's re-elaboration of learning content. Within this perspective, AI can function as a true mediator for a personal approach to study, as evidenced by the cluster connecting *student*, *AI*, *concept map*, *study*, and *base*. As further confirmation, several statements from the interviewed teachers are reported. One teacher affirms that, when creating a concept map, it is always necessary to “*prioritize a direct interaction, as every student has developed their own idea of a concept map*” (f.g. 1, Greta, Lower Secondary School teacher). Therefore, AI should not be thought of as a substitute for thought; it is important to reiterate that “*whoever uses ChatGPT must read and understand what interests them or not, and what they can derive from that information*” (f.g. 1, Valentina, Lower Secondary School). These findings are particularly significant for students with disabilities, as shown by the semantic cluster revolving around the teacher, which reveals a strong link between terms such as *support*, *student*, and *disability*. For this to occur, however, adequate attention must be paid to the learning context, which does not always have sufficient resources. In this regard, two teachers stated the following: “*It is necessary to have a different setting at school. With the right setting, it can be used; if you have a laboratory space, you can conduct certain types of lessons, you can use it very well*” (f.g. 2, Lodovica, Upper Secondary School). “*We support teachers are also lacking in materials. Students with disabilities at school do not even have a personal computer or tablet. If I need to show a video, I must bring my own laptop or tablet*” (f.g. 3, Christian, Upper Secondary School). Another interviewee, however, denounced the fact that, in some cases, teachers are unable to use the existing equipment: “*If you go into school storage rooms, it's shocking. There is everything imaginable, so many things still packed and never opened... There are even tools that no one knows how to use; so, in the end, what is the point?*” (f.g. 3, Vincenzo, Upper Secondary School). This testimony directly recalls the second aspect to which we turned our attention: the centrality of training.

b) Teachers' training needs

This area was explored through the following question: *Do you believe that specific training should be provided on the use of AI for educational and social inclusion? In which areas?*

Quantitatively speaking, all teachers responded affirmatively, citing a range of reasons. Again, for a more focused analysis, the findings from the discourse analysis are presented below, covering both the occurrences and the similarities observed:

Occurrences	Frequencies
Training	24

Power	22
artificial intelligence	18
Teacher	15
Own	13
Class	10
Digital	9
Speak	9
Tool	9
Level	7

Table 2: Responses to the question
 “Do you believe that specific training should be provided on the use of AI for educational
 and social inclusion?
 In which areas?”

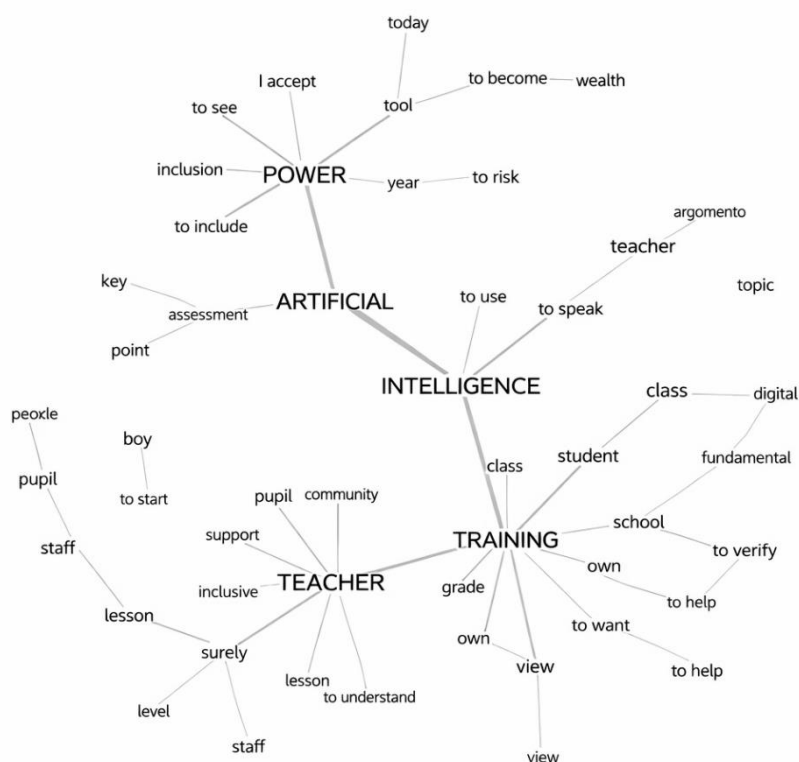


Fig. 2 Analysis of similarities regarding the question:
 “Do you believe that specific training should be provided on the use of AI for educational
 and social inclusion? In which areas?”

In both cases, the results highlight the significance of training, as it is considered a fundamental tool for building an inclusive context. Indeed, around the node *power*, elements such as *tool*, *to become*, *wealth*, and *inclusion* branch out. At the same time, the presence of the term *to risk* highlights how AI is also perceived as a danger. For this reason, teachers must understand its potential to ensure it can function as an innovative agent capable of transforming the entire educational context. First and foremost, it is necessary to refer to the inclusive values that, as highlighted by Booth and Ainscow (2002), guide teacher action: in their absence, AI risks being considered merely a material resource that does not significantly affect pedagogical practices. This aspect is well-illustrated by the testimony of some interviewees:

“In school, we find a great deal of diversity. For example, I teach in a class where there is a student who doesn’t speak a word of Italian because G they arrived from China two months ago, a student with a hearing aid due to hearing difficulties, and another who qualifies under Law 104 with ADHD, motor restlessness, and other issues. If I don’t accept entering a class of this type, if I don’t accept the people inside it, if I don’t promote their inclusion or propose a lesson that can engage them, I could have all the artificial intelligences in the world and the most extraordinary teaching methods, but I will not succeed in delivering an inclusive lesson. AI works only when the teacher accepts and intends to acquire an inclusive forma mentis” (f.g. 1, Simona, Lower Secondary School).

“Before anything else, it is necessary to adopt a 360-degree training approach, especially dedicated to inclusive education” (f.g. 1, Silvia, Lower Secondary School).

“Training is fundamental precisely because, in the school world, there are still very ‘old-school’ teachers who only offer frontal lectures. If they see that students are bored, they keep talking just to finish the syllabus topic. Beyond AI, I would implement training on what it truly means to teach and what it means to include everyone. Some have forgotten, or they have remained stuck in previous generations” (f.g. 2, Milena, Upper Secondary School).

In the absence of this, the risk is that AI will be considered exclusively as a topic to take sides on, in a dichotomous pro/con fashion, without engaging in processes of dialectical problematization. This aspect is clearly highlighted by the following consideration: *“I am very sorry that such an important topic as the digital transition has become mere ‘staffroom talk’ AI is very dangerous: we are paralyzing a subject that should instead be the central theme of our discussions. In the places designated for such talk, it doesn’t happen it cannot be corridor gossip because we risk causing irreversible damage”* (f.g. 3, Vincenzo, Upper Secondary School).

c) Future Perceptions.

In this regard, it was deemed appropriate to stimulate the participants’ imagination by asking them to describe, using a maximum of one or two words (or a metaphor), their perception of school in the next five years. Clearly, this request was not intended to obtain an exhaustive framework, but rather a representation that evoked moods and projections anchored in current experiences. In this sense, the facilitators’ concern centered on the risk that focusing on a longer timeframe might lead to descriptions and arguments that – referring to distant future situations – might be perceived as utopian or, conversely, dystopian. The terms used by each interviewee, identified by their school level, are reported below:

High School	What do you think school will be like in five years?
Lower Secondary	Barely developed
Lower Secondary	Regressive
Lower Secondary	Chaotic
Lower Secondary	All smoke and no fire (downgraded)
Upper Secondary	Environmentally conscious
Upper Secondary	Very different
Upper Secondary	Stagnant and bureaucratic
Upper Secondary	More welcoming
Upper Secondary	Educated and fun
Upper Secondary	Free-spirited and responsible
Upper Secondary	Revolutionised

Table 3: Responses to the question: “How do you envision school in five years?”

The responses obtained reveal the presence of ambivalent attitudes, ranging from optimistic views – which point to processes of change already partially underway – to perspectives that, conversely, reflect a perception of stagnation, chaos, and regression. This aspect is most pronounced among lower secondary school students, who report a greater discrepancy between their personal desires for change and what they observe in their school environments.

This issue aligns with research on lower secondary schools, which still appear to be the most affected by critical issues and resistance to change, with significant repercussions on student learning outcomes, which reveal regional disparities (Falzetti, 2019).

4. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

Although the exploratory study foreshadows an educational ecosystem capable of giving an increasingly refined shape to the “school of complexity”,

the final considerations cannot ignore the specific identification of certain critical issues and methodological limitations that could affect the efficacy of new inclusive paradigms. The first limitation highlights how “tailor-made” pedagogy, in calling for the implementation of AI, ideally requires a homogeneity of cutting-edge technological infrastructure and widespread connectivity to guarantee equity in accessibility. The intrinsic risk of an increasing digital divide could paradoxically exacerbate inequalities between schools of excellence and peripheral or poorly funded realities, transforming a tool for inclusion into a new, even more powerful factor of marginalization. A further critical issue is represented by the difficulty in mapping and neutralizing the cognitive biases inherent in the opacity of algorithmic training data (black box). Entrusting the personalization of learning to systems that may convey stereotypes or produce erroneous information poses the problem of scientific validation of educational content and requires constant human supervision, the cognitive cost of which for the teacher has not yet been fully quantified. In their role as a facilitator of reflexivity, however, the teacher is committed to managing the cultural change produced by complexity, of which AI represents one of the most significant elements (Elhoweris & Al-Gahtani, 2023). In this sense, they tend to perceive it not as a threat to their professional authority or an additional bureaucratic burden, but as a possible ally, despite the actual professional strain caused by bureaucratic loads and deep-seated cultural resistance. Furthermore, the paradox of cognitive delegation must be considered, highlighting the delicate boundary between “thinking with machines” and “delegating to machines”. While recent studies focus on the enhancement of human capabilities, the influence of cognitive laziness or the atrophy of basic analytical skills must be considered. It is necessary to direct research toward the impact of various functions of routine task automation, which can both generate resources for creative thinking and lead to technological dependence, with a resulting reduction in the student’s independent critical thinking. As a recent field of investigation, the study faces a temporal limitation regarding the rapid evolution of generative AI, with the danger of educational-didactic models becoming obsolete before they are even implemented. Therefore, the “school of complexity” requires a systemic commitment aimed at transforming AI from a potential “black box” into a device for widespread reflexivity, becoming a catalyst for human agency. This aims to restore the teacher’s function as a facilitator and the student’s role as a self-determined protagonist of their own learning journey (Korayim et al., 2025). In this perspective, the research conducted paves the way for future developments intended to monitor, through a longitudinal approach, the actual impact of such tools on inclusive practices. The goal remains to inhabit change with a critical spirit, so that digital innovation is always oriented toward the

enhancement of every single subjectivity, in the name of an equity that is, at once, technological and profoundly human (Järvelä et al., 2025).

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Educational Innovation and Artificial Intelligence: Policy Challenges for Pedagogical Quality, Human Creativity, and Sustainable Digital Integration

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Abstract: Innovation and technology increasingly shape educational systems, redefining teaching methodologies, learning environments, and institutional governance. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into higher education, while offering efficiency and expanded access to knowledge, raises critical policy challenges related to pedagogical quality, academic integrity, and the preservation of human creativity. This paper adopts a policy-oriented perspective to examine how educational institutions can strategically manage technological innovation while maintaining human-centered learning principles. Through qualitative analysis grounded in academic practice and institutional experience, the study explores the dual impact of AI technologies: on the one hand, as tools that enhance learning processes and professional skills; on the other, as sources of dependency, reduced student engagement, and weakened critical thinking when insufficiently regulated. The research highlights the urgent need for clear institutional policies, ethical guidelines, and long-term strategies that govern the responsible use of AI in education. Particular attention is given to curriculum design, assessment methods, and faculty roles, emphasizing the importance of aligning digital innovation with educational objectives rather than technological determinism. Examples from higher education, including architecture and design disciplines, illustrate both challenges and effective policy-driven practices. The paper concludes by proposing policy recommendations aimed at supporting sustainable educational innovation, fostering digital competence, and reinforcing the central role of human intelligence in learning processes. These recommendations seek to inform decision-makers, educators, and policymakers in navigating the ongoing digital transformation of education.

Keywords: *Education Policy; Innovation and Technology; Artificial Intelligence; Human-Centered Learning; Digital Governance*

1. Introduction

Recent developments in innovation, digitalization, and artificial intelligence have highlighted both opportunities and challenges in academic and professional contexts. In education, architecture, engineering, and design, reliance on intelligent technologies has become increasingly evident, profoundly influencing learning processes and knowledge production. This raises important questions regarding the quality of outcomes and the adequacy of methods employed, particularly when such tools are used uncritically.

Education represents a fundamental pillar for sustainable development. A central question emerges: to what extent does AI in academia represent genuine progress, and to what extent does it introduce challenges related to educational quality, cognitive development, and professional preparation? The global pandemic accelerated digital transformation, demonstrating both the potential and the risks of rapid technological integration without adequate pedagogical frameworks.

The primary issue concerns the improper use of AI-based tools by students, who often use them as substitutes for autonomous research, limiting analytical, creative, and critical skill development. This highlights the urgent need for educational policies and institutional strategies that regulate AI integration, ensuring balance between technological innovation and pedagogical quality.

This study aims to analyze AI implications in higher education, identify main challenges, and propose policy and institutional strategies for responsible integration. It explores AI impact on learning processes, cognitive skills, and academic quality, emphasizing the need for curricular reforms and appropriate educational policies. Despite growing AI diffusion, structured institutional initiatives regulating its use remain lacking at the national level in Albania, directly affecting student work quality and contributing to reduced individual effort and critical thinking. This study aligns with the conference theme "Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society," contributing to contemporary debates on technological innovation integration. It emphasizes the need for innovative approaches ensuring responsible AI use, where technological innovation supports and strengthens human intelligence, creativity, and critical thinking in educational processes.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Digital technologies have significantly reshaped higher education, transforming teaching methodologies and academic engagement (Selwyn, 2016; Redecker, 2017). However, technology integration does not automatically improve pedagogical quality. As Selwyn (2016) and Bates

(2019) argue, effectiveness depends on pedagogical integration and alignment with learning objectives. Without appropriate frameworks, digital technologies risk promoting surface-level rather than deep learning.

Artificial intelligence offers opportunities to enhance learning, assessment, and academic support through personalized experiences and adaptive feedback (Luckin et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2019). Despite advantages, AI integration raises pedagogical and ethical concerns. UNESCO (2021) highlights risks related to academic integrity, intellectual autonomy, and student dependency on automated systems. Excessive AI reliance may reduce critical thinking and independent knowledge production (Selwyn, 2019). Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) note that research often focuses on technological capabilities rather than pedagogical implications, indicating gaps in understanding AI's effects on learning behaviors in real academic contexts.

Human creativity, critical thinking, and reflective engagement remain central to meaningful learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011). While AI can support learning, it may alter cognitive engagement if used without pedagogical guidance. Holmes et al. (2019) and UNESCO (2021) emphasize that human-centered approaches must guide AI integration to ensure technology strengthens rather than diminishes human intellectual development. However, literature often lacks analysis grounded in educators' direct pedagogical experience.

AI integration requires appropriate institutional policies and governance frameworks (European Commission, 2022). Educational institutions must establish ethical guidelines, ensure academic integrity, and support responsible technology use. The OECD (2021) emphasizes that policies must ensure AI supports human-centered learning and critical thinking rather than passive reliance on automated systems. Many institutions remain in early stages of developing comprehensive AI integration strategies.

This study adopts a human-centered pedagogical framework emphasizing the central role of human intelligence, creativity, and critical thinking in education (Luckin et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2021). It also adopts a practice-based perspective, recognizing the importance of educators' direct experience (Schön, 1983). This framework supports critical examination of both opportunities and risks associated with AI in higher education, providing foundation for recommendations aligning technological innovation with pedagogical quality, human creativity, and responsible institutional governance.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, practice-based research design examining pedagogical implications of AI integration in higher education. The research

is grounded in direct teaching experience within architecture and design education, focusing on how AI tools influence student engagement, originality, critical thinking, and learning autonomy. A qualitative approach enables in-depth exploration of pedagogical processes and student learning behaviors in authentic academic contexts, informed by a reflective pedagogical perspective.

The study was conducted within undergraduate architecture and related courses at two Albanian higher education institutions: a public university (43 students in "Applied Research Methods in Urban Planning", midterm and final exams) and a private university (32 students in "Architecture Studio", midterm presentations and final exam with rubric evaluation). Observations focused on authentic student interactions with AI tools during research, design development, project presentations, and examinations, with particular attention to the final exam phase where AI dependency peaked. Architecture education provides a particularly relevant context, requiring high levels of originality, critical thinking, and creative synthesis.

The primary instrument was a structured pedagogical observation protocol designed to systematically examine student engagement, participation, originality, and AI tool use during academic activities. Data collection was based on direct classroom and studio observation, focusing on student interactions with AI in research, design development, and assignments. Reflective pedagogical documentation was maintained throughout the teaching period, providing qualitative insight into changes in student behavior, engagement levels, and work originality.

Collected data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, allowing identification and interpretation of recurring pedagogical patterns related to learning behavior, technological reliance, creative performance, and intellectual engagement. The analysis involved systematic review and organization of observational data, identification of key themes including changes in student independence and originality, and interpretation in relation to the theoretical framework of human-centered learning and responsible AI integration.

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for educational research. Research was based on pedagogical observation within standard teaching activities and did not involve collection of personal or sensitive student data. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were fully respected, with no individual identities recorded. All observations were analyzed at a collective level, complying with institutional ethical guidelines and principles of academic integrity, confidentiality, and responsible research conduct.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results and Findings

The findings are based on qualitative pedagogical observation and quantitative analysis conducted across architecture and related courses in public and private higher education institutions in Albania. Results highlight significant changes in student learning behavior associated with increasing use of AI tools and general online platforms.

Key findings from the two universities are summarized in Table 1, demonstrating that approximately 76% of students across both institutions neglected traditional research methods, favoring AI-generated content and general web sources instead.

Table 1. Comparative AI Usage Across Two Universities

Course/University	Students	Observation Period	AI/Web Usage & Performance Issues	Main Performance Issues
Applied Research Methods in Urban Planning (Public University)	43	Midterm & Final Exam	Approximately 78% used AI/web sources; bypassed quantitative/qualitative surveys; generated fabricated sketches combining web images	Decline in textbook reading; lack of originality; deviation from site analysis topic
Architecture Studio (Private University)	32	Midterm & Final Exam	79%+ used AI for project images; superficial web info without case studies. Poor oral preparation; lack of conceptual depth.	Weak oral preparation; lack of conceptual depth; superficial presentations

Note: AI usage peaked during final exam phase in both cases.

Detailed rubric performance for the Architecture Studio course is shown in Table 2. Quantitative analysis revealed that over 78% of students relied primarily on general websites such as Wikipedia, online forums, and social media platforms when preparing assignments and examinations, often replacing textbooks and peer-reviewed literature. Qualitative observations indicated growing dependence on AI-based systems to generate explanations, summaries, and solutions. While these tools increased efficiency, they frequently reduced independent research effort and limited deeper conceptual engagement. Students relying heavily on AI and non-academic sources exhibited weaker conceptual understanding and reduced ability to apply foundational knowledge autonomously, whereas those engaging with

academic literature demonstrated stronger analytical and creative performance.

Table 2. Rubric Results for "Architecture Studio" (32 students)

Criterion (Weight)	Exemplary (90-100%)	Proficient (70-90%)	Developing (50-70%)	Inadequate (<50%)	Key Observation (AI Impact)
Creative Problem-Solving (35%)	5%	15%	50%	30%	Superficial ideas; lack of originality
Model/Sketch Skills (30%)	8%	20%	45%	27%	AI-generated sketches vs. manual analysis
Observation/Research (15%)	10%	18%	40%	32%	78%+ web sources without case studies
Design Impact (10%)	12%	22%	38%	28%	Poor connection to smart/eco materials
Participation (10%)	15%	25%	35%	25%	Weak oral presentations

Note: Results show dominance of "Developing/Inadequate" categories due to superficial AI/web usage.

4.2 Discussion

The findings confirm and extend existing research on pedagogical implications of digital technologies and AI in higher education, showing that although AI tools improve efficiency and accessibility, they may reduce critical thinking and independent knowledge construction when used without pedagogical guidance (Selwyn, 2019; UNESCO, 2021; Holmes et al., 2019). Results indicate that AI-supported systems do not automatically lead to deeper learning but can reinforce surface-level engagement and reliance on automated outputs rather than sustained analytical work, reflecting Selwyn's (2019) critique of uncritical digital enthusiasm.

The observed reliance on general online platforms reflects a broader shift in knowledge access and processing, confirming OECD's (2021) warning that digital accessibility does not automatically translate into meaningful learning without structured pedagogical support. The quantitative indicator that more

than 78% of students relied on general online sources rather than academic literature highlights structural vulnerability and gradual shift in epistemological approaches, where speed and convenience are prioritized over methodological rigor. Key patterns in student learning behavior are summarized in Table 3.

This pattern is particularly problematic in architecture, engineering, and design, where learning is fundamentally based on cognitive synthesis and creative interpretation.

Table 3. Overview of observed student learning behaviors in relation to AI and information sources

Indicator	Description
Use of general online sources	Over 78% of students relied primarily on non-academic platforms (e.g., Wikipedia, forums).
Use of academic literature	A minority of students systematically used textbooks and peer-reviewed sources.
Dependence on AI tools for assignments	Increasing use of AI systems to generate explanations, summaries, and solutions.
Depth of conceptual understanding	Heavy AI users showed weaker independent understanding of core concepts.
Analytical and creative performance	Students engaging with academic literature showed stronger analytical and creative work.

The extensive AI use observed illustrates both opportunities and risks (Luckin et al., 2016; Holmes et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2021). While AI can facilitate personalized information access and adaptive feedback, when used primarily to obtain ready-made explanations without complementary engagement with primary sources, these tools may reduce cognitive effort, originality, and independent problem-solving. This confirms the human-centered learning perspective emphasized by Luckin et al. (2016) and UNESCO (2021), according to which technology should enhance rather than replace human intellectual development.

These dynamics acquire particular significance in the Albanian higher education context. Albanian universities have adopted digital platforms more quickly than they have developed institutional frameworks to regulate them. While AI tools are widely accessible, there is currently no unified national strategy defining clear pedagogical, ethical, or academic standards for their use, in contrast with policy orientations recommended by UNESCO (2021), the European Commission (2022), and the OECD (2021). This institutional gap creates fragmented practices and leaves both students and educators without sufficient guidance.

From a policy perspective, findings highlight urgent need for action at interconnected national, institutional, and curricular levels. At the national level, educational authorities should develop comprehensive frameworks for AI in higher education defining ethical guidelines, academic integrity standards, and pedagogical principles (UNESCO, 2021; European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2021). At the institutional level, universities should implement governance mechanisms and faculty development programs supporting responsible AI integration. At the curricular level, the study underscores importance of integrating AI literacy, digital ethics, and critical technology use as formal study program components. Taken together, results confirm that AI in Albanian higher education must be approached as a complex pedagogical and policy challenge requiring coordinated strategies that prioritize human-centered learning and academic integrity.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined pedagogical and institutional implications of AI and digital technologies in higher education, focusing on architecture and design education in Albania. Findings reveal marked transformation in how students access and process knowledge, characterized by high reliance on general online platforms and extensive AI tool use, often at the expense of traditional academic research methods and independent cognitive engagement.

While AI and digital technologies provide important benefits in efficiency, accessibility, and learning support, results demonstrate that their unregulated and pedagogically unstructured use may weaken essential academic competencies, including independent research capacity, critical thinking, conceptual understanding, and creative problem-solving. The study makes important contribution by providing empirical evidence grounded in real pedagogical practice, documenting how students increasingly replace textbooks and peer-reviewed literature with simplified digital content and AI-generated explanations.

Results support balanced, human-centered approach in which AI functions as supportive tool embedded within robust pedagogical frameworks, institutional governance, and national education policies (Holmes et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2021; Luckin et al., 2016), rather than as substitute for human intellectual effort. Findings have direct implications at national, institutional, and curricular levels in Albania. At national level, they underline urgent need for comprehensive policy framework governing AI use, establishing ethical standards and pedagogical principles aligned with international best practices (UNESCO, 2021; European Commission, 2022; OECD, 2021). At

institutional level, universities are called to adopt clear governance strategies regulating AI use in teaching, learning, and assessment. At curricular level, the study highlights need for structural reform through introduction of dedicated courses on AI literacy, digital ethics, and critical technology use.

Ultimately, successful AI integration in Albanian higher education depends on balanced and human-centered approach that preserves academic integrity, strengthens intellectual development, and promotes sustainable educational innovation. If supported by coherent policies, institutional leadership, and pedagogical vision, AI can be transformed from source of dependency into strategic instrument for enhancing educational quality and preparing future generations for complex demands of digital society.

5.2 Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

Despite contributions, this study has limitations. Research was conducted within specific academic context, focusing on architecture and design education in selected Albanian institutions. Findings may not be fully generalizable to all disciplines or educational systems. The study was based primarily on qualitative observation and contextual indicators rather than large-scale statistical data. Future research could benefit from broader quantitative studies involving larger, more diverse populations and longitudinal studies examining long-term AI integration impact on learning outcomes. Comparative studies across different disciplines, institutions, and national contexts would further contribute to understanding how AI can be integrated to enhance educational quality.

5.3 Policy and Curriculum Reform Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several concrete recommendations can be proposed for higher education institutions and national education authorities in Albania:

1. Introduction of AI Literacy Courses

Universities should introduce mandatory courses focused on artificial intelligence literacy, digital ethics, and responsible technology use. These courses should help students understand both the capabilities and limitations of AI tools.

2. Curriculum Reform to Strengthen Critical Thinking

Academic curricula should prioritize analytical reasoning, independent research, and creative problem-solving. Assessment methods should be redesigned to evaluate students' intellectual processes rather than only final outputs.

3. Development of National AI Education Policy Framework

The Ministry of Education and national accreditation bodies should develop formal guidelines regulating AI use in higher education, ensuring consistency, academic integrity, and pedagogical quality across institutions.

4. Faculty Training and Institutional Capacity Building

Universities should implement professional development programs to support faculty in integrating artificial intelligence into teaching in pedagogically appropriate and responsible ways.

5. Establishment of Institutional Governance and Ethical Guidelines

Higher education institutions should develop formal policies defining acceptable and unacceptable uses of artificial intelligence in academic work, ensuring transparency and academic integrity. These reforms would support the responsible integration of artificial intelligence while preserving the fundamental role of human intelligence, creativity, and critical thinking in higher education.

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Preventing Drop-out from Sport: Technological Innovation and Educational Strategies

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Abstract: Youth sport drop-out represents a crucial educational challenge in contemporary digital societies, often signaling broader forms of social and formative fragility.

Rather than interpreting disengagement from sport as a simple interruption of physical activity, this study conceptualizes drop-out as a potential indicator of misalignment between young people’s developmental needs and the responses offered by educational and sport institutions. Drawing on exploratory research conducted among 88 university students enrolled in Motor Sciences programs, the study investigates perceptions of sport discontinuity and its possible connection with educational drop-out. Findings suggest that sport disengagement is perceived as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by motivational, relational, structural and cultural factors, including performance pressure, loss of intrinsic motivation, institutional imbalance and competing digital environments. Within this framework, pedagogy assumes a strategic mediating role.

Technological innovation is not approached as an end in itself, but as a potential educational device capable of supporting personalization, formative feedback and inclusion. The integration of digital monitoring systems and gamified strategies may contribute to enhancing self-efficacy and sustaining engagement, provided that such tools are embedded within coherent pedagogical designs.

The study highlights the responsibility of universities in preparing future professionals capable of integrating embodied pedagogy and digital competence, fostering hybrid educational ecosystems that promote continuity, well-being and inclusive participation.

Keywords: *sport drop-out, technological innovation, physical education, digital society, well-being, inclusion*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

In contemporary digital societies, educational environments are increasingly shaped by processes of technological innovation, cultural acceleration and reconfiguration of social interactions. Within this evolving landscape, sport and physical education represent crucial, yet often underestimated, domains of youth development. Far from being merely recreational activities, organized sport contexts function as formative spaces where young people experience discipline, cooperation, resilience and identity construction. However, recent data indicate a significant rise in youth sport drop-out rates. According to ISTAT (2024), approximately 1.56 million young people aged between 10 and 24 discontinued sport participation in Italy, with higher rates among girls (21.6%) compared to boys (15.1%). The primary reasons reported include lack of time (41.9%), loss of interest (39.1%), academic commitments (16.2%) and economic constraints (7.6%). These figures suggest that sport disengagement is not an isolated phenomenon but part of broader social and educational transformations. In digitalized contexts, young people's time, attention and motivational resources are increasingly distributed across hybrid environments that combine physical and virtual experiences.

1.2 Research Problem and Objectives

The research problem addressed in this study concerns the misalignment between young people's developmental needs and the responses provided by educational and sport institutions in a digital society. Specifically, the study investigates whether sport drop-out may represent an early indicator of broader educational fragility, potentially connected to school or university disengagement. The objectives of this paper are threefold: 1) To reinterpret youth sport drop-out as a pedagogical issue situated within digital educational ecosystems; 2) To explore students' perceptions of the relationship between sport disengagement and educational continuity through exploratory empirical research; 3) To outline sustainable, innovation-oriented intervention strategies capable of integrating technological tools within inclusive educational practices.

1.3 Relevance to the Conference Theme

This study directly addresses the conference theme “Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society” by examining how technological innovation can be pedagogically governed to prevent youth disengagement from formative environments. Within the thematic area “Innovation & Technology in Education,” the paper proposes a model in which digital

feedback systems, gamification strategies and monitoring tools are treated as mediating devices for personalization, inclusion and well-being.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Youth Sport Drop-out: Motivational and Structural Perspectives

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017) has been widely applied to sport contexts, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, competence and relatedness in sustaining intrinsic motivation. Empirical studies indicate that when these basic psychological needs are frustrated—through excessive performance pressure, lack of enjoyment, or limited agency—young people are more likely to disengage (Crane & Temple, 2015). Bandura’s (1997) concept of self-efficacy further contributes to understanding how perceived competence influences persistence in physical activity. Sociological studies highlight structural factors such as socioeconomic inequality, gender disparities, and access to facilities (Coakley, 2011).

2.2 Sport as Educational Space: A Pedagogical Perspective

From a pedagogical perspective, sport cannot be reduced to physical performance. It represents a formative environment where corporeality, relationality and identity are constructed. Authors such as Bertolini (1988) and Mortari (2007) underline the embodied nature of learning. Within this framework, sport drop-out assumes a broader meaning: it may signal a rupture in formative continuity rather than simply the cessation of physical activity. This perspective resonates with ecological approaches (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which conceptualize development as embedded within interconnected systems.

2.3 Digital Society and Educational Mediation

The digital society reshapes attention, temporality, and motivational structures. Rosa (2013) conceptualizes contemporary societies by processes of social acceleration, where individuals experience pressure to optimize time and performance. In sport contexts, digital technologies offer both opportunities (monitoring, gamification) and risks (excessive quantification, anxiety). In the digital age, the 'lack of time' reported by 41.9% of young people (ISTAT, 2024) should be reinterpreted as a form of 'temporal poverty' or 'subjective acceleration'. Digital environments fragment the day into micro-tasks, reducing the mental space necessary for long-term sporting commitment. From a pedagogical perspective, technological innovation must not be an additional burden of performance monitoring, but a tool to help students reclaim their time. This requires a shift from 'quantified self' (pure

data collection) to 'qualified self' (pedagogical awareness of one's own limits and rhythms).

2.4 Identified Gap and Conceptual Positioning

The review reveals gaps in the integration between sport pedagogy and digital innovation. This study adopts a pedagogical-ecological perspective in which sport drop-out is interpreted as an indicator of misalignment within hybrid learning ecosystems.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts an exploratory descriptive research design. The research follows a predominantly qualitative orientation, supported by descriptive quantitative data.

3.2 Participants and Sampling Strategy

The study involved 88 students enrolled in Motor Sciences programs. 94.3% were from the University of Urbino and 5.7% from the University of Bologna. 65.9% identified as male and 34.1% as female. A convenience sampling strategy was adopted.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the study sample (N=88)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
University	Urbino	83	94.3%
	Bologna	5	5.7%
Gender	Male	58	65.9%
	Female	30	34.1%
Primary Activity	Full-time Student	65	73.9%
	Working Student	22	25.0%
	Other	1	1.1%

3.3 Instruments and Procedures

Data were collected through an anonymous online questionnaire (Google Forms). It included demographic info, sport participation patterns, and reflections on ISTAT 2024 data.

3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative responses from open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles: participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity was guaranteed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

Among the 88 respondents, 63.6% currently practice organized sport. 69.4% perceived a connection between sport drop-out and educational drop-out. Recurring reasons for this connection include loss of motivation, performance pressure, and lack of balance between academic and sport commitments. This pressure is clearly reflected in the students' words. One respondent noted:

The competitive environment often focuses only on the podium. When you feel you can no longer meet those expectations, and at the same time school becomes more demanding, the easiest thing to do is to give up sport, because it is no longer seen as a space for well-being but as another test to pass.

Our exploratory survey confirms that the link between sport and educational drop-out is perceived as a structural issue. The 69.4% of respondents who see a connection between the two phenomena highlight how sport functions as a 'barometer' of educational resilience. As suggested by the qualitative feedback, sport is 'discipline and responsibility'; its abandonment often precedes or accompanies a broader 'nihilistic' detachment from institutional learning environments.

Regarding the management of time in a digitalized society, a student observed: Between hours spent on social media for study or leisure and the load of university exams, sport becomes 'stolen time'. Without an educator who helps you integrate these two worlds, you feel constantly overwhelmed and behind schedule.

This finding suggests that sport-based interventions can serve as early-warning systems for broader educational fragility in the digital society.

4.2 Discussion

The high percentage identifying a connection supports the hypothesis that discontinuities in formative contexts share underlying dynamics. The findings

align with ecological models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

5. Conclusion and Strategic Proposals

5.1 Pedagogical Strategies for Digital Ecosystems Based on the theoretical framework and initial survey insights, several pedagogical strategies can be proposed to tackle drop-out in digital ecosystems:

Hybrid Mentorship Models:

Universities should train 'Digital Sport Tutors'—professionals capable of integrating embodied pedagogy with digital fluency to help students balance academic and athletic paths.

Formative vs. Summative Technology:

Sport clubs and schools should move away from using wearable tech solely for ranking and competition. Instead, technology should provide 'formative feedback' to enhance self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation, addressing the 'loss of interest' reported by 39.1% of youth.

The 'Flipped Sport' Approach:

This strategy involves the use of digital platforms to provide athletes with theoretical content, video analysis, and tactical schemes before the actual training session (on-demand). In this way, time spent "on the field" is not wasted on theoretical explanations but is dedicated entirely to the quality of human interaction, physical movement, and sociality, thereby maximizing the educational value of physical presence.

As a participant effectively summarized:

Digital tools are useful if they help us prepare better, but they cannot replace the coach's gaze. We don't need a computer that tells us we are slow; we need someone who understands why we are tired today and helps us find the motivation to stay on the field.

Another crucial aspect involves the very first approach to sport, which sets the foundation for future persistence and prevents early traumatic disengagement.

As one respondent profoundly reflected:

The phase in which a child first approaches a sport is very delicate; the coach-educator must be capable of positively influencing the child by listening to their fears and accepting their insecurities. It is fundamental to promote a sunny and welcoming environment where the coach leaves them the right freedom to experiment and get to know each other, finding a balance between teaching and fun that guarantees a healthy approach to sports practice.

The qualitative feedback from our sample emphasizes the urgency of this pedagogical shift. As one respondent pointed out:

The phenomenon of sports drop-out is growing because today more importance is given to sporting results themselves rather than the growth of the child. At a certain age, we don't need coaches, but prepared educators who aim for the growth and fun of the youth.

This testimony highlights that the digital transition must be accompanied by a 'human-centric' approach, where technology supports the educator in focusing on the person, not just the performance.

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

The study is limited by the small convenience sample (N=88) and the use of self-reported data. Future research should extend to larger samples and longitudinal designs to better understand the long-term impact of digital mediation on sport persistence.

4.3 Final Remarks: Towards an Onlife Pedagogy

The findings of this research highlight the need to revise the training programs for future Physical Education and Motor Science professionals. Training should integrate pedagogical digital literacy, enabling coaches to use data as a support for the educational relationship rather than as a tool for judgment.

Furthermore, developing soft skills and the ability to design hybrid ecosystems (such as Flipped Sport) is essential to reduce the time poverty experienced by young athletes.

In conclusion, preventing sport drop-out in the digital age requires more than the adoption of new tools; it demands a radical shift in the pedagogical paradigm. The future of physical education lies in creating onlife learning ecosystems, where the challenge is not to choose between the physical and the digital, but to build a strategic bridge between them. By emphasizing the educational value of effort and the social meaning of belonging, technological innovation can become a mediator of inclusion rather than a barrier.

Shaping the future means ensuring that the digital revolution does not alienate the body, but instead provides new languages through which movement can be experienced as a fundamental human right, thus supporting a sustainable path toward well-being and holistic development.

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AI Ethics in Education

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies are increasingly present in everyday life, from virtual assistants and content creation tools to more advanced uses in fields such as autonomous driving and healthcare.

AI has also been widely adopted in the educational domain, with promised benefits of personalized learning, real-time assessment, and inclusiveness for students with special needs. However, AI’s rapid evolution has left limited time to account for ethical issues concerning trustworthiness of the data sources, privacy breaches, decreased problem-solving skills, and lack of interpersonal relationships with instructors and peers.

This study brings together the main ethical concerns related to Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED) and provides recommendations for responsible usage of AI technologies to facilitate the learning process. The paper offers practical recommendations for the responsible use of AI in education.

The aim is to support educators, institutions, and policymakers in using AI in ways that improve learning while protecting ethical standards and equal access to education in a digital society.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED), AI Ethics, Educational Technology, Responsible AI*

1.Introduction

The rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence technologies and their prevalent deployment have reached the education realm and promise innovative solutions to common challenges such as student engagement, prediction of student performance, and personalized learning. However, there are still limitations that need to be considered before further integrating GAI into the educational system. This study explores the application of Generative AI technologies in the context of educational practices, the resultant benefits, and the ethical limitations of such tools. The main contribution of this paper is a systematic analysis of how the deployment of GAI in education affects students and the broader academic system. The development of generative AI has recently accelerated the utilization of intelligent tools in instructional settings that most students already live in. Whether it's an automated tutoring system or AI-empowered content generation, such systems are transforming how students learn and how they engage with their learning. These advances provide significant opportunities for enhancing accessibility and improving personalization in education, but they also result in complex ethical challenges including transparency, accountability, and responsible use of AI systems.

This paper is structured as follows. Section 2 examines the history of Artificial Intelligence, the technological foundations of AI, more specifically that of Generative AI. The benefits of using GAI technologies in education are listed, as well as the ethical challenges AI usage poses to the educational system. Section 3 discusses the methodology of this study and the tools used. Finally section 4 provides discussion of the reviewed articles and recommendations on strategies to handle the regulation of AI ethics in education.

2. Literature Review

Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the study and development of entities that simulate intelligent behavior utilizing computer technology. As firstly theorized by Alan Turing in 1950, the thought experiment named accordingly the Turing Test ([Turing, 1950](#)), a computer or machine would be considered intelligent if the answers to the questioning of a human interrogator would be indiscernible whether they came from a human or a machine([Brunette et al., 2009](#)). Therefore, to pass the Turing Test a machine should have the ability to process natural language, retain the information it receives, answers queries and draws new conclusions, and finally be able to adapt to new circumstances ([Cordeschi, 2007](#); [Yousri Adli et al., 2022](#)). The field is said to have received its name during the conference in July 1956 at Dartmouth College, from John

McCarthy who coined the term “Artificial Intelligence” ([McCarthy et al., 2006](#)). Participating in the conference were the main pioneers that would later build the foundations of the extensive field of AI that has taken the world by storm, such as McCarthy, Marvin Minsky, Claude Shannon, Nathan Rochester, Oliver Selfridge, Ray Solomonoff, Trenchard More, Arthur Samuel, Allen Newell, and Herbert Simon ([Brunette et al. 2009](#)).

During its development, Artificial Intelligence systems have been categorized into two approaches. The first approach was focused more on creating efficient machines that facilitated repetitive and intellectual tasks for humans. The second approach, however, had a more theoretical aim and strived to simulate the human brain and effectively duplicate its mental capabilities ([Cordeschi, 2007](#)). Artificial intelligence as a domain is quite broad and can be sectioned into subdivisions including machine learning, computer vision, natural language processing, deep learning, and reinforcement learning ([Yousri Adli et al., 2022](#)). These technologies find extensive applications in the medical, surveillance, autonomous systems, finance, and education field to name a few ([Brunette et al., 2009](#)).

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Generative Artificial Intelligence (gen AI) refers to the type of AI technology that can create content of textual or graphical nature. Based on learned patterns and datasets Gen AI is capable of “generating” text, images, videos, and code ([Pang and Wei, 2025](#); [Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#); [Stryker and Scapicchio, 2024](#)). To identify, encode patterns and then use the collected data to construct new content, Gen AI utilizes different techniques such as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), diffusion models, variational autoencoders, and transformers.

Generative adversarial networks (GANs) are machine learning models that learn patterns from existing datasets and generate realistic data based on them. They operate using an unsupervised learning framework with two neural networks working together – a generator and a discriminator ([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#)). The generator model learns from the data distribution and generates samples, while the discriminator model labels them into real or fake ([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#); [Varughese](#)).

Diffusion-based networks are used primarily for image generation. Training of the model is done in two parts: the forward process that gradually adds random noise to the data, and the reverse process that removes the noise and constructs data samples that resemble the original data distribution ([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#); [Stryker and Bergmann](#)).

Variational autoencoders (VAEs) can generate content by varying the input data they were trained on. The VAE uses two models: the encoding model that

compresses the input data into its most distinctive attributes, and the decoding model that reconstructs the input from the compressed view. VAEs operate using mainly unsupervised learning but can be modified to work with supervised or semi-supervised as well ([Stryker and Bergmann](#)). Transformers are neural networks designed to handle sequential data. The architecture consists of an encoder and decoder. ([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#)) The input text is converted into tokens according to their significance which allows transformers to focus on the most relevant parts of the text. Transformers are heavily utilized in constructing LLMs with GPTs being transformer models that use multi-head attention feature ([Stryker and Bergmann](#)).

2. Foundation Models and LLMs

Training gen AI models comes with large computational and economic costs. Enormous amounts of processing resources such as GPUs are needed to perform the training process. To make the procedure more cost-effective Foundation models (FMs) and Large Language Models (LLMs) were developed ([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#); [Murphy, 2022](#)). FMs can achieve general-purpose generation including videos, texts, images, sounds, and a mixture of multiple modalities (multimodal FMs). They are trained on unlabeled and unstructured data of enormous size. Foundation models are considered the starting stage for developing AI models that are cost-efficient, with BERT and GPT being the most common ([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#)). Large Language models (LLMs) [Stryker](#) are treated as a subset of FMs since they generate text, but not the other modalities that FMs are designed to produce. LLMs are trained to handle natural language patterns and comprehend it. Other than that, LLMs provide translations, tone analysis, generate written texts, answer questions as virtual assistants and chatbots, correct grammatical errors and debug programming code([Håkansson and Phillips-Wren, 2024](#)). At its core LLM is a probabilistic model that works as a giant statistical machine to predict the sequence of words given a context and pattern. They are one of the most accessible Gen AI technologies with public LLMs such as Open AI’s ChatGPT, Microsoft’s Copilot, Meta’s Llama models, and Google’s Gemini assistant ([Stryker](#)).

3. Benefits of GAI in Education

GAI (Generative AI) can be leveraged by educators to handle routine tasks and alleviate their workload in order to focus their attention toward individualized teaching activities ([Pedro et al., 2019](#)). The various advantages of integrating these technologies into the academic workflow are summarized

in Figure 1. With GAI educators can achieve faster completion rates of administrative processes such as student enrollment, attendance tracking, classroom scheduling, resource allocation, and quick feedback delivery ([Hannan and Liu, 2021](#); [Makinde et al., 2024](#)). GAI systems could also be included in the process of grading to provide a more efficient use of time during course evaluation allowing students to recognize probable areas of weaknesses ([Bashir and Lapshun, 2025](#)).

Moreover, GAI can enhance decision making during course preparation and choosing teaching practice. ([Dehbozorgi et al., 2024](#)) provides a gen AI driven system for selecting pedagogical practices tailored to the course and classroom. Particularly this can be helpful in training novice educators in adopting the best possible practices for classroom management ([Pang and Wei, 2025](#)).

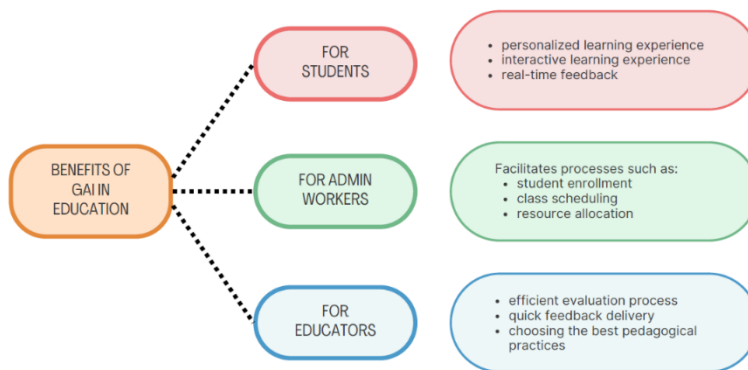


Fig. 1 Benefits of Gen AI in Education.

Students can benefit from GAI technologies to personalize the learning experience to match their needs ([Halkiopoulou and Gkintoni, 2024](#)). Instead of relying on standardized practices of receiving identical instruction from the educators, GAI can cater to the students' actual questions and weak spots within the subject ([Binhammad et al., 2024](#)). The learning process can be enriched by making it more interactive which can be accomplished easily through GAI, providing a simulated situation where students can practice their knowledge ([Lau and Lee, 2012](#)). For example, when used in programming courses, GAI facilitated debugging and code comprehension ([Pang and Wei, 2025](#)). When utilized to resolve issues rather than to generate complete solutions, GAI can greatly improve student scores ([Ghimire and Edwards, 2024](#)).

Moreover for any course material, GAI can generate questions of different levels to further personalize the process of self-assessment done from the students ([Fawzi et al., 2024](#)).

4. Ethical challenges of AI in Education

Despite its usefulness and extensive utilization in recent years, GAI technologies pose several ethical challenges of different nature. From concerns over unfairness and biases, to privacy and security problems, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure safety while using GAI. In ([Harambam et al., 2018](#)) three distinct levels of AI ethical fields of concern are introduced: ethics of the design of the algorithm architecture, the ethical consequences of the deployment of GAI, and strategies for long-term regulation of these technologies. The main ethical concerns associated with generative AI technologies in education are summarized in Figure 2.

One of the most significant challenges of GAI is the unfairness and biases included in the system ([Rane et al., 2024](#)). Due to biased data, or insufficient representation of marginalized communities, GAI technologies can fail to analyze and produce a fair learning experience for students in these groups ([Baker and Hawn, 2021](#)). Another concern when using GAI is privacy and security issues. Since these systems acquire and maintain in their databases large amounts of data, risks of privacy breaches are high. Learners can give up sensitive information which in case of a cyber attack can be retrieved and used in malicious ways ([Mueller and Stephens, 2022](#)). This is especially problematic with learners of minor age who are endangered by such practices ([Bashir and Lapshun, 2025](#)).

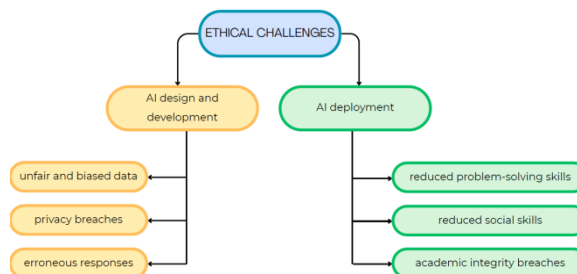


Fig. 2 Ethical challenges of Gen AI in Education.

Often GAI technologies are shown to generate irrelevant or incorrect content, risking misinformation at a great scale ([Pian et al., 2024](#)). Due to their opaque algorithm, it is difficult to manage GAI’s decision-making process ([Bashir and Lapshun, 2025](#)). This type of challenge is critical in the field of Education, as it can give erroneous feedback to the students and hinder their educational progress ([Pang and Wei, 2025](#)). Current GAI technologies are focused on

creating content that feels real but is not always factual. This raises concerns when accurate historical records are needed (Yan and Liu, 2024). Finally, it is important to address the long-term effects of utilizing GAI technology in education (Pang and Wei (2025)). The study in (Miladi et al., 2024) emphasizes that long-term impact studies must be done to monitor student progress, engagement and knowledge retention. While there is a short-term improvement in grades, over-reliance on GAI may hinder student’s problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. Without proper guidelines to regulate assistance from GAI, students may passively complete their work without grasping any knowledge or gaining essential skills (Yan and Liu (2024)). As reported in a recent study by MIT (Kosmyna et al., 2025), brain connectivity gradually declined with continuous LLM assistance in the educational task of writing an essay. Moreover, replacing interaction with educators and peers with virtual interactions negatively affects social capabilities, which can damage their career prospects once they graduate (Ray, 2023).

3. Methodology

This review aims to present prevalent AI ethical issues and offer recommendations on possible courses of action for responsible use of GAI in the educational sphere. The databases used included Google Scholar, PubMed, and IEEE Xplore. The main keywords utilized in the screening process were “AIED”, “AI ethics”, “ICT in education”, “Generative AI”. The overall literature screening and selection process followed in this study is illustrated in Figure 3. For the ethical framework and policies regarding AI usage in education, articles published between the 2019-2025 written in English were considered. Narrative synthesis was utilized to organize the key findings and proposed strategies for efficient regulation of AI in education from the selected articles.



Fig. 3 Literature review selection process used in this study, illustrating database search, screening, eligibility assessment, and final paper selection.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the reviewed literature on AI ethics in education, the practices we propose are separated into three tiers: ethical construction of the AI algorithm architecture, ethical considerations on the deployment of AI technologies, and regulatory strategies and policies do be set up by authorities. The proposed framework for responsible integration of AI in education, consisting of ethical design, responsible deployment, and regulatory governance, is illustrated in Figure 4. As discussed in the Ethical limitations’ subsection, GAI technologies can suffer from unfairness, biased information, non-factual responses, and breaches in data privacy and security. There are several practices that can be employed when setting up GAI architectures that will prevent to a great degree the aforementioned ethical issues.

The development of a LLM tool for education starts from the selection of the foundational model (i.e. BERT, GPT) that fits the intended use or field of education it will be deployed in. During the training period, it is of utmost importance to ensure data quality and inclusivity, with equal representation across social groups. During a Microsoft’s study ([Gunasekar et al., 2023](#)), the model was trained only on “textbook-grade” datasets and it outperformed models trained on much larger datasets that did not differentiate the data quality ([Yan and Liu, 2024](#)).



Fig. 4 Framework for responsible integration of artificial intelligence in education, including ethical AI design, responsible deployment, institutional policies, and governmental regulation.

After making it past the training phase where the datasets meet the ethical and quality standards, it is crucial for annotators (preferably educators) to evaluate the model’s responses to ensure they conform with the AIED regulations. Firstly, the model can be tested for simple tasks, and gradually increase the

complexity of the challenge. The next step in building the LLM is to optimize the reinforcement learning algorithm to adjust the GAI behavior. Proximal Policy Optimization (PPO) can be a good fit for this stage ([Schulman et al., 2017](#)). Upon passing each of the previous stages, the model reaches “maturity” and should be able to self-supervise and self-regulate according to the posed challenges. However, since the LLM model was build, trained, and rewarded with the ethical issues in mind, it is less likely to breach those rules.

On the other hand, educators, policy makers, and tech companies deploying GAI for usage in the education sphere need to explore the long-term impacts these technologies will have on student performance and engagement. Given the many studies on the reduced cognitive abilities when over utilizing generative AI to complete tasks, or academic integrity breaches when tasks are not original, but fully prompted, it is crucial to pose limitations to the over-reliance on GAI for schoolwork. Moreover, academic institutions can either set up strict disciplinary procedures for infringement of academic integrity, or design assignments or exams that take into account GAI usage (for example: oral examinations).

And finally, the most significant tier of AIED regulation is to be done by authorities. Mainly from national education ministries, but also from international organizations such as the Council of Europe (, European Parliament ([VERHEYEN](#), UNESCO; [Miao and Holmes, 2021](#)), and the United Nations. Privacy breaches, discrimination, lack of accountability and transparency are issues that these regulatory bodies should take into account and move past ethical discussions, to enforced rules that AI companies must adhere to ([Stracke, 2024](#)). Using educational equity audits, AI registries, impact assessments on the algorithms utilized, government institutions and global organizations can build a framework to safeguard AI ethics in the educational system. The future work needs to focus on assessing the future educational and social changes of generative AI implementation in universities on the long-term implications for education and society. Empirical research on student learning achievement, ethical sensitivity, and institutional governance will be crucial to determine the impact of AI technologies on the development of critical thinking and digital literacy. Technology innovation, paired with robust ethical oversight, ensures that a positive effect from AI models in teaching helps maintain fairness, transparency and academic integrity.

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Pedagogy in the Age of AI: Ethical and Cognitive Challenges in Architecture and Design Education

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Abstract: This paper examines the evolving role of artificial intelligence (AI) in architectural and design education, focusing on the ethical and cognitive challenges it presents for both students and educators. As generative tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and DALL·E become increasingly integrated into academic environments, they are reshaping how design is conceptualized, visualized, and communicated. While AI offers new possibilities for accelerating creativity and productivity, it also raises concerns related to authorship, academic integrity, critical thinking, and the transformation of traditional studio culture. The study adopts a mixed methods approach combining literature review, reflective teaching practice, and empirical data from a faculty wide survey conducted at the University of New York Tirana. The survey, involving professors from architecture, interior design, and graphic design, explores awareness and use of AI tools, ethical and pedagogical concerns, cognitive shifts in learning processes, and perceived opportunities. Findings highlight AI's potential to support concept development, visual experimentation, and data informed design decisions, while also warning against risks such as overreliance and reduced student agency. The paper ultimately advocates for a reflective and ethically grounded integration of AI in architectural education that preserves the critical and human centered nature of creative learning.

Keywords: *AI in architecture, education, pedagogy, AI and ethics*

1.Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become one of the most used tools in education nowadays, as it has the power to assist learning and the way learning materials are conceived and experienced (Becker et al., 2018; Seldon & Abidoye, 2018). Early applications of AI in education can be dated back to the 1980s with the development of first intelligent tutoring systems which give birth to large language models (LLMs) and later in the 2020s to generative AI tools. AI is now applied in the everyday practices of students and educators, from text review, content creation, and fast visualization to real time problem solving. AI's capacity to make learning interactive through personalized content and feedback has been recognized as a major pedagogical advancement (Jaiswal & Arun, 2021; Rios Campos et al., 2023). As studies have shown, AI is capable of producing teaching materials, summarizing and reviewing documents, investigating and doing inquiry, and enhancing students' cognitive skills (Bozkurt, 2023a; Huang et al., 2023). Particularly in art related and humanitarian fields such as art, architecture, graphic design, and interior design, AI supports students during the conceptual exploration phase, to speed up visualization or include multiple options very fast, and in refining iterative design processes based on feedback, through real time simulation. This transformation introduced also potential risks, raising critical concerns about the future of education. In this regard, there are a lot of critical issues related to the misuse of AI generated data, reliability of content and data, and unequal access to AI advanced apps. According to Ouyang et al., (2022) and Daneshjou et al., (2021), it's crucial to urgently address questions of bias, privacy, transparency, and algorithmic accountability. In this regard, Kaplan and Haenlein (2019), sustain that AI in education should be seen through ethical, cultural, and philosophical lenses. This paper investigates the multifaceted impact of AI on education, with a particular emphasis on its transformative role in creative and design based disciplines. It examines how AI technologies are reshaping pedagogy, learning environments, and academic inquiry, while also engaging with the ethical and societal challenges they face.

2.Theoretical Framework

AI in Architecture Education: A Transformative Shift

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in architecture education has begun to reshape the creative process, learning methods, and design delivery. After the long use of Computer Aided Education (CAE), AI has emerged as a technological tool to enhance students' capacities and assist in both

conceptual and analytical thinking (Guney, 2015; Mayuk & Coşkun, 2020). In architectural education, AI is transforming traditional studio practices and theoretical learning by accelerating the conceptualization process, enriching theoretical development, and aiding in design ideas. One of the major roles of AI in architectural education is the use of generative and visual design tools. Platforms such as Mid journey, DALL·E, Adobe Firefly, Runway ML, and Deep Art allow students to quickly generate visual concepts, explore design alternatives, and experiment with different styles and aesthetics. These tools make the exploration of visual forms or compositions and spatial ideas faster than using traditional methods (Bozkurt, 2023a; Sadek & Mohamed, 2024). In addition, AI tools can be used to structure ideas, summarize texts, and provide real-time feedback during the design process, exploring at different scales, from interior spaces to urban systems (Edirne & Öztürk, 2023; Ge et al., 2024). This approach is consistent with constructivist learning environments that emphasize discovery, rapid prototyping, and experimentation (Soddu & Colabella, 1995; Brown et al., 2020).

AI also contributes to the visualization of concepts in the early stages. Through textual instructions or simple sketches, AI tools can generate three dimensional images, plans, and surfaces that have transformed even abstract ideas into visual forms. These tools can make their appearance, which in prototyping and support the articulation of design goals (Avcı & Kavut, 2024). By facilitating the transition from concept to visualization, AI allows students to spend more time experimenting with different solutions, potentially having the potential of their design outcomes. Another dimension of AI's role is the ability to explore new aesthetic possibilities, reinterpret, combine styles, and experiment with color, typography, and appearance. By generating images quickly, it also makes the completion of posters, illustrations, and concepts even faster. (Bozkurt, 2023a). AI also supports theoretical courses and architectural history education. Furthermore, AI can help in finding literature, comparing theoretical perspectives, and organizing complex information, making the learning process more interactive and accessible (Fareed et al., 2024). Finally, AI tools in automating repetitive design tasks and supporting performance analysis. Functions such as automated plan generation, material model creation, and BIM changes allow students to focus on the more conceptual and creative aspects of design (Bölek et al., 2023).

Ethical Challenges in AI Integration in Architecture and Design Education

The integration of Artificial Intelligence in architectural education, despite its advantages, also brings some ethical challenges. Ethical concerns such as accountability, authorship, data privacy, and equal access (Jobin, Ienca, &

Vayena, 2019). As students rely on AI tools for their tasks, such as summarizing course material, conceptual development, visualization, and performance simulations, this brings both academic and professional challenges.

Authorship, Originality, and Academic Integrity

The use of AI generated tools such as mid journey, DALL·E, Run wayML, Canva, and Adobe Firefly in architecture, art, and graphic design education raises questions about authorship and originality. In a discipline where creativity and personal expression are central to the outcome, AI generated results challenge originality. The use of these tools makes it possible to create detailed works by giving simple written requirements without clearly distinguishing what is original work and what is machine generated. (Nguyen et al., 2023). This undermines educational objectives such as design thinking, critical thinking, and reflective practice (Haleem 2022). Without clear ethical rules, the use of AI can lead to plagiarism as well as the reduction of interaction in the design process.

Plagiarism and Ownership of AI Generated Content

AI systems generate visual and textual outputs from members of a large network of connections, raising questions about copyright and ownership. Many AI generated outputs blend or replicate stylistic features from existing works without clear attribution (Fareed et al., 2024). When other academic projects are made, these outputs will simply be their original contributions from AI generated content (Choi & Yang, 2024). Furthermore, because AI is often trained on the author’s own materials, there is a risk that the images or designs generated from existing works (Bozkurt, 2023). These issues complicate the novelty and originality of creative disciplines.

Transparency, Data Ethics, and Informed Consent in AI Use

Another ethical transparency concerns how AI systems work. Many people are exposed to AI tools without people knowing how the algorithms process data or generate results. In architectural education, where design outcomes can reflect cultural and social values, this lack of transparency can obscure ethical implications. In addition, all may be aware of how their associated data or design data is stored or accessed by external platforms. Promoting algorithmic literacy and ensuring informed consent are therefore effective in building trust and accountability in education (Darwin et al., 2024; Shin & Won, 2020).

Equity, Access, and Ethical Integration in Curriculum

The The integration of AI in design education risks amplifying existing inequalities if access to advanced tools and computational resources is uneven.

Students in under-resourced institutions may lack access to AI platforms, creating disparities in learning outcomes and skill development (Holmes et al., 2022; Luo, 2024). To address these challenges, architectural education must not only ensure equitable access but also embed ethical awareness into the curriculum. Students should be trained to critically evaluate AI-generated outputs, recognize algorithmic bias, and reflect on the broader societal implications of AI in design. Integrating ethics through seminars, reflective assignments, and interdisciplinary approaches can foster responsible and informed use of AI (Choi & Yang, 2024; Seo et al., 2021).

Cognitive Challenges in Studio Learning

Studio-based learning is fundamental to architecture and design education, where students engage in reflective production, experimentation, discussion, iteration, and critique. However, the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into this process may alter both student learning and traditional teaching approaches. Anderson (2015) defines cognition as the mental processes that support learning, including perception, attention, memory, reasoning, and problem-solving. Zohar and Barzilai (2013) argue that cognitive challenges can disrupt these processes, affecting how students perceive, understand, and apply knowledge. In design studios, such challenges relate closely to creativity, iteration, judgment, and tacit learning—areas that are increasingly influenced by emerging technologies.

Effects on critical thinking and deep learning

AI programs like ChatGPT and Midjourney can show students pictures, help them come up with new ideas, and answer questions quickly with little input from the students. These technologies could be useful, but make it harder to learn how to think critically. Holmes et al. (2022) emphasize that deep learning requires sustained engagement and evaluation. If students use AI too much and don't think about it, they might become reliant on AI generated solutions without fully understanding the underlying principles or critically thinking about how it was designed.

The Process Based Decline in Creativity and Iteration.

In studio learning, the process is more important than the end result. Drawing, failing, getting feedback, and doing tasks over and over are not just things to do; they are ways of thinking that help you learn more deeply. If efficiency can bypass these stages, limiting experimentation. The OECD (2021) says that using AI to automate education could hurt metacognitive awareness, which is the ability to think about how you think and is important for learning

design. Students in architecture studios get more creative by trying things out and seeing them in new ways. (Bozkurt et al., 2023).

The Role of Intuition in Dependency versus Judgment

Some teachers are worried that AI gives unclear algorithms the power to make decisions, while others see it as a learning partner (Seo young Lee et al., 2023). The danger becomes clearer when students start using AI to make decisions that need judgment, gut feeling, or real world experience. Students often have to use their own logic when they are designing. When students rely on AI to solve problems, they lose the ability to think critically. Güler and Özen (2023) assert that students lose their understanding of scale, hierarchy, and spatial relationships when utilizing AI platforms solely with text prompts.

AI as a Threat to Traditional Studio Methods, Like Sketching

Studio culture relies on collaboration, discussion, and feedback. The use of AI technology has changed these relationships. Caliskan's (2023) study indicates that the integration of AI in design studios diminishes the probability of interpersonal communication, round table discussions, collaborative experimentation, and process oriented feedback. It changes the focus from group inquiry to individual results that are already set in stone, and it makes drawing less important. At the same time it also reduce the role of traditional methods such as sketching. AI can support studio learning, but it must be used carefully to ensure architecture education remains focused on creativity, critical thinking, and human-centered learning.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed methods approach combining conceptual analysis with empirical investigation. The methodology integrates theoretical research through a literature review with practical insights derived from teaching experience and an institutional survey. This approach enables a deeper discussion of the impact of artificial intelligence on creative pedagogy, particularly within higher education in Albania. Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, a review of scholarly literature on AI in education helped frame the research, focusing on issues of creativity, ethics, authorship, and student learning. Second, the authors' teaching experience at the University of New York Tirana (UNYT), within the Faculty of Architecture and Design, provided contextual insights based on students' use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Midjourney. Third, an online survey was distributed to academic staff in the Department of Architecture and Design. Survey data were analyzed using descriptive methods, while open

ended responses were interpreted narratively to identify recurring themes regarding AI’s challenges and opportunities in design education.

4. Findings and Results

Case Reflections: Teaching AI in Albania

At the Faculty of Architecture and Design at the University of New York Tirana, several classroom experiences have revealed both the potential and the risks associated with AI tools such as ChatGPT in student assignments. Below are mentioned a few cases of misuse of AI tools.

CASE 1: One case occurred in the Architectural History I course, where students were assigned to write a reflective essay on a historical period- such as Ancient Egypt, Classical Rome, and the Renaissance. While AI was strictly allowed for minor tasks such as grammatical editing or language improvement, some students overstepped these boundaries. Two submitted essays were found to be highly similar to each other, particularly in the chosen topic, the structure of the paragraphs, and the reasoning behind selecting that period. Close inspection revealed that such essays were largely generated using Chat GPT, with minimal student input. This case highlights that the danger lies not only in plagiarism, but also in the erosion of academic integrity, where AI generated content is presented as the original voice of a student.

CASE 2: Another example was observed in the Graphic Communication course, where students were tasked with preparing a PowerPoint presentation on an influential architect. One student chose Frank Lloyd Wright and submitted a visually appealing presentation **Fig. 1**. However, factual inaccuracies within the slides such as distortions of Prairie House features and a fabricated image of Wright himself suggested overreliance on generative AI. The student admitted to using ChatGPT to prepare the content and images but demonstrated no clear understanding of the subject matter.



Fig. 1 Student presentation on Frank Lloyd Wright and his projects, where both Wright’s portrait and the Prairie House image were altered through AI.

CASE 3: A third case emerged in the History of Architecture II course, where students were asked to express the philosophy and core principles of a chosen

architect through a poster. Among several submissions, one poster stood out for its lack of conceptual coherence. It was later discovered that the student had used an AI platform to generate the entire poster based on the command: “Create a poster for Bernard Tschumi”. **Fig. 2** During the presentation, the student was unable to explain the rationale behind the chosen visual elements. When questioned about why certain imagery or textual choices were made, the student admitted to having little control or understanding of the results.



Fig. 2 Student work on representing the architect through a poster generated from AI.

Survey Findings and Results

Twelve academic lecturers from the University of New York Tirana participated in the survey, representing diverse ranks, experience levels, and disciplines across architecture (50%), graphic design (25%), and interior design/civil engineering. The sample included both full-time (n=7) and part-time (n=5) faculty, teaching across theory, studio, and technical courses at bachelor's and master's levels, highlighting AI's relevance across all dimensions of design education.

AI Awareness and Usage

Section 1 of the survey explored educators' awareness and use of AI in architecture education. Table 1 summarizes key findings from this section, offering insight into how faculty perceive their own familiarity with generative AI tools, how students are engaging with these technologies in academic settings, and the impact AI is having on learning outcomes. The results indicate a high overall awareness of AI among educators, though its actual integration into teaching remains uneven. A majority of students are already using AI tools often without structured guidance. Educators have mixed views on AI, noting increased efficiency but concerns about reduced originality, critical thinking, and overreliance on automation.

Table 1 AI Awareness and Usage. Source: Author

Question	Key Results
A. Familiarity with generative AI tools	80% somewhat familiar, 10% very familiar and active users, 10% slightly familiar. Indicates broad exposure but limited advanced adoption.
B. Personal use of AI in teaching or academic work	70% reported using AI tools (ChatGPT 20%, Midjourney/Krea/Runway 10%, others DALL·E and DeepSeek 40%); 30% reported no use despite familiarity. Adoption remains experimental.
C. Student use of AI in coursework	30% observed occasional use; 30% unsure; 10% reported use in all courses; 10% image generation/rendering; 10% heavy reliance. AI present but often informal and unsupervised.
D. Student use with professional training	50% reported independent exploration without training; 30% untrained experimentation; 10% intentional and informed use; 10% unsure. Indicates a gap in AI literacy.
E. Types of assignments where AI is used	Text writing/research summaries (80%); rendering/image generation (60%); grammar/layout assistance (50%); conceptual development in studio work (40%).
F. Impact on student performance	50% reported both benefits and risks; 20% moderate improvement; 10% significant improvement; 10% negative effects; 10% unsure. AI seen as improving efficiency but potentially reducing originality.

Ethical and Pedagogical Concerns

Section 2 of the survey focused on educators’ concerns surrounding the ethical and pedagogical implications of AI in academia. This part aimed to understand faculty perspectives on academic integrity, student responsibility, assessment practices, and appropriate use stages of AI within design based education. The results showed that educators acknowledge both the risks AI introduces and the pedagogical shifts it demands. Most view student use of AI as under regulated, inconsistently informed, and potentially harmful to learning depth and academic values. While there is openness toward AI’s use, especially in technical or final stages, educators call for clearer guidelines, ethical instruction, and curriculum adaptations. **Table 2**

Table 2 Ethical and Pedagogical Concerns. Source: Author

Question	Key Results
A. Primary concerns about student AI use	Major concerns: plagiarism, reduced effort, diminished critical thinking, loss of creativity, and biased content (80% each). Lack of transparency noted by 50%; inequitable access by 10%. Educators view AI as both

	useful and potentially enabling unethical academic practices.
B. Adjustments in teaching or assessment methods	50% made some adjustments; 10% major changes; 40% have not yet adapted but are considering it. Indicates growing awareness but limited institutional transformation.
C. Should students be allowed to use AI in academic work?	60% support limited, stage specific use; 20% unrestricted use; 10% support only tasks; 10% oppose entirely. Faculty generally favor moderated and guided AI integration.
D. Appropriate stages for AI use	Most support use in drafting/visualization and final presentation (40%). Fewer support concept generation, theory writing, or design exploration (20–30%). AI is seen as more appropriate in later project stages.
E. Students’ awareness of ethical responsibilities	60% believe students have partial awareness; 30% believe students are unaware; only 10% believe students are fully aware. Indicates a significant gap in ethical literacy regarding AI use.

Cognitive Challenges and Educational Impact

Section 3 examines the cognitive and educational implications of AI integration in design and architecture education. The objective is to explore how AI influences students’ critical thinking, originality, studio culture, and collaborative learning. Findings show concern that AI reduces critical engagement (50%), discourages independent ideas (50%), and fosters overreliance (70%). Yet, 90% agreed it can enhance innovation when used responsibly. Educators also noted a weakening of studio culture, with reduced peer consultations (50%), dialogue (60%), and collaboration (60%). Still, most supported AI in practical phases such as language correction (60%) and final project refinement (60%), suggesting cautious acceptance when guided appropriately.

Table 3 Cognitive Challenges and Educational Impact. Source: Author

STATEMENT	1	2	3	4	5
AI reduces students’ ability to think critically		10	40	30	20
AI discourages students from exploring their own ideas		20	40	30	20
AI leads to overreliance and superficial learning		10	20	50	20
AI, if used responsibly, can support innovation and creativity			10	70	20
Studio culture is weakened by AI’s presence		50	30	20	
Students engage less in peer to peer consultations due to their reliance on AI.	10	30	40	20	

AI diminishes spontaneous dialogue and critique in studio culture.	20	20	40	20	
The use of AI reduces collaborative learning and group creativity.	20	20	40	20	
AI should be allowed in the executive phases of projects (e.g., rendering, layout, polishing)		40	20	40	
AI is useful for language correction or clarity in written assignments			30	60	10

(1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3 neutral, 4=Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Open Ended Question

For the open-ended question “Have you observed any noticeable changes in student behavior, creativity, or learning patterns since AI tools became more accessible?” professors reported mixed effects of AI on student learning. Some saw little change, particularly in Graphic Design, while others noted greater independence, confidence, and creativity. Concerns centered on overreliance, especially in writing, leading to faster but superficial work. Overall, all agreed that AI is a double edged tool- enhancing creativity and efficiency but risking critical thinking, originality, and collaboration.

Ethical Dimensions of Access to AI Tools

Section 4 addresses the ethical dimensions of access to AI tools in design education, emphasizing affordability, institutional responsibility, and fairness. The findings reveal that while access inequalities are not universally seen as prohibitive, they are widely acknowledged as an ethical concern, with many respondents citing cost, licensing restrictions, and limited trial features as barriers.

Table 4 Ethical Dimensions of Access to AI Tools. Source: Author

Question	Key Results
A. Ethical challenges related to affordability and access	50% viewed access as a moderate concern; 20% as a major issue due to inequality; 20% considered it not a concern; 10% minor concern. Overall, access is recognized but not universally seen as prohibitive.
B. Limitations in accessing AI tools	30% often face access limitations; 40% occasionally; 30% rarely. No respondents reported complete absence of restrictions, indicating widespread but uneven access challenges.
C. Types of barriers encountered	subscription costs (ChatGPT Pro, Midjourney, Adobe Firefly), limited trial features, firewall restrictions, and cross platform access limitations. These constraints restrict students’ access to a wider creative ecosystem.

D. Impact of limited access on student potential	40% reported some impact; 10% significant impact; 40% little or no impact; 10% unsure. Opinions are divided on whether premium tools significantly affect creativity and technical development.
E. Institutional responsibility for AI access	60% support institutional licenses for key AI tools; 50% inclusion in digital literacy strategies; 30% equitable access regardless of finances; 20% promotion of open source alternatives. All respondents recognized institutional responsibility.
F. Support for policies ensuring equitable AI access	60% support policy development; 30% cautiously supportive (“maybe”); 10% opposed. Indicates strong recognition of the need for institutional frameworks to ensure fairness in AI adoption.

Institutional Strategy and Recommendations

The final survey section examined institutional policies, support, and recommendations for AI integration. Results revealed gaps in frameworks and strong demand for clearer guidance, training, and oversight. Educators called for clear regulations, workshops for staff and students, and institutional licenses for tools, alongside curricular revisions that embed ethics and critical thinking. Recommendations stressed careful adoption: using AI to support, not replace, creativity; limiting it to technical refinement stages; and promoting human centered reflection. Notably, 90% agreed on the need for professional training, highlighting consensus that faculty must be equipped to guide students ethically.

5. Conclusion

The study shows that the introduction of Artificial Intelligence into architecture and design education represents a pedagogical transformation rather than merely a technological shift. AI enables rapid visualization, expanded creative exploration, and increased technical efficiency. However, without clear guidance, it may threaten key principles of design education such as originality, critical thinking, and the collaborative culture of the design studio. Survey results and classroom experiences at the University of New York Tirana (UNYT) indicate that students are already experimenting extensively with AI tools, often without sufficient ethical awareness or training. At the same time, educators remain divided regarding the opportunities and risks associated with these technologies. These findings highlight the responsibility of educators to guide students toward responsible AI use by establishing clear boundaries, nurturing academic integrity, and

encouraging reflection on authorship and originality. Several recommendations emerge from this study:

- Universities should teach AI skills and ethics (authorship, creativity, critical thinking) in the curriculum.
- Clear guidelines should define how and when AI can be used in the design process.
- Students should reflect on their AI use, for example through short disclosure statements in projects.
- Institutions should ensure equal access to AI tools for all students.
- Assessment should focus more on the design process, not only final results.
- Faculty should receive ongoing training to understand and use AI effectively.
- AI should be presented as a support tool, not a replacement for creativity and critical thinking.
- In conclusion, AI in architectural education should be integrated carefully, balancing technology, ethics, and equal access while keeping design human-centered.

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Determinants of higher education students’ acceptance and intention to use artificial intelligence tools

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Abstract: The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has created new opportunities and challenges for higher education. This study examines the acceptance and intention to use generative AI tools among students enrolled in Educational Sciences programmes in Portugal and Brazil. A quantitative approach was adopted using a questionnaire based on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 model.

The instrument was administered to 287 students from a Portuguese higher education institution and 160 students from a Brazilian institution. The results indicate generally positive perceptions of generative AI tools among students. Performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, and habit emerged as key determinants of behavioural intention to use these technologies.

However, actual use remains limited and mainly focused on conversational generative AI tools, particularly for summarising content, clarifying concepts, and supporting academic organisation.

These findings suggest that generative AI is still in an early stage of adoption in higher education. In light of these results, the study proposes pedagogical guidelines to support the critical and responsible integration of generative AI tools in teaching and learning processes.

Keywords: *Generative artificial intelligence; Higher education students; Technology acceptance.*

1. Introduction

The accelerated advancement of artificial intelligence, particularly generative AI (GenAI), is transforming contemporary society, including higher education. Systems such as ChatGPT generate text, images, and other outputs through large language models, offering new possibilities for personalised learning, immediate feedback, and innovative pedagogical practices (Boubker, 2024; Deng et al., 2025; Grassini et al., 2024). At the same time, the growing use of these technologies raises concerns related to inaccuracies, bias, academic integrity, and the potential impact on student agency (Han et al., 2025; Lo et al., 2024; Lund et al., 2025).

Although research shows increasing interest in the educational potential of GenAI, empirical studies examining students’ perceptions and adoption intentions remain limited (Chan & Hu, 2023; Kim et al., 2025). In particular, few studies have analysed the determinants of GenAI acceptance using theoretical frameworks such as the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2). This gap is especially evident in contexts such as Portugal and Brazil and among students in Educational Sciences programmes. To address this gap, the present study examines the acceptance and behavioural intention to use GenAI tools among higher education students in these two national contexts.

2. Theoretical Framework

The UTAUT2 is a robust, empirically validated framework widely employed to examine the adoption of digital innovations in educational settings (Farsi, 2023). Acosta-Enriquez et al. (2024) emphasise that UTAUT2-based analysis of GenAI acceptance factors can effectively guide the integration of such emerging technologies to enhance higher education processes. Accordingly, this study applies the model—formulated by Venkatesh et al. (2003, 2012)—to assess higher education students’ uptake and application of GenAI tools. Its structural framework features key exogenous constructs—Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI), Facilitating Conditions (FC), Hedonic Motivation (HM), Price Value (PV), and Habit (H)—postulated to shape Behavioural Intention (BI), which in turn drives actual Use (U).

Performance Expectancy (PE) captures the degree to which individuals perceive a technology as improving their performance and operational context (Venkatesh et al., 2012). It highlights technology’s critical function in modern education, deemed vital for boosting student achievements and teaching

effectiveness (Alzahrani & Alzahrani, 2025). Regarding GenAI in higher education, PE aligns with students' anticipated gains in their learning activities (Grassini et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Effort Expectancy (EE) reflects perceptions of the ease or complexity involved in mastering new technologies (Venkatesh et al., 2012). In this research, it gauges students' views on the minimal effort required to engage with GenAI systems (Strzelecki, 2024; Xu et al., 2024), especially among novices (Strzelecki, 2024).

Social Influence (SI) assesses how influential figures impact adoption intentions (Venkatesh et al., 2012). It captures students' sense that peers, educators, and key contacts encourage innovative AI tools (Strzelecki, 2024; Xu et al., 2024), with collective social dynamics potentially transforming tech interactions (Alzahrani & Alzahrani, 2025).

Facilitating Conditions (FC) denote beliefs in having sufficient expertise, assurance, and infrastructure for proficient technology deployment (Venkatesh et al., 2012). For GenAI, FC involves access to tools alongside technical aid and training during high-demand periods (Grassini et al., 2024; Strzelecki, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Hedonic Motivation (HM) denotes the pleasure users derive from technology engagement (Venkatesh et al., 2012), particularly pertinent to captivating tools such as ChatGPT (Grassini et al., 2024; Strzelecki, 2024; Xu et al., 2024).

Price Value (PV) evaluates the trade-off between costs and benefits of technology use (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Within this study, PV weighs expenses against advantages from GenAI for higher education students, although some prior work excludes it owing to tools like ChatGPT's free availability (Grassini et al., 2024; Strzelecki, 2024).

Habit (H) quantifies the automatic execution of behaviours absent conscious deliberation (Venkatesh et al., 2012), emerging as a key driver in technology adoption (Strzelecki, 2024). It manifests in students' routine embedding of ChatGPT through usage frequency, session length, and workflow integration (Grassini et al., 2024; Strzelecki, 2024).

Behavioural Intention (BI) is the main antecedent of technology adoption (Venkatesh et al., 2012), shaped by UTAUT2 factors (Grassini et al., 2024).

Use (U) denotes actual frequency, duration, and application of tools like ChatGPT in academic work, influenced by Habit (H) (Grassini et al., 2024; Strzelecki, 2024; Venkatesh et al., 2012).

Drawing upon this conceptual framework, the study establishes the following objectives:

To evaluate the levels of acceptance and usage intentions for GenAI tools among higher education students in Educational Sciences programmes across Portugal and Brazil.

To examine gender differences in GenAI acceptance and behavioural intentions within the participant sample.

To investigate the relationships between UTAUT2 constructs and students' behavioural intentions to utilise GenAI tools.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative survey approach to examine university students' acceptance and behavioural intentions toward GenAI tools in higher education. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire based on the UTAUT2 framework and administered to Portuguese and Brazilian students enrolled in Educational Sciences programmes. A convenience sample comprising 447 students from two higher education institutions (HEI) was used: the School of Education at the Santarém Polytechnic University (N = 287), and the various campuses of the State University of Maranhão dedicated to Educational Sciences (N = 160).

In the Portuguese sample, 88.5% of participants were female and the average age was 23.2 years (SD = 9.21). In the Brazilian sample, 72.5% were female and the average age was 29.6 years (SD = 9.87). Participants in both groups were enrolled in different levels of study, including bachelor's, master's, postgraduate, and vocational programmes. Detailed sociodemographic characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Profile of Participants by Institution

	Item	Portugal		Brazil	
		Number	Percentage (%)	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	33	11,5	42	26,3
	Female	254	88,5	116	72,5
	Prefers not to answer	-	-	2	1,3
Type of programme	Higher Vocational Course	20	7	-	-
	Bachelor's degree	224	78	135	84,4
	Postgraduate studies	8	12,2	1	0,6
	Master's degree	35	2,8	7	10,6
	Doctoral degree	-	-	17	4,4

This research utilised a questionnaire structured across three main sections. The initial section outlined the research objectives, detailed the implemented

data protection protocols, and clarified the procedure for securing participants' voluntary informed consent. The subsequent section gathered demographic data, including gender, age, and current academic level. The final section incorporated items from the UTAUT2 instrument (Venkatesh et al., 2012) to evaluate students' acceptance of and intent to adopt GenAI tools within higher education contexts. Prior research confirms the instrument's strong internal consistency (García-Murillo et al., 2023), with UTAUT2-based items demonstrating reliable psychometric properties across multiple validations supporting their use in educational technology acceptance studies.

The questionnaire was translated into European Portuguese and adapted into Brazilian Portuguese. A pre-test was conducted with eight students in Portugal and five in Brazil to ensure clarity and comprehension of the instrument. Minor wording adjustments were made before the final data collection. The questionnaire included 32 items measuring UTAUT2 constructs. Items were adapted to the context of GenAI in higher education. Responses were measured using 7-point Likert scales, while the Use dimension employed a 7-point frequency scale ranging from “never” to “several times a day”.

The instrument demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency across all constructs analysed. As shown in Table 2, Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from 0.770 to 0.943 in the Portuguese sample and from 0.784 to 0.916 in the Brazilian sample – values exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, which indicates good scale reliability. These results confirm adequate homogeneity among items within each dimension, rendering the instrument reliable for analysing the variables under study. Detailed reliability coefficients for each questionnaire dimension appear in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability analysis of the different constructs in the questionnaire

Dimensions	PE		EE		SI		FC		HM		PV		H		BI		U	
Country	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR	PT	BR
Cronbach's α	0,921	0,877	0,872	0,792	0,818	0,844	0,856	0,790	0,943	0,916	0,882	0,784	0,908	0,865	0,909	0,786	0,868	0,831

The Shapiro–Wilk test indicated non-normal data distribution ($W = 0.980$, $p < 0.001$); therefore, non-parametric analyses were used. A one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank test compared responses with the scale midpoint, Mann–Whitney U tests examined gender differences, and Spearman correlations analysed relationships between constructs.

Responses to the open-ended question (“How do you use artificial intelligence tools in your learning or study process?”) were analysed using thematic content analysis. A total of 284 valid responses were obtained from Portuguese

students and 153 from Brazilian students. An inductive coding procedure was used to identify recurring themes, and multiple coding was applied when responses referred to more than one type of use.

4. Findings

Table 3 presents the initial descriptive analysis, revealing that students overall showed moderate to high agreement with the UTAUT2 model dimensions in both samples: Portuguese (M = 4.48; SD = 1.11) and Brazilian (M = 4.76; SD = 1.18).

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of responses by dimension and overall mean.

	Portugal	Brazil	Portugal	Brazil
	M	M	SD	SD
PE	5,30	5,57	1,42	1,37
EE	5,14	5,22	1,30	1,26
SI	4,66	4,44	1,34	1,61
FC	5,64	5,31	1,13	1,28
HM	5,33	5,14	1,60	1,73
PV	3,88	4,01	1,73	1,69
H	4,05	3,78	1,70	1,73
BI	4,63	4,61	1,71	1,60
U	2,92	3,08	1,41	1,42
Global Mean	4,48	4,76	1,11	1,18

In the Portuguese sample, means across dimensions ranged from 2.92 (U) to 5.64 (FC). The highest values were FC (M = 5.64; SD = 1.13), HM (M = 5.33; SD = 1.60), and PE (M = 5.30; SD = 1.42), indicating that students viewed GenAI facilitation positively, recognised its benefits, and reported satisfaction with these tools.

In the Brazilian sample, means ranged from 3.08 (U) to 5.57 (PE). Similar to Portugal, high values emerged for PE (M = 5.57; SD = 1.37), FC (M = 5.31; SD = 1.28), and EE (M = 5.22; SD = 1.26), reflecting overall positive perceptions of GenAI tools' usefulness and usage conditions in academia.

This positive perception aligns with the qualitative responses. Among Portuguese students, the most frequent uses of GenAI were support in academic work (31.0%), information search (28.2%), and clarification of doubts and concepts (23.2%). Among Brazilian students, the most frequent

references concerned clarification of doubts (47.1%), support in academic work (41.8%), and information search (39.9%). In both groups, GenAI is primarily viewed as a useful academic support tool, helping explain the high values observed for PE and FC.

In both samples, the 'Use' dimension showed the lowest mean scores: $M = 2.92$ ($SD = 1.41$) in Portugal and $M = 3.08$ ($SD = 1.42$) in Brazil. These findings suggest that, despite favorable attitudes and moderate intentions toward GenAI tools (Portugal: $M = 4.63$; $SD = 1.71$; Brazil: $M = 4.61$; $SD = 1.60$), students' actual usage remains relatively limited-

Qualitative responses offer further insight into this result. Students in both countries described GenAI tools mainly as complementary resources for specific tasks rather than integrated elements of their study routines. In Portugal, 20.8% of references concerned summarising and organising materials, while in Brazil this category reached 31.4%. These findings suggest that GenAI is often used to simplify complex content or support assignment preparation but is not yet consistently embedded across learning activities.

The relatively high standard deviations (greater than 1 in most dimensions) indicate considerable variability among participants, possibly reflecting differences in familiarity, experience, and confidence with GenAI tools in academia.

A comparative analysis between samples reveals broadly similar patterns in students' perceptions of UTAUT2 dimensions, though some differences emerge. Overall, Brazilian students reported slightly higher means across most dimensions, particularly in PE (Brazil: $M = 5.57$; Portugal: $M = 5.30$), EE (Brazil: $M = 5.22$; Portugal: $M = 5.14$), and PV (Brazil: $M = 4.01$; Portugal: $M = 3.88$), suggesting a somewhat more positive view of GenAI tools' usefulness and accessibility.

Portuguese students recorded higher mean scores in dimensions such as FC (Portugal: $M = 5.64$; Brazil: $M = 5.31$), HM (Portugal: $M = 5.33$; Brazil: $M = 5.14$), and H (Portugal: $M = 4.05$; Brazil: $M = 3.78$), suggesting a more favorable perception of institutional conditions and GenAI tool integration into academic routines. However, in both samples, the U dimension showed the lowest mean values (Portugal: $M = 2.92$; Brazil: $M = 3.08$), indicating that—despite positive perceptions and moderate use intentions—effective adoption of these technologies in academia remains in early stages.

The qualitative findings reveal nuanced differences between the two groups. Portuguese students more often mentioned brainstorming and idea generation (20.8%) and showed clearer concern with verifying information and avoiding uncritical copying (6.3%). Brazilian students, in turn, more frequently described GenAI as practical support for understanding content, solving doubts, and academic writing, with clarification of doubts reaching 47.1% and

linguistic support 20.9%. These differences may reflect distinct usage patterns, with Portuguese students emphasising exploratory uses and Brazilian students highlighting direct academic support.

These inter-sample differences may stem from institutional, contextual, and digital access factors in the respective academic environments. For the Brazilian sample, slightly higher means in PE and EE likely reflect stronger perceived benefits of GenAI tools and their potential to enhance academic performance.

This study further assessed whether students’ perceptions of GenAI tool acceptance and use intention differed significantly from the response scale midpoint (4), employing one-sample Wilcoxon signed-rank tests (Table 4).

In the Portuguese sample, results revealed a statistically significant difference from the reference value ($W = 29836$; $p < 0.001$). The observed mean ($M = 4.48$; $SD = 1.11$) exceeded 4, with a mean difference of 0.528 (95% CI [0.389, 0.667]), indicating students’ generally positive perceptions of GenAI tool acceptance and use in higher education.

The Brazilian sample showed similar results, significantly differing from the scale midpoint ($p < 0.001$) and reflecting a favorable academic view of these technologies.

Table 4. One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Tests: Dimensions and Overall Mean vs. Scale Midpoint

	Test value = 4									
	W		<i>p</i>		Mean Diff		95% CI			
	Portugal	Brazil	Portugal	Brazil	Portugal	Brazil	lower limit		upper limit	
							Portugal	Brazil	Portugal	Brazil
PE	34413	11187	<0,001	<0,001	1,5	1,750	1,25	1,625	1,625	2,000
EE	34659	10362	<0,001	<0,001	1,25	1,375	1,125	1,125	1,375	1,625
SI	27227	7220	<0,001	<0,001	0,75	0,500	0,625	0,250	1	0,875
FC	38052	11098	<0,001	<0,001	1,75	1,375	1,625	1,250	1,875	1,625
HM	31592	9344	<0,001	<0,001	1,667	1,333	1,333	1,000	1,833	1,833
PV	14278	5344	0,258	0,805	-0,167	0,000	-0,333	-0,333	0,0000185	0,333
H	18290	4629	0,593	0,117	0,0000201	-0,250	-0,125	-0,625	0,25	0,000
BI	25853	7535	<0,001	<0,001	0,667	0,667	0,5	0,500	1	1,000
U	5895	2368	<0,001	<0,001	-1,357	-1,143	-1,571	-1,357	-1,143	-1,000

Global Mean	29836	10567	<0,001	<0,001	0,528	0,792	0,389	0,599	0,667	0,984

Analysis of individual dimensions showed statistically significant positive differences from the scale midpoint for most constructs—namely PE, EE, SI, FC, HM, and BI ($p < 0.001$). These findings underscore students’ strongly positive perceptions of GenAI tools’ utility, ease of use, social influence, and motivational appeal, alongside a clear intention to continue using them academically.

In contrast, PV and H dimensions exhibited no significant differences from the midpoint in either the Portuguese or Brazilian samples, suggesting that tool costs and habitual incorporation are not yet key determinants for students. Finally, the U dimension yielded significantly lower values than the midpoint ($p < 0.001$), indicating that—despite positive attitudes and intentions—students’ actual GenAI usage remains relatively limited.

Qualitative responses again align with this pattern. Students in both countries often stressed that GenAI should support rather than substitute independent thinking or academic work. This critical stance appeared in 6.3% of Portuguese responses and 11.1% of Brazilian responses, suggesting that relatively cautious use may partly contribute to the low scores in the U dimension.

Given the significance of this finding, a detailed item-level analysis of the U dimension was conducted to assess students’ frequency of use across GenAI tool categories.

Table 5 results reveal differences in GenAI tool usage frequency between samples. Chat tools showed the highest means in both (Portugal: $M = 6.01$; $SD = 1.16$; Brazil: $M = 5.81$; $SD = 1.48$), indicating widespread adoption and integration into academic practices. Translation tools had intermediate values (Portugal: $M = 3.12$; $SD = 2.14$; Brazil: $M = 3.36$; $SD = 2.35$), suggesting moderate use tied to linguistic needs or foreign language content support. Other categories exhibited lower usage: assessment tools (Portugal: $M = 1.95$; $SD = 1.84$; Brazil: $M = 2.13$; $SD = 1.95$), image tools (Portugal: $M = 2.22$; $SD = 1.91$; Brazil: $M = 2.06$; $SD = 1.93$), audio/video tools (Portugal: $M = 2.21$; $SD = 1.89$; Brazil: $M = 2.11$; $SD = 1.99$), and research tools (Portugal: $M = 2.01$; $SD = 1.86$; Brazil: $M = 2.11$; $SD = 1.90$)—all reflecting limited academic adoption. The ‘Other AI tools’ category showed moderate values (Portugal: $M = 2.92$; $SD = 2.24$; Brazil: $M = 3.99$; $SD = 2.36$), indicating varied usage based on individual tool familiarity.

Table 5. Mean and standard deviation of participants' responses for the types of tools in the Use (U) dimension.

	M		SD	
	Portugal	Brazil	Portugal	Brazil
Chat tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Bing AI, Microsoft Copilot, DeepSeek, ...)	6,01	5,81	1,16	1,48
Assessment tools (e.g., Gradescope, SmartGrade, Formative AI, ...)	1,95	2,13	1,84	1,95
Image tools (e.g., Leonardo AI, DALL-E, Tess AI, ...)	2,22	2,06	1,91	1,93
Audio/video tools (e.g., Pictory AI, Veed, Speechify, ...)	2,21	2,11	1,89	1,99
Translation tools (e.g., DeepL, Duolingo AI, Sider, ...)	3,12	3,36	2,14	2,35
Research tools (e.g., Elicit, Jenni AI, Perplexity, ...)	2,01	2,11	1,86	1,90
Other GenAI tools	2,92	3,99	2,24	2,36

In summary, students primarily use chat tools, perceived as more useful, accessible, and easily integrated into academic activities. Other tool categories exhibit significantly lower usage, indicating that adoption of specialized GenAI solutions remains at an early stage—likely influenced by tool familiarity, specific academic needs, or technological access.

This result aligns with the qualitative data, in which most students explicitly mentioned conversational GenAI systems such as ChatGPT or Gemini when describing their study practices. These tools were mainly used to clarify concepts, obtain summaries, organise assignments, or initiate academic tasks. By contrast, references to more specialised tools—such as image generation, research support, or automated assessment—were much less frequent, which helps explain the lower mean values for these categories.

Gender differences across dimensions were examined using the independent-samples Mann-Whitney U test. Table 6 results show no statistically significant differences between female and male participants in any dimension for either the Portuguese or Brazilian samples ($p > 0.05$). Specifically, PE, EE, SI, FC, HM, PV, H, BI, and U all yielded p-values exceeding the significance threshold, indicating similar perceptions and attitudes toward GenAI tool usage among female and male students.

Table 7 presents Spearman correlation results showing positive, statistically significant relationships among most UTAUT2 dimensions in both Portuguese and Brazilian samples. Coefficients ranged from 0.28 to 0.84, reflecting weak to very strong associations. In Portugal, the strongest correlations involved BI with H ($\rho = 0.842$), BI with PE ($\rho = 0.756$), and PE with HM ($\rho = 0.750$). The

Brazilian sample yielded comparable patterns, with significant positive correlations among BI, H, and PE.

These findings indicate that GenAI tool use intention strongly relates to prior routine incorporation and concurrent perceptions of utility and satisfaction. Thus, both instrumental factors (expected performance) and affective factors (motivation and habit) play key roles in academic GenAI acceptance.

Table 7. Spearman’s correlation matrix between the dimensions

	Portugal							
	PE	EE	SI	FC	HM	PV	H	BI
EE	0,701	-						
SI	0,649	0,586	-					
FC	0,649	0,739	0,595	-				
HM	0,75	0,722	0,616	0,715	-			
PV	0,456	0,475	0,516	0,469	0,464	-		
H	0,721	0,595	0,558	0,538	0,66	0,522	-	
BI	0,756*	0,689*	0,584*	0,632*	0,730*	0,508*	0,842*	-
U	0,33	0,28	0,324	0,258	0,306	0,312	0,351	0,385*
	Brazil							
	ED	EE	IS	CF	MH	P	H	BI
EE	0,549	–						
SI	0,666	0,509	–					
FC	0,495	0,649	0,528	–				
HM	0,635	0,492	0,591	0,504	–			
PV	0,438	0,326	0,544	0,346	0,494	–		
H	0,58	0,392	0,541	0,417	0,626	0,486	–	
BI	0,667*	0,404	0,557*	0,389	0,638*	0,465	0,776*	–
U	0,273	0,242	0,389	0,341	0,455	0,31	0,482	0,487*

Conversely, the U dimension showed the lowest correlations, ranging from $\rho \approx 0.24$ – 0.39 with other dimensions; BI-U links were $\rho = 0.385$ (Portugal) and $\rho = 0.487$ (Brazil). These modest associations suggest that—despite favorable attitudes and intentions—actual AI tool usage remains limited, consistent with early-stage adoption in higher education.

The qualitative findings support this interpretation by showing that students’ reported use remains concentrated in a limited set of academic support

functions. AI is mainly used to assist learning tasks rather than as a fully integrated and habitual academic technology.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Students in both Portugal and Brazil hold generally positive perceptions of GenAI tools in academic contexts. This pattern aligns with the UTAUT2 framework (Venkatesh et al., 2012), where constructs such as PE, FC, and HM shape behavioral intention and technology use. The highest scores were observed in these dimensions, suggesting that students regard GenAI tools as practical resources for academic work.

The qualitative findings reinforce this interpretation. Students in both countries described using GenAI tools mainly to support academic work, search information, clarify concepts, and summarize complex texts. This pattern aligns with Grassini et al. (2024), who analyzed university students' ChatGPT acceptance via UTAUT2, and Strzelecki (2023), who linked acceptance and use to perceived usefulness and ease of use.

At the same time, the results reveal a discrepancy between students' positive perceptions and their actual levels of use. In both samples, the U dimension obtained the lowest mean scores, indicating that GenAI tools are not yet systematically embedded in study routines. This interpretation is compatible with Bauer et al. (2025), who argue that discussions about GenAI in education should move beyond the initial enthusiasm surrounding these technologies and focus more carefully on their actual effects on learning processes.

The qualitative responses help explain this gap. Students frequently describe GenAI as a complementary academic support tool rather than a central component of their learning process. Many of the reported uses were task-specific and episodic, such as summarizing readings, clarifying doubts, or organizing assignments. This cautious and selective pattern of use suggests that students recognize both the benefits and the limitations of GenAI in academic contexts; a similar ambivalent perception was reported by Chan and Hu (2023), who found that students tend to view GenAI as a valuable learning tool while also highlighting the challenges and uncertainties associated with its effective integration into teaching and learning processes.

Another relevant finding concerns the predominance of conversational tools. In both samples, chat-based systems such as ChatGPT or Gemini were clearly the most frequently used technologies, whereas more specialized tools for assessment, research, or multimedia production showed much lower levels of adoption. This result is coherent with Strzelecki (2023) and Grassini et al. (2024), both of whom focus specifically on students' adoption of ChatGPT in higher education. The evidence suggests that conversational AI currently

serves as the main entry point through which students engage with GenAI in academic settings.

The comparison between Portuguese and Brazilian students revealed broadly similar patterns, though some differences emerged. Brazilian students reported slightly higher scores in PE and EE, whereas Portuguese students scored higher in FC, HM, and H. According to Venkatesh et al. (2012), such differences matter because UTAUT2 assumes BI and U are shaped by perceived benefits, ease of use, contextual conditions, and prior experience. These findings therefore suggest that contextual factors may influence how students appropriate GenAI tools across national settings.

The qualitative data add nuance to this comparison. Portuguese students more often referred to brainstorming and idea generation, while Brazilian students more frequently described GenAI as a direct aid for clarifying doubts, improving writing, and supporting academic tasks. Even so, both groups converge in viewing GenAI primarily as an academic support resource rather than as a substitute for independent intellectual work.

This cautious stance is particularly relevant considering the ethical debates surrounding GenAI in education. UNESCO (2023) explicitly frames GenAI in education as an area requiring human-centred implementation, policy development, and ethical safeguards. Although only a small proportion of responses explicitly referred to the need to verify AI-generated information or avoid uncritical copying (6.3% among Portuguese students and 11.1% among Brazilian students), these statements suggest the emergence of a critical awareness regarding the limitations of GenAI tools. This concern is consistent with recent discussions about the ethical and pedagogical implications of GenAI in higher education (Han et al., 2025) and with debates about academic integrity associated with the use of GenAI in academic contexts (Lund et al., 2025).

Another noteworthy result concerns gender. In this study, no statistically significant gender differences were observed in relation to acceptance, behavioral intention, or use of GenAI tools. This suggests that, in the two contexts examined, gender is not a decisive factor in students' orientations toward GenAI. Instead, perceptions of usefulness, accessibility, and academic support appear to be more central.

Overall, the findings support the relevance of the UTAUT2 model for analyzing the adoption of GenAI in higher education. The strong relationships observed between BI, PE, HM, and H are coherent with the explanatory structure proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2012). At the same time, the relatively low levels of actual use show that acceptance should not be equated with full pedagogical integration.

In conclusion, this study shows that students in both Portugal and Brazil recognize the academic usefulness of GenAI tools, especially conversational systems that support information access, concept clarification, and academic organization. However, actual use remains concentrated in a limited set of support functions and has not yet become fully routinised. In this respect, UNESCO (2023) is particularly relevant in arguing that the central challenge is not simply whether GenAI will be used in education, but how it can be integrated responsibly, critically, and meaningfully into learning processes.

Considering these findings, HEI should promote pedagogical approaches and teaching practices that support the critical and informed use of GenAI. This includes encouraging students to verify AI-generated information, engaging them in activities that involve analysing and evaluating GenAI outputs, and integrating GenAI into learning tasks that support reflection, interpretation, and knowledge construction. Such practices may help students move from occasional and instrumental uses of GenAI tools toward more critical and pedagogically meaningful engagement. Strengthening students’ digital and AI literacy therefore becomes an important condition for ensuring that these technologies contribute positively to teaching and learning processes in higher education.

Some limitations of this study should nevertheless be acknowledged. The sample was obtained through convenience sampling and included students from only two HEI, all enrolled in programmes in the field of Educational Sciences, which limits the generalisation of the results to other institutional and disciplinary contexts. In addition, the study relied on self-reported perceptions and practices, which may not fully capture students’ actual patterns of GenAI use. Future research could therefore expand this line of inquiry by including a wider range of institutions and academic fields, as well as by adopting longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to better understand how students’ use of GenAI evolves and how these technologies can be more effectively integrated into teaching practices and learning processes in higher education.

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The Role of Teachers in the Development of Students' Communication in the First Grade of Primary School

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Abstract: This research study examines in a detailed and analytical manner the determining role that teachers play in the development, advancement, and enrichment of students' communication skills during the first year of primary education a period that marks a radical and highly delicate turning point in a child's psycho-social development. The primary objective of this research was the empirical verification of the direct influence of teachers on shaping the intricate communication relationships and dynamics between teacher-student and student-student within the new school environment. In this paper, communication is treated as an essential, fundamental, and irreplaceable element of pedagogical work, which contributes directly to enhancing the quality of the educational process and the effective socialization of young students in their first community outside the family. To conduct this research, a highly representative and comprehensive sample of 132 first-grade teachers from primary schools in the city of Gjilan, Vitia and Kamenica was included. As a research instrument, a structured professional questionnaire designed specifically for teachers was applied, while the processing, comparison, tabulation, and statistical analysis of the data were carried out using the software packages Microsoft Office Excel 2007 and IBM SPSS v.19.0, ensuring maximum accuracy in drawing research conclusions. The results derived from this research clearly demonstrate that students with higher communication skills exhibit significantly higher academic achievements and more stable academic success than students with limited or weak linguistic expression. The study highlights the real challenges, emotional barriers, and numerous difficulties that teachers face during the critical period of students' adaptation to the new environment, emphasizing the exceptional importance of pedagogical tact and patience during the first months of schooling. A

finding of particular importance in this study is the existence of significant statistical differences in communicative competence between students who attended pre-school education in relevant institutions and those who did not have this prior institutional experience. Furthermore, the research proves that direct face-to-face communication remains the most effective, successful, and preferred tool for building sustainable, reciprocal, and productive cooperation between teachers and parents. The final conclusions of the paper underline that the teacher's role is irreplaceable in shaping the child's personality, self-confidence, and communicative competence, serving as a solid foundation for their long-term academic success and social well-being. This study strongly argues that serious investment in the development of communication at this early age is an indispensable prerequisite for the student's holistic development and the formation of a healthy personality for the future.

Keywords: *Teacher's role, communication development, pre-school education, pedagogical interaction, academic achievement, teacher-parent cooperation.*

1. Introduction

Communication can be defined as a multifaceted process of establishing bilateral contact through which meaning is transmitted. It functions as a mechanism of mutual influence facilitated by symbolic tools, as well as a process for exchanging information, meanings, and emotions among individuals via both verbal and non-verbal messaging. (Mikuš Kos, 2010) The fundamental objective of communication is to be heard and understood, while simultaneously listening to and understanding others. In the context of early childhood, communication serves as a primary indicator of a child's relational stance toward their environment, forming the bedrock for their cognitive development. According to Lev Vygotsky, from the very beginning of life, the infant enters into an "interactive dance" with their caregiver, where each participant influences the adaptability of the other. As the child matures, their development interacts critically with the social environment, shaped predominantly by two deterministic factors: the familial system and the school environment. (Vasta, R., Haith, M. M., & Miller, S. A., 2007) A fundamental characteristic of education, viewed through an interactive-communicative lens, is its reliance on cooperation. The efficacy of the educational process is contingent upon the quality of interaction and communication within the teacher-student dyad. Through this reciprocal relationship, both the teacher's professional persona and the student's personality undergo a process of continuous refinement and maturation. (Lutolli-Kadriu, 2016)

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Communication constitutes one of the primary pathways for the realization of the educational-instructional process and the facilitation of synergy between the school and its social environment. School life, although situated within a confined setting, is profoundly complex, expansive, and multidimensional. It inherently imposes certain restrictions on the student's autonomy and spontaneous activity. This inherent limitation necessitates the implementation of effective communication across all segments and levels of the institution. Consequently, addressing school life from a communicological perspective requires an in-depth understanding of various challenges particularly regarding social dynamics and the organizational visions that are unveiled through the communicative process. (Murati, 2017) Communication serves as a fundamental pillar of school life, fulfilling a dual functional role: As an Active Force: It facilitates the cognitive process of acquisition and establishes authentic interpersonal contacts within the learning environment; As a Quality Determinant: Conversely, the absence of high-quality communication obstructs the workflow and prevents communication from becoming an expressive force within the institution. In the classroom setting, while the curriculum content is vital, the educator acts as a pivotal mediator between these materials and the student. Instruction, therefore, can be analyzed as a communicative circuit through which knowledge, skills, and habits are transmitted from the source (the teacher or instructional media) to the recipient (the student). The ultimate objective of teaching and learning is for students to master the ability to communicate and exchange ideas. This is achieved through systematic, pre-planned tasks that must be executed through specific, deliberate forms of communication. (Danilović, 1996)

3. Methodology

This study is characterized by its empirical, individual, and descriptive nature. Based on its functional design, the research follows a quantitative methodology, prioritizing the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and trends within the communicative process. The primary objective of this study was to obtain precise and empirical data regarding the communicative dynamics within first-grade classrooms, specifically focusing on the teacher-student dyad and its reciprocal nature. Furthermore, the research aimed to evaluate the qualitative significance attributed to communication during instructional activities and to identify the predominant modalities employed specifically, verbal versus non-verbal communication.

Research Hypotheses

To provide a structured analytical framework for this study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- Hypothesis (H1): Teachers encounter significant communicative barriers with students during the initial transition and adaptation phase to the formal school environment.
- Hypothesis (H2): There is a lack of proactive parental engagement regarding the communication of students' difficulties within the academic setting.
- Hypothesis (H3): There is a significant negative correlation between communicative difficulties and the level of academic achievement among students.

Research Variables

The conceptual framework of this study is built upon the interaction between the following independent and dependent variables:

Independent Variables:

These are the factors that act as the catalysts or predictors in the research: Teachers: Professional profile, pedagogical approach, and moderation style; Student Communicative Competence: The inherent or acquired ability of the first-grade student to express and receive messages; Modality of Communication: The specific forms used (verbal, non-verbal, and para-verbal techniques).

Dependent Variables: These are the outcomes or phenomena being measured: Academic Achievement: The level of success and performance of students in the first grade; Authentic Teacher-Student Discourse: The quality and depth of interaction within the classroom; Teacher-Parent Collaboration: The efficacy and frequency of the school-family partnership.

Research Methodology and Instrumentation

To ensure a comprehensive analysis of first-grade communicative dynamics, this study employed a multi-methodological approach, utilizing a structured questionnaire comprising both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The following core methodologies were integrated: Theoretical Analysis Method: This generalized method provided the conceptual framework for the study. It clarified various pedagogical approaches to first-grade communication and facilitated the derivation of critical conclusions. This method was instrumental in mapping the multidimensional interactions between teacher-student, teacher-parent, and parent-child dyads, as well as peer-to-peer interpersonal communication. Observational Method: Observation played a pivotal role in

gathering primary, real-time data. This direct approach allowed for the empirical documentation of classroom interactions, capturing the "lived reality" of the communicative process as it naturally unfolds during the instructional day. Statistical Method: Quantitative data were processed using rigorous statistical analysis. Through standardized measurement instruments and questionnaires, research data were quantified to identify patterns, frequencies, and correlations regarding student communication. Interview/Conversation Method (Qualitative Dialogue): This method facilitated direct engagement with educators and students. By capturing their subjective opinions and professional insights, it provided a deeper qualitative layer to the understanding of the reciprocal relationship between teacher and student.

Research Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises primary school teachers and first-grade students from elementary schools within the Municipality of Anamorava places, as Gjilan, Viti and Kamenica. The research sample consisted of \$N=132\$ teachers, selected to provide a representative cross-section of the teaching force engaged in early childhood education within this region. This sample size is statistically significant for providing insights into the communicative dynamics and pedagogical challenges specific to the first-grade transition period.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

Hypothesis (H1): Teachers encounter significant communicative barriers with students during the initial transition and adaptation phase to the formal school environment.

Table 1. Chi-Square Test Results for the First Hypothesis

The results of a contingency table χ^2 statistical test performed at 16:06 on 18-JAN-2022			
data: contingency table			
	A	B	
1	13	82	95
2	91	46	137
3	28	4	32
	132	132	264
expected: contingency table			
	A	B	
1	47.5	47.5	
2	68.5	68.5	
3	16.0	16.0	

chi-square = 82.9
 degrees of freedom = 2
 probability = 0.001

Burimi: hulumtim nga Autori

Two variables were analyzed using the Chi-square test in relation to the second auxiliary hypothesis: communication difficulties and student communicability at the beginning of the school year. The results ($\chi^2 = 82.9$, $df = 2$, $p = .001$) indicate a statistically significant association between teachers' communication challenges and students' level of communicability during their adaptation to the new school environment. Consequently, the second auxiliary hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis (H2): There is a lack of proactive parental engagement regarding the communication of students' difficulties within the academic setting.

Table 2. Chi-Square Test Results for the Second Hypothesis

The results of a contingency table χ^2 statistical test performed at 17:10 on 18-JAN-2022			
data: contingency table			
	A	B	
1	78	74	152
2	48	51	99
3	6	7	13
	132	132	264
expected: contingency table			
	A	B	
1	76.0	76.0	
2	49.5	49.5	
3	6.50	6.50	

chi-square = 0.273
 degrees of freedom = 2
 probability = 0.872

Burimi: Hulumtim i autorit

The second auxiliary hypothesis was tested using two variables related to parental involvement: their interest in school activities and their openness in communicating child-specific issues. As illustrated in Table 2, the test results indicate a statistically significant difference in distribution and a slight correlation between the two variables. Consequently, the hypothesis is rejected as the results do not meet the expected threshold. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that parents maintain a moderate level of interest in communicating regarding their children’s academic and behavioral challenges.

Hypothesis (H3): There is a significant negative correlation between communicative difficulties and the level of academic achievement among students.

Table 3. Chi-Square Test Results for the Third Hypothesis

The results of a contingency table χ^2 statistical test performed at 17:36 on 18-JAN-2022			
data: contingency table			
	A	B	
1	81	102	183
2	46	26	72
3	5	4	9
	132	132	264
expected: contingency table			
	A	B	
1	91.5	91.5	
2	36.0	36.0	
3	4.50	4.50	
chi-square = 8.08			
degrees of freedom = 2			
probability = 0.018			

Burimi: Hulumtim i autorit

The third auxiliary hypothesis examined the relationship between communication and academic achievement, specifically focusing on how communication difficulties impact student success. The Chi-square test results ($\chi^2 = 8.08$, $df = 2$, $p = .018$) indicate a statistically significant difference between the variables. A strong negative correlation was observed between communication difficulties and student success rates, suggesting that increased communication barriers are associated with lower academic

performance. Consequently, the fourth auxiliary hypothesis is validated and accepted.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study demonstrates that communication skills are a primary determinant of academic success, as students with higher communicative competence consistently outperform those with weaker skills. During the critical transition to the school environment, educators encounter significant challenges, even though students initially show a high readiness to interact. Notable differences emerge between students with prior preschool education and those without, while factors such as emotional behavior, social circles, and the use of concrete instructional tools play a vital role in this process. Furthermore, creative methodologies including role-playing and theatrical activities prove highly effective in fostering student communication. Regarding parental engagement, interest levels remain moderate and often unsatisfactory, with a lack of open communication concerning child-specific issues posing a persistent challenge. Based on these findings, it is recommended that educational institutions and the Ministry of Education implement specialized training for teachers on verbal and non-verbal communication, integrate dramatic techniques into the curriculum, equip classrooms with modern instructional materials, and strengthen face-to-face teacher-parent partnerships.

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Mediation: A Reality of Modern Higher Education

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Abstract: Higher education institutions, in dealing with everyday situations of disputes between different stakeholders, have long ago found it necessary to implement mediation as one of the key methods of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). Conflict situations, if they could not be resolved within the university's instances, ended up in external instances, up to and including court proceedings. Mediation in education involving a neutral third party - which facilitates voluntary, confidential, and collaborative resolution of conflicts - is in service of helping disputing parties reach mutually acceptable solutions. This procedure reduces the extent of eventual punishments, restores broken communication, and fosters a coexistence and supportive academic environment. This service has proven to be closely aligned with the purpose, mission, and objectives of higher education, emphasizing the values of the modern university while dealing more effectively with substantive and formal issues of disagreement. This paper focuses on the use of mediation as one of the promising methods of dispute resolution, demonstrating its numerous uses for disputes between students, academic units and staff within the institutional environment. The results emerging from the research prove the existence of space for the need to promote mediation in education by providing information and training to stakeholders within higher education institutions with the aim of not only expanding implementation, but also increasing the role of mediation.

Keywords: *disputes, higher education, stakeholders, neutral third party, facilitates, fosters coexistence.*

1. Introduction

In achieving its objectives of maintaining peace and preventing conflicts, the United Nations has dedicated its activities in recent decades to promoting mediation at the global level. The importance of mediation is emphasized by the former Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon in the Foreword of the *United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation* (2012): "Mediation is one of the most effective methods of preventing, managing and resolving conflicts.

To be effective, however, a mediation process requires more than the appointment of a high-profile individual to act as a third party. Antagonists often need to be persuaded of the merits of mediation, and peace processes must be well-supported politically, technically and financially" (UN Guidance, 2012). The definition provided by this Guidance is that: "Mediation is a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements (UN Guidance, 2012). With the long-awaited adoption of the UN Convention on International Settlement Agreements resulting from Mediation (known as Singapore Convention) (2019), this definition was expanded by concretizing the mediation process: "Mediation means a process, irrespective of the expression used or the basis upon which the process is carried out, whereby parties attempt to reach an amicable settlement of their dispute with the assistance of a third person or persons ("the mediator") lacking the authority to impose a solution upon the parties to the dispute" (Singapore Convention, 2019).

The statutory and judge-made definitions of mediation in the modern legal systems reveal considerable differences in viewpoint and elements of the definitions. However, there are variations on a common core definition, which serves as the functional basis of the present investigation (Hopt & Steffek, 2013). According to this core definition, on which the literature and judicial practice almost agree: "Mediation is a procedure based on the voluntary participation of the parties, in which an intermediary (or multiple intermediaries with no adjudicatory powers systematically facilitate(s) communication between the parties with the aim of enabling the parties to themselves take responsibility for resolving their dispute" (Hopt & Steffek, 2013). This is also reflected in the definition of the authors Henry Brown and Arthur Marriott: "Mediation is a facilitation process in which the parties to the dispute involve the assistance of an impartial third party (mediator), who helps them to try to reach the agreed settlement of their dispute" (Brown & Marriott, 2011). In this case the mediator does not have the authority to make any decision that is binding on them, but uses certain techniques and skills to help them negotiate an agreed solution to their dispute without initiating and conducting legal and arbitration.

The advantages and benefits of mediation as a method of dispute resolution are well-argued and documented in many areas of life and activities within society. As the use of mediation has increased, so has the development of reasoned demands for the inclusion of its use within the academic community and students within higher education institutions. As such, mediation in higher education has already been proven to facilitate, resolve, and prevent conflicts between students, faculty leadership, and academic and administrative staff as

much as possible, fostering a peaceful, more collaborative, and inclusive academic environment in communication.

2. Legal regulation

The first generally accepted international document at the global level that promoted and gave high consideration to alternative means of dispute resolution, including mediation, was the Charter of the United Nations (1945). Chapter VI, entitled Peaceful Settlement of Disputes (Articles 33-38), sought to ensure that peaceful methods of dispute resolution were accorded special importance in connection with the prohibition of the use of force in international relations.

The UN's commitment to creating a globally harmonized regulatory framework for mediation had reached its significance through the work of the UN Commission on International Trade Law recognized as UNCITRAL. It managed to ensure the preparation, approval and ratification of a considerable number of legal acts in the field of dispute resolution through mediation:

UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Mediation and International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (2018 - amending the Model Law on International Commercial Conciliation, 2002). As a non-binding instrument for countries that can use it voluntarily, it provides uniform rules regarding the mediation process and aims to encourage the use of mediation, ensuring greater predictability and certainty in its use.

United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (2019). Being a binding international instrument, it is expected to bring certainty and stability to the international framework on mediation.

The European Union is another organization which prioritizes the active promotion of alternative dispute resolution, primarily mediation. To this end, in 2008, the EU adopted the Directive on Certain Aspects of Mediation in Civil and Commercial Matters. The justification for the adoption of this directive by the European Parliament in its Preamble states that it aims to encourage the use of mediation, facilitate dispute resolution and help avoid inconvenience, time and expense, enabling citizens to secure their rights, their legal as efficiently as possible.

At the local level in North Macedonia, mediation is a very recent phenomenon. The Law on Mediation (2021) succeeded the two previous laws of 2006 and 2013, harmonizing local legislation with the EU Directive (2008) and the Singapore Convention (2019), to which North Macedonia is a signatory. This law regulates mediation in disputed relations in which the parties may freely dispose of their requests, unless another law establishes the exclusive

jurisdiction of a court or other authority, regardless of whether it is conducted before or after the initiation of a court or other procedure.

3. Mediation in higher education

Universities and colleges across the nation experience a wide range of problems related to campus life (Miller, 1987). Conflict is a natural occurrence in higher education institutions. According to Neil H. Katz over the past 50 years, college administrators have experimented with a variety of procedures and methods to resolve conflict or mitigate its effects. This overview will briefly cover the past 50 years to illustrate some of the most important milestones that propelled the growth and development of mediation services as supplements to the more traditional and punitive ways to handle disputes (Katz, 2017).

The Law on Mediation provides for the application of mediation in education as a possibility. This law generally stipulates that education is among the other fields that are suitable for resolution through mediation, i.e. among the fields in which mediation responds to the nature of the disputed relations and can help resolve them, arising between domestic and/or foreign individuals and legal entities, the Law expressly emphasizes disputes in the field of education (Article 1(2), Law on Mediation, 2021).

Such a guarantee offered by the Law on Mediation regarding the applicability of mediation in education opens the door for the Law on Higher Education (2018) to further address the possibility that disputes that occur between the academic community and within higher education institutions and their units can be resolved through peaceful means. Such a thing is provided for in Article 14 entitled "Peaceful resolution of disputes". The legislator has determined the broader designation of alternative means as peaceful means for resolving disputes, which includes mediation. According to this Article: “Disputes between members of the academic community, as well as disputes between independent higher education institutions and their units, shall be resolved amicably, in joint bodies, and in another manner of understanding” (Article 14(1)). However, when resolving dispute referred above, the regular conduct of the activity specified in the statute may be hindered (Article 14(2)). Finally, if the dispute cannot be resolved in any of the ways provided, the dispute shall be resolved in court (Article 14(3)). This means that, while resolving the dispute through court proceedings remains the last resort, if the parties, after efforts made for a peaceful resolution, have not succeeded in overcoming the open contradictions between them.

In order to protect the rights of students, the Law on Higher Education stipulates that a student ombudsman is elected at each university, from among

the regular students of the university (Article 31(1)). Based on the legally foreseen powers, this student ombudsman has the role of mediator who acts based on the student's complaint or on his own initiative if he considers that a student's right has been violated by the University authorities or another member of the University's academic community. The authorities of the higher education institution are obliged to act upon the indications of the student ombudsman (Article 32(1)).

It is understandable that the legislator has left the procedure for conducting mediation in cases where its implementation is required to be elaborated in more detail by higher education institutions in their statutes. This is due to the fact that each higher education institution has its own structural and functional characteristics and specificities.

4. Practical implementation

Interpersonal conflicts in any sphere involve different interests inherent in human relations and are present in various social organizations, educational organizations being among them. As a microcosm of society, an educational institution at any level brings together diverse views of the world, ways of being, thinking, and living, thereby becoming a space reflecting social differences and a place where all sorts of everyday conflicts take place (Usmanova et al., 2021). Considering the undeniable fact that a higher education institution is an organization that encompasses different social groups and different categories that differ in terms of professional preparation and professional distinctiveness, it is expected that interpersonal conflicts will be an integral part of it.

Mediation services are the most common ADR interventions. Mediation sessions range from student living disputes and relationship issues to mediation for family, court-annexed, community, workplace, and some unique services such as victim-offender mediation, elder, and estate mediation. Noteworthy services include re-entry mediation and social justice mediation (Katz, 2017). For this reason, mediation in education also has a pedagogical element included within itself, aiming to achieve three primarily educational goals: conflict resolution, prevention, and strengthening interpersonal relationships.

Analyzing mediation and communication practices in education, we have to note that what lies at their basis is the effective resolution of a conflict situation. Moreover, the classification of conflict situations is highly important as it provides support in recognizing their specific manifestations and choosing the communication behavior algorithm appropriately (Usmanova et al., 2021). In this respect, it should be noted that there are studies which show

that school mediation reduces aggressiveness (Jones, 2001) or verbal abuse (Farrell & Myer & White, 2001). Moreover, by developing cooperative relationships and skills to discuss different viewpoints with an open mind, Tjosvold states: “Organizations can empower managers and employees to use conflict to probe problems, create innovative solutions, learn from their experience, and enliven their relationships” (Tjosvold, 2008).

A study conducted shows that for several decades now, USA law students have been actively participating through clinics in organizations dedicated to ADR services. Clinics encompass a wide range of practices, such as court-annexed mediation, pro bono mediation for citizens in need, community mediation services, and various other ad hoc ADR services across all areas of the law (Mancuso & Felicetti, 2024).

5. The importance

The importance of mediation and other ADR services to complement and, when necessary, replace traditional procedures is to manage conflicts at their lowest and most effective levels, address underlying problems, improve the conflict climate on campus, and maintain relationships. Alternative pathways encourage personal empowerment, accountability, and promote creative thinking and skill development of participants within the academic community (Katz, 2017). All of this is done to maintain the unity of relations between the parties to the dispute, thereby avoiding communication breakdowns and the need to transfer the resolution of the dispute to judicial instances. This is reinforced by the fact that the vast majority of mediation procedures are concluded quickly (mostly within a day). The signing of the agreement for the resolution of the dispute at the conclusion of the mediation also implies a commitment by the parties that they will adhere to the content of the signed agreement.

Kayla Matthews from the *Mediate* platform through the elaboration of the seven benefits of mediation programs in higher education institutions argues that mediation programs offer several advantages to any organization. They help staff members constructively solve problems, and they allow all parties in a conflict to air their grievances safely and work collaboratively towards resolution (Matthews, 2019). When it comes to higher education institutions, mediation programs offer additional key benefits. They calm the occasional infighting present among highly educated professionals. It also models appropriate problem-solving skills for students and provides them with a quality coveted by today's employers (Matthews, 2019). Such benefits include:

- Mediation programs teach problem-solving skills as a process: Universities should embrace a process-oriented approach to handling any difficult matter, including interpersonal conflicts;
- Mediation programs prove less intimidating than discipline policies: Mediators agree to work sincerely to resolve the problem, which requires a two-way commitment;
- Mediation programs encourage multi-tiered, democratic leadership: Higher education institutions that hope to retain top talent should adopt mediation to encourage greater shared ownership among stakeholders;
- Mediation programs encourage open dialogue between students and staff: It empowers parties to take proactive steps to communicate when problems first arise;
- Mediation programs model valuable soft skills for students: Because students are exposed to professional mediation resources, these programs can also encourage students to pursue similar career paths involving conflict resolution or counseling;
- Mediation programs encourage self-reflection and awareness: Self-awareness helps educators check inherent biases they may have, such as when it comes to dealing with students with certain behavioral issues;
- Mediation programs transform higher education institutions: Such programs improve engagement among students and staff alike.

Such programs, despite the multiple benefits they offer, face difficulties and obstacles in their implementation in practice. These barriers do not stem from the lack of will and readiness of educational institutions to implement them, but because of the funds required for their implementation. Moreover, such funds are also needed for the preparatory phase of training staff to deal with mediation.

The development of technology, and especially the rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), has rightly opened the debate on whether AI will replace the role of mediators in the not-so-distant future. At this stage, the exact form and content of this evolution remains uncertain, given the rapid pace of technological advances and the impacts that digital modes of engagement are having on conflict resolution practitioners. According to Martin Waehlsch: “AI can serve as a tool for mediators but will not replace them. At best, AI can help process and analyze vast amounts of data, including historical conflict data, socio-political dynamics and cultural nuances, giving mediators a greater understanding of complex conflict dynamics and supporting them in formulating more effective strategies” (Waehlsch, 2024).

6. Conclusion

The above discussion clearly shows that academia is increasingly oriented towards conflict management through alternative dispute resolution, mainly through negotiation, mediation, restorative practices and generally towards promoting a model of peaceful and sustainable coexistence within the community. Today, most people strongly agree on the usefulness of mediation within the context of education, especially higher education, because it not only helps resolve conflicts, specifically, but also ensures that these conflicts do not escalate into critical situations in long and arduous judicial proceedings. This has led to the fact that at the global level, the United Nations has prepared documents for the regulation of mainly interstate mediation: UNCITRAL Model Law on International Commercial Mediation (2018) and the Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation (2019), while at the local level, the Macedonian legislator regulates mediation with the Law on Mediation (2021), while for mediation in higher education, the regulatory emphasis is on the Law on Higher Education (2018). Mediation in higher education is one of the pillars for fostering a neutral, inclusive and cooperative environment, offering a serious voluntary alternative characterized by a high level of confidentiality and the absence of formal procedures, of conflict resolution. It is in colleges that it improves and elevates the level of communication, restores disturbed relationships, increases student/staff satisfaction and develops valuable soft skills such as empathy and conflict resolution. Thus, mediation in universities, despite the difficulties it faces, including the challenges of professional advancement of mediators and technological advancement in the form of AI, is showing that mediation has a promising future in universities and colleges.

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Innovation of Study Programmes in Foreign Language Teacher Education with the Aim of Developing Entrepreneurial and Project-Based Thinking

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Abstract: The paper presents an innovation of study programmes in Romance language and German language teacher education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, with a focus on developing students' entrepreneurial and project-based thinking. The research component includes identifying students' needs, attitudes, and baseline competencies through questionnaire surveys using the HEInnovate tool. The questionnaire will be completed by students and graduates enrolled in programmes focused on Romance languages and the German language, enabling the collection of data on their attitudes toward innovation, entrepreneurship, and the management and implementation of projects. The analysis of the results will identify strengths as well as areas requiring enhanced support for students' engagement in innovative activities. The findings serve as a basis for modifying the curricula of the respective study programmes to more systematically develop students' competencies in entrepreneurship and project management. The proposed innovation links theoretical knowledge with practical experience provided by mentors from professional practice, start-up simulations, and project-oriented teaching, thereby supporting the development of competencies necessary for effective project planning and management, risk management, teamwork, and the presentation of outcomes. At the same time,

the innovation strengthens the inclusive and international dimension of education and prepares future foreign language teachers to use interdisciplinary and digital skills (not only) in pedagogical practice. Based on the questionnaire results, the paper formulates specific recommendations for innovating study programmes with the aim of supporting students' entrepreneurial thinking and project orientation.

Keywords: *entrepreneurial thinking, project competencies, innovation in education, foreign language teacher education, HEInnovate*

1.Introduction

The transformation of contemporary education is driven by rapid socio-economic change, technological development, and increasing demand for transferable competences in the labour market (European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2019). Higher education institutions are therefore expected to equip graduates not only with disciplinary expertise, but also with innovation capacity, entrepreneurial thinking, and project-management skills (European Commission, 2017). These expectations are particularly relevant in teacher education, where foreign language teachers are no longer solely knowledge transmitters, but also project initiators, international coordinators, and facilitators of interdisciplinary cooperation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). At Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, the bachelor programmes in Romance Languages and Literature Teacher Education and German Language and Literature Teacher Education require targeted innovation to address these challenges. Although they currently provide strong linguistic and didactic foundations, they do not yet include a systematic framework for developing entrepreneurial and project-management competences. This gap is particularly evident in the context of ongoing curricular and participation in initiatives such as Erasmus+ and eTwinning, which demand advanced project design, financial planning, and evaluation skills (European Commission, 2021).

The research problem therefore lies in the discrepancy between expanding professional expectations placed on teachers and the limited integration of entrepreneurial training in current teacher education programmes. The present study aims to support the planning and design of curricular innovation by using the HEInnovate framework as a diagnostic and evaluative tool (HEInnovate, 2018). The goal is to generate evidence-based recommendations for the future integration of entrepreneurial and project-based thinking in foreign language teacher education.

2. Innovation of the Study Programmes in Foreign Language Teacher Education

The planned innovation of the bachelor-level study programmes in Romance Languages and Literature Teacher Education and German Language and Literature Teacher Education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra represents a strategic response to anticipated changes in the social, economic, and educational environment. Both programmes are included among the eligible fields within the Slovak Smart Specialisation Strategy SK RIS3 2021+, confirming their potential relevance for national and regional development (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2021). The planned innovation is intended to strengthen the capacity of higher education to prepare graduates not only as subject specialists, but also as professionals capable of initiating and managing innovation processes (European Commission, 2017).

The new State Educational Programme (2023) and the broader educational reform emphasise the development of cross-cutting literacies, including digital, financial, civic, social, and professional competences, which teachers must both master and be able to cultivate in their students (Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, 2023). In parallel, foreign language teachers are increasingly engaged in international cooperation and mobility initiatives, including Erasmus+ and eTwinning, which require competences in project design, financial planning, coordination, and evaluation that are not yet systematically included in the current curriculum (European Commission, 2021).

To address this anticipated gap, four project-oriented courses are being planned for integration into the bachelor study programmes: Project Management 1, Project Management 2, Project Practice, and Excursion: Project in Practice. These courses are designed to form a structured developmental pathway. Project Management 1 is intended to establish foundations in entrepreneurial thinking, creativity, business planning, and risk management. Project Management 2 will deepen strategic and organisational competences, including change management, sustainability, branding, and impact evaluation. Project Practice will provide intensive mentoring in small groups, enabling students to simulate start-up environments and design project proposals relevant to school contexts. The Excursion course is planned to strengthen experiential learning through guided visits to enterprises, where students will analyse organisational structures, financing mechanisms, and strategic processes.

The design of the innovation is supported by institutional analysis conducted using the HEInnovate self-assessment framework (HEInnovate, 2018), which

identifies the need to enhance systematic support for entrepreneurial competences and methods of impact evaluation. Data obtained from student and graduate surveys will serve as an empirical basis for refining course content and planning implementation strategies. The planned systemic integration of project-based learning aims to prepare students for a modern teacher profile aligned with evolving professional and policy expectations.

3. Developing Entrepreneurial and Project-Based Thinking

A core objective of the planned innovation is the deliberate development of entrepreneurial and project-based thinking as integral components of teacher professional identity. In contemporary educational contexts characterised by rapid change and institutional complexity, entrepreneurial competence is understood as a transversal capacity including initiative, creativity, opportunity recognition, strategic reasoning, collaboration, and reflective evaluation (European Commission, 2016). For future foreign language teachers, these competences are particularly relevant, as professional roles increasingly involve coordinating partnerships, designing interdisciplinary activities, and contributing to school development (OECD, 2019).

Within the planned innovation, the sequential structure of Project Management 1 and Project Management 2 is intended to provide students with a coherent conceptual framework. Emphasis will be placed on creativity techniques, vision building, risk analysis, sustainability, and impact measurement, as well as on iterative and agile approaches to project development. Simulations such as structured pitch presentations are planned to allow students to formulate project intentions clearly, respond to feedback, and refine proposals according to stakeholder expectations.

The Project Practice component is planned to translate these principles into collaborative application with a particular focus on startup-oriented initiatives. Students will work in small teams to design educationally relevant projects, fostering responsibility, communication skills, and resource management strategies. Continuous mentoring by external professionals is anticipated to ensure that theoretical knowledge is tested against practical conditions and that students gain confidence in implementing innovative ideas within school environments.

Experiential learning will be further expanded through Excursion: Projects in Practice, where students will analyse enterprises as examples of project-based organisations. Reflection on organisational structures, financing mechanisms, and strategic management will support deeper understanding of how innovation processes operate beyond the academic setting and how similar principles can be adapted to educational institutions.

Finally, the development of entrepreneurial thinking is planned to be systematically monitored through research using the HEInnovate framework (HEInnovate, 2018). By assessing students' and graduates' baseline competences and attitudes, the programmes aim to ensure that competence development is evidence-informed and continuously evaluated. In this way, entrepreneurial and project-based thinking is intended not as an isolated curricular addition, but as a sustained and measurable component of future foreign language teacher education.

4. Research Problem and Aim

The research problem addressed in this study arises from the anticipated discrepancy between the expanding professional expectations placed on foreign language teachers and the currently limited integration of entrepreneurial and project management competences within traditional teacher education curricula. While contemporary educational policy documents emphasise innovation capacity, cross-cutting literacies, and project-based collaboration (European Commission, 2017; Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic, 2023), structured preparation in these domains remains largely absent in the existing teacher education programmes. This gap may limit graduates' readiness to initiate and manage school development projects, participate in international cooperation schemes such as Erasmus+ and eTwinning, and contribute to the long-term sustainability of educational institutions.

The primary aim of the research is to collect baseline data on students' and graduates' needs, attitudes, and self-perceived competences related to entrepreneurship, innovation, and project management in the context of foreign language teacher education. The findings are intended to provide an empirical foundation for the planned curricular innovation and to guide the systematic integration of entrepreneurial and project-based learning into the bachelor programmes.

5. Participants

The research sample consists of undergraduate students enrolled in the bachelor study programmes of Romance Languages and Literature Teacher Education and German Language and Literature Teacher Education as well as graduates of the mentioned study programmes at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. The participants are students and graduates of the Department of Romance and German Studies at the Faculty of Arts.

These students are preparing for a professional career as foreign language teachers in lower and upper secondary education. Their current academic training focuses primarily on linguistic, literary, cultural, and didactic disciplines. At the time of data collection, they had not yet participated in any systematic coursework explicitly oriented toward entrepreneurial thinking or project management, which makes them an appropriate group for assessing baseline competences, attitudes, and perceived needs in this domain. On the other hand, the graduates were able to retrospectively evaluate their studies, identifying aspects with which they were satisfied as well as areas they perceived as lacking. The collected data will inform the design of the planned innovation.

The sample size was small, and completing the questionnaire was voluntary.

6. Research Instrument

Data were collected through a questionnaire based on the HEInnovate self-assessment framework developed by the European Commission in cooperation with the OECD (HEInnovate, 2018). HEInnovate is an internationally recognised tool that enables higher education institutions to assess their entrepreneurial and innovative potential across multiple dimensions, including leadership and governance, organisational capacity, entrepreneurial teaching and learning, preparing and supporting entrepreneurs, digital transformation, knowledge exchange and collaboration, and internationalisation. For the purposes of this study, selected dimensions of the HEInnovate framework were adapted to focus specifically on students' and graduates' perceptions of entrepreneurial teaching and learning, opportunities for project-based engagement, institutional support mechanisms, and the development of innovation-related competences. The questionnaire employed Liker-scale items, allowing respondents to evaluate the current presence of entrepreneurial and project-oriented elements in their study programmes and to self-assess their own competences and preparedness.

Using HEInnovate in this preparatory research offers several methodological advantages. First, it provides a theoretically grounded and internationally validated framework for analysing entrepreneurial capacity in higher education. Second, it enables the identification of both strengths and areas requiring improvement, supporting evidence-based curriculum development. Finally, its multidimensional structure allows for the examination of entrepreneurial education as an integrated institutional process, rather than as isolated courses.

The collected data will be analysed descriptively in order to identify prevailing trends and priority areas for curricular enhancement. The results will serve as

a basis for designing the planned project-oriented courses, mentoring structures, and experiential learning components, ensuring that the future innovation is responsive to students' and graduates' actual needs and prepares them for contemporary professional demands.

7. Results / Findings and Discussion

Measurements using the HEInnovate tool are structured into eight basic categories: Leadership and Governance; Organisational Capacity: People, Resources, Incentives and Rewards; Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning; Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs; Digital Transformation and Capability; Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Networks; The Internationalized Institution; and Impact of the Entrepreneurial HEI. The responses of the survey participants can be graphically represented as follows:

The results indicate that the institution has established stable foundations, particularly in the areas of international orientation and cooperation (achieving a score of 4.1 out of 5) and digital transformation (score 3.7). The university effectively reflects global trends and supports the mobility of both students and staff (e.g. through programmes such as Erasmus+, SAIA), thereby fostering a favourable environment for innovation transfer. Digital transformation is evident both at the institutional level (for example, through the introduction of specialised degree programmes such as Artificial Intelligence – Natural Language Processing or Digital Economy) and at the level of individual units (e.g. through workshops such as *The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Foreign Language Teaching*, held on 8 December 2025). At the same time, the university has implemented basic mechanisms supporting digital operations and recognises digital transformation as a key component of its strategic development.

Despite these strengths, the evaluation also identified critical areas that are essential for the development of entrepreneurial thinking, including within teacher education programmes. The lowest-rated dimension was Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs, which achieved an average score of only 3. Within this dimension, a significant shortcoming concerns access to business incubation facilities (score 2.6). Similarly, support for students, graduates and staff in establishing new ventures or developing existing businesses appears insufficient (score 2.8). The findings further suggest that the institution does not adequately promote awareness of entrepreneurship nor sufficiently stimulate entrepreneurial intentions among students, graduates and staff to establish their own enterprises (score only 2.9).

Although the overall dimension of Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning received an average score of 3.5, a notable weakness lies in the monitoring

and evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of entrepreneurial education, which scored only 2.8. This indicates the absence of systematic instruments for measuring the development of entrepreneurial competences among students. In the dimension of Leadership and Governance, the institution demonstrates a clear strategic commitment to embedding entrepreneurship within its culture; however, the overall score (3.1) suggests the need to move beyond formal strategic declarations towards deeper institutional integration within the organisational structures of the university and its faculties.

The presented results of the student and graduate evaluation can, owing to the tool applied, be compared with both the global average and national averages. For comparative purposes, the European database platform European Higher Education Sector Observatory (EHESO Microdata Access), established by the European Commission, is utilised. This platform collects and provides data on higher education institutions across Europe (European Education and Culture Executive Agency). The following section compares the obtained results with the global university average as well as with the national average for Slovakia: The national graphical comparison (Figure 3) indicates that, within the context of Slovak universities, CPU achieves above-average results in most of the monitored dimensions. However, a different pattern emerges in the global comparison. The radar chart (Figure 2) demonstrates that the values obtained from the evaluation conducted among students and graduates of teacher education programmes at the Department of Romance and German Studies, Faculty of Arts, at CPU are, in the majority of assessed dimensions, very close to the global average, without statistically significant deviations. The institutional profile appears balanced and without extreme fluctuations, suggesting a systematic, albeit moderately conservative, approach to the development of entrepreneurship.

The comparison with the global average particularly confirms the strong level of internationalisation at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, while simultaneously highlighting insufficient support in the dimensions of Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs and Leadership and Governance. In light of these findings, the greatest potential for further development can be identified in the areas of strategic management of entrepreneurship, support for entrepreneurial initiatives, the strengthening of ecosystems and external partnerships, and the systematic measurement and evaluation of impact.

8. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

The present study sought to provide an evidence-based foundation for the planned innovation of the bachelor's study programmes in Romance Languages and Literature Teacher Education and German Language and

Literature Teacher Education at the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. By applying the HEInnovate self-assessment framework (HEInnovate, 2018), the research identified both strengths and areas requiring targeted development in relation to entrepreneurial and project-oriented education. It should be noted, however, that the research sample was relatively small and the participation in the questionnaire was voluntary, which limits the generalisability of the findings.

The results indicate that the institution demonstrates solid performance in the areas of internationalisation and digital transformation, reflecting a favourable environment for innovation and cross-border cooperation. At the same time, the findings reveal structural weaknesses in the systematic preparation and support of entrepreneurial initiatives, as well as in the evaluation and impact measurement of entrepreneurial learning. Particularly low scores in the dimension Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs and in the assessment of the impact of entrepreneurial education point to insufficient institutional mechanisms for stimulating entrepreneurial activity, mentoring initiatives, and monitoring competence development.

These findings clearly support the necessity of innovating the existing study programmes. The relatively average results in comparison with global benchmarks suggest that while the university operates within an internationally comparable standard, it does not yet demonstrate a distinctive or strategic integration of entrepreneurial thinking within teacher education. The planned introduction of structured project-management courses (Project Management 1, Project Management 2, Project Practice, and Excursion: Projects in Practice) therefore responds directly to empirically identified gaps. The innovation is not conceived as an isolated curricular addition, but as a systemic intervention aimed at strengthening strategic leadership in entrepreneurship education, embedding impact-evaluation mechanisms, and fostering a supportive ecosystem for student initiatives. In this sense, the results confirm that curricular reform is not only desirable but necessary in order to align teacher education with contemporary professional expectations and European policy priorities.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. First, the research sample was limited in size and based on voluntary participation, which may have introduced self-selection bias and reduced the representativeness of the data. Second, the comparison of results is based on mean scores derived from Likert-scale self-assessment responses. Such aggregation may obscure internal variability and individual differences among respondents. Third, participation in the HEInnovate self-assessment is voluntary both nationally and internationally; there is no mandatory requirement for higher education institutions or individual respondents to

complete the instrument. Consequently, it is not possible to determine how many institutions or respondents ultimately contributed to the Slovak or global averages used for comparison, which affects the comparability and interpretability of benchmark data.

Furthermore, the study relies on self-perceived competences and institutional perceptions rather than on objective performance indicators. Self-assessment data may be influenced by subjective interpretation, response bias, or limited awareness of institutional strategies. Future research should therefore complement questionnaire findings with qualitative methods (e.g., interviews or focus groups), longitudinal monitoring of competence development, and analysis of measurable outputs such as student project implementation, grant participation, or entrepreneurial initiatives.

In conclusion, while the institution demonstrates a stable and internationally comparable profile, the results underline the strategic importance of strengthening entrepreneurial and project-based competences within foreign language teacher education. Systematic curricular innovation, accompanied by continuous evaluation and strengthened institutional support mechanisms, represents a necessary step toward preparing future teachers for the complex and innovation-driven educational landscape of the 21st century.

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Can Artificial Intelligence Become a Research Team Member? AI as a Reflexive Partner: Evaluating Riff in Collaborative Doctoral Research

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Abstract: As artificial intelligence transforms academic research, scholars face both challenges and opportunities in integrating AI into their work (Bail, 2024). This study evaluates the integration of Riff, an AI-powered chatbot, as a digital member of a research team. The goal is to critically evaluate its limitations and potential in facilitating collaborative autoethnography (CAE) and fostering reflexive dialogue. A team of six doctoral students enlisted Riff to prompt asynchronous, individual and contextually responsive dialogue. The resulting data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Technical evaluation highlights Riff’s potential as a “catalyst” for deeper reflection. However, significant tensions emerged regarding the professionally risky nature of self-disclosure, the difficulty of maintaining critical distance or self-censorship in competitive academic environments. This presentation shares the learnings from the qualitative research process critically evaluating opportunities, ethical dilemmas and the future potential of using Large Language Models (LLM) as a research team member. This work contributes to contemporary research methods by providing a framework for using LLMs

as reflexive partners while highlighting the urgent need for ethical guidelines in a digital academia.

Keywords: *AI-powered reflexivity, Large Language Models (LLM), Digital Ethics, Collaborative Autoethnography (CAE), Doctoral Education*

1. Introduction

As PhD students beginning our academic journey, we encountered numerous challenges along the way. These experiences directed our attention to the issue of well-being within academic institutions. As presented by Pizuńska et al. (2021), PhD students show a lower level of general mental well-being and higher anxiety and sleep problems, as well as depressive symptoms, than graduates not undertaking doctoral studies. Additionally, Piotrowski et al. (2024) show that PhD candidates experience significant stress. As demonstrated in the work of Blalock & Akehi (2017) and Anderson et al. (2019), engaging in reflection may contribute positively to well-being.

These considerations inspired us to investigate and reflect on our own experiences within the collaborative autoethnography (CAE) framework. To gather data for our analysis, we decided to include artificial intelligence, recognizing its growing presence in research and the scientific community, and its transformative impact on academic inquiry. Scholars now face both challenges and opportunities in integrating AI into their work (Bail, 2024).

The purpose of this paper is to explore and understand the role of AI as a research partner or team member, rather than merely a tool for optimization. We evaluate the integration of Riff, an AI-powered chatbot, to critically assess its potential and limitations in supporting collaborative autoethnography (CAE) and reflexive dialogue. This study offers a framework for using LLMs as reflexive partners and underscores the need for ethical guidelines in digital academia.

2. Theoretical Framework

Taking the large body of research into consideration, the main idea behind current paper is to promote resonable and limited use of LLM, aiming at increasing the reflexivity and reducing negative effects. The scientific community's adaptation to technological progress has been an ongoing process for decades (Huang, 2017), as illustrated by earlier responses to the emergence of computers (Brent, 1984) and qualitative data analysis software (Shelly & Sibert, 1986). In 2022, large language models (LLMs) rapidly gained popularity. Commonly referred to as chatbots, these models use linear

prediction mechanisms (Wei et al., 2022) to generate human-like responses and enable real-time interaction (Bommasani et al., 2022). As expected, the scientific community responded with a range of positions, from enthusiasm, through cautious acceptance, to explicit concern regarding their scientific application (Balu & Morard, 2024; Geng et al., 2024; Roberts et al., 2024; Nicmanis & Spurrier, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Soon, numerous proposals emerged regarding the use of LLMs in social sciences, including qualitative research. The dominant line of inquiry focused on applying chatbots to coding (Bryda & Sadowski, 2024; Tai et al., 2024; Barrera et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025; Costa et al., 2025; Nguyen-Trung, 2025; Pattyn, 2025; Goyanes et al., 2025), data organization (Nguyen-Trung, 2025), thematic analysis (Lee et al., 2024; Hitch, 2024; Naeem et al., 2025; Olawade et al., 2025), and transcription (Barrera et al., 2025; Olawade et al., 2025). However, other applications have also been proposed. Researchers have used LLMs to plan research projects (Balu & Morard, 2024), generate interview questions (Roberts et al., 2024), prepare recruitment materials (Schroeder et al., 2025), simulate research participants (Buttrick, 2024; Gao et al., 2025; Davidson & Karell, 2025; Gray et al., 2026), and structure manuscripts based on conducted research (Roberts et al., 2024), including selecting or preparing illustrative quotes from qualitative data (Lee et al., 2024). Notably, some authors report using LLMs to support or partially delegate interview moderation (Walsh & Pallas-Brink, 2023; De Ajuro et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025; Nardon et al., 2025; Olawade et al., 2025). Due to their human-like communication style, some authors anthropomorphize chatbots, referring to models such as ChatGPT as partners (Costa et al., 2025; Walsh & Pallas-Brink, 2025), friends (Chubb, 2023), team members (Lee et al., 2024), or junior researchers (Goyanes et al., 2025; Gray et al., 2026).

Several authors emphasize the potential advantages of using LLMs in qualitative research. They describe research processes as more efficient and less time-consuming (Hitch, 2024; Barrera et al., 2025; Chen et al., 2025; Goyanes et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2025; Olawade et al., 2025; Pattyn, 2025), which may reduce research costs and increase accessibility (Hitch, 2024). It may also broaden the range of populations that can be included in research, including marginalized groups (Olawade et al., 2024). The ability to analyze large datasets allows for the inclusion and adequate representation of diverse perspectives (Hamilton et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025). Some authors argue that LLM-based analyses may be more consistent and less susceptible to certain human biases (Jakhali & Akhavan, 2024), and that they reduce errors or omissions associated with manual analysis (Hamilton et al., 2023; Olawade et al., 2025). Importantly, however, the advantages described in the literature primarily concern productivity,

understood as time efficiency, cost reduction, and scalability. In contrast, the depth and reflexivity of analyses appear to remain unchanged or may even decrease (Hitch, 2024).

Despite these potential benefits, skepticism regarding the use of LLMs in qualitative research persists. One key issue is that chatbots are designed to generate coherent responses rather than to verify factual accuracy, making them prone to hallucinations and the production of inaccurate or fabricated content (Roberts et al., 2024; Nguyen & Welch, 2025). Because AI systems reflect patterns present in their training data, they may privilege Western epistemological frameworks, inadequately represent perspectives from other cultural contexts, or reproduce existing stereotypes (Friedman et al., 2024; Buttrick, 2025; Olawade et al., 2025; Ibrahim & Voyer, 2025). Moreover, LLM outputs are sensitive to user prompts and may reproduce researchers' implicit assumptions or expectations (Roberts et al., 2024).

At the same time, chatbots lack embodied experience and empathy, which are often considered central to qualitative interpretation (Hitch, 2024; Roberts et al., 2024). Delegating parts of the analytic process to an LLM reduces the researcher's direct engagement with the data, potentially making the analysis less nuanced and less reflexive (Roberts et al., 2024; Jowsey et al., 2025; Nguyen & Welch, 2025; Paulus et al., 2025). Over time, limiting the practice of core research skills may weaken researchers' competencies and increase technological dependency (Hitch, 2024; Roberts et al., 2024; Nguyen & Welch, 2025). Ethical concerns are also frequently raised, particularly regarding data privacy when information is shared with externally owned models, often without explicit disclosure in participant consent forms (Lee et al., 2024; Ibrahim & Voyer, 2025; Walsh & Pallas-Brink, 2025). Additionally, limited transparency concerning training data and model architecture—often protected as trade secrets—restricts the ability to assess bias and ensure replicability (Nguyen & Welch, 2025; Ibrahim & Voyer, 2025). Finally, environmental concerns have been highlighted, particularly the high electricity and water consumption associated with training and operating large-scale models (Ibrahim & Voyer, 2025; Christou, 2025; Jowsey et al., 2025; Nguyen & Welch, 2025).

Taking the large body of research into consideration, the main idea behind current paper is to promote reasonable and limited use of LLM, aiming at increasing the reflexivity and reducing negative effects.

3. Methodology

The study was designed and carried out using a qualitative research approach. As a research method, we used collaborative autoethnography (CAE) to

explore our individual and shared experiences after the first year of doctoral school. Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) is observed to be used in other research on doctoral students’ experiences (Gleiman, Knolton, & Mokhtarian, 2015; Kim & Cho, 2023). This method enables research team members to collaboratively reflect on their personal experiences and interpret them within broader sociocultural contexts (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013).

The team of six doctoral students at a Polish university’s doctoral school served as the study participants. Contribution to research was consensual and voluntary. All data acquired was (relatively) confidential.

Data were collected using Riff, an AI-powered chatbot that operates on a large language model (LLM), enabling asynchronous, individual, and contextually responsive dialogue. As advertised by the manufacturer, compared with other chatbots “powered by generative AI (...) typically designed to answer questions and perform tasks, Riff focuses on asking learners thought-provoking questions to deepen their reflection process” (Riffbot.ai, 2026).

Riff chatbot, developed by Stanford professor Leticia Britos Cavagnaro, educator and scientist, designed specifically to assist users in three stage reflection processes (Britos Cavagnaro, 2023). The process of inquiry was designed to support deep and future focused reflection by facilitating conversation flows through three types of questions. The first group of questions facilitates “the noticing” stage, where the questions are asked to support the reflection on the basic elements of the experience selected. “The sensing” stage questions allow for deepening of the reflection through elaboration on the deeper level of emotions connected with the experience. The closing stage incorporates questions supporting “the envisioning” of future experiences.

Participants received link to the conversation with Riff via email and conversed asynchronously at different times in their native Polish language. Each participant was instructed to interact with Riff by answering a minimum of 5 questions. Data was collected in August 2025. The research material was subsequently translated into English, with each researcher translating only their own interview.

The data were analysed using *reflexive* thematic analysis (RTA), a qualitative method that emphasizes the researchers’ active role in identifying, interpreting, and constructing themes from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The analysis has been adjusted to our study (as can be observed in a detailed description of the data analysis process in Duda-Maciejewska et al., in press). Initially, each researcher independently developed a set of codes based on the research material. We then refined these codes to create a unified coding framework. In the final step, we compared our collaboratively developed codes to those generated by Riff. This process ensured that Riff’s summary

did not replace the team’s analytical work but instead served as an additional point of comparison.

After establishing the coding framework, the main themes were developed, reviewed, and refined through collaborative discussion. These finalized themes were then assigned to individual researchers for further exploration and synthesis, leading to the final stage of writing.

Researchers acknowledge the importance of ethical considerations and the need for guidelines when interacting with Artificial Intelligence. During the study process, we engaged in discussions about both our roles and Riff’s role within the research. We recognize the importance of safeguards embedded in the tool when addressing conversations related to well-being and mental health. However, we observed that Riff currently lacks effective mechanisms for responding to or managing discussions about well-being concerns. Our reflections on the experience, including our feelings during and after the conversations, led us to critically consider whether Riff is an appropriate tool for conducting interviews on sensitive topics.

4. Results and Discussion

The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate the outcomes, opportunities, limitations and ethical considerations of integrating and AI-powered chatbot (Riff) as a reflexive research partner within the process of collaborative autoethnographic (CAE) process supported by Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA).

The original CEA process design was modified due to significant time constraints experienced by all six doctoral students. To support the initiation of the reflection process, Riff was introduced at the beginning of the study to facilitate structured, three-stage reflection process. The chatbot was provided with contextual information on the deteriorating wellbeing in academia and specific challenges faced by doctoral students. A shared invitation prompt served as an anchor for participants’ asynchronous reflections.

All six students engaged asynchronously with Riff in their mother language. The length of reflective dialogues ranged from 396 to 1127 words. The engagement, length and depth of reflection varied: three participants completed in depth all three reflective stages (noticing, sensing, envisioning); two completed the noticing and sensing stages in depth, but provided shorter responses in the envisioning stage; one participant engaged in depth primary in the first stage and provided shorter responses in the remaining two stages. But all participants met the minimum requirement of five conversation rounds.

Some participants reported that after the anchoring prompt, Riff selected one of the threads of the reflection for further questioning while leaving other elements of response unattended and ignoring the merit or broader emotional context.

At the time of the study Riff provided an option to select other than default character types (f.e. emotional intelligence guide, creative catalyst, growth mindset coach, system thinker, perspective expander, feedback gatherer and ambiguity navigator) which were not tested. Following the AI-initiated reflection phase, the CAE process continued with face-to-face discussions and iterative Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA). The research team later compared three analytical outputs:

1. human-led Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) with themes and sub themes co-created during iterative process (Duda-Maciejewska et al., in press).
2. summary report generated automatically by Riff listing common themes present in all reflections.
3. the list of common themes generated by Riff upon explicit promoting.

The human-led RTA included three main themes supplemented by the subthemes:

Theme 1: Internal relationships (dynamics within oneself) with four subthemes including managing multiple, challenging roles and life difficulties; experiencing Imposter Syndrome and feelings of self-imposed pressure; thoughts of giving up or not completing doctoral school; growth and acquiring new knowledge.

Theme 2: Supportive group and relationship, with four subthemes including: perception of the doctoral group; supportive relationships within the group; support from family and friends; shared experiences and sharing them.

Theme 3: Navigating systems' tensions with three subthemes: the burden of administrative and bureaucratic work; learning to navigate academic worlds; supportive supervisors' system; living in-between systems.

The automatically generated summary included the list of the following categories: imposter syndrome mitigated by peer support and a supportive academic environment, feeling of overwhelm, self-doubt, anxiety related with administrative demands and the decline in mental health.

The prompted list of themes included:

1. Imposter Syndrome and self-doubt.
2. Importance of peers' support and community.
3. Significance of supervisor/mentor relationships
4. Challenges with bureaucracy and formal requirements.

5. Navigating feedback and external pressures.
 6. Interdisciplinary challenges and methodological shifts.
 7. Balancing doctoral studies with other life demands.
 8. Search for personal meaning and autonomy.
- The above outputs demonstrate differences in thematic structuring and prioritization differences between human-led and AI-generated analysis.

Ethical considerations

The researchers made a conscious decision to limit the scope of Riff usage during the CAE and RTA process. The chatbot was used during the initial asynchronous reflection later on two occasions as a comparative reference point.

5. Discussion

The study examined the integration of Riff chatbot as a reflexive research partner primarily during the collaborative autoethnographic process, while limiting its usage during reflexive thematic analysis. The outcomes show both the enabling potential and tensions associated with AI presence during the research.

The introduction of Riff for initiating reflective processes under the time constraints was effective. All participants completed asynchronous reflection, what suggest that it mat lower entry barriers to reflexive work in the demanding academic context. But the variety of length and depth or responses experienced, despite the minimum number of questions imposed, indicates that AI facilitated reflection might not secure expected quality of responses beyond the technical requirement imposed.

During the analysis, synthesis and narrative creation stages, the chatbot was used only as a ‘provocation’, and an outsider. Still, the human-led analysis resulted in multilayered themes and subtheme structure and deeper narrative construction. While AI-generated themes represent the summary list of emotional categories being present as a common denominator in all reflections.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis values researcher subjectivity as value adding resource during the narrative creation (Clark & Braun, 2022). In contrast, the large language models having "very algorithmic nature" may be relevant during systematic thematic analysis. Yet AI-generated summaries may present a valuable point of reference during the analysis phase.

The findings also emphasize the need for continuous protection of the variety of voices in relation to AI tendency for looking for shared

narrative. Therefore, human dialogue, collective interpretation and co-creation remain central to RTA method.

The study shows that AI can effectively support the start of the process and provides stimulating point of reference during codes and themes creation, but the meaning making phase and narrative creation remain human domain in CAE and RTA.

The asynchronous nature of AI reflection uncovered serious ethical consideration as while addressing reflective territory and wellbeing it might evoke strong emotions which require conscious reaction. Human supervision remained omnipresent during this study, yet the integration of the safety design features would contribute to the protection of participants' wellbeing during the process.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

This work contributes to contemporary qualitative methodology by examining large language models not as optimizing tools and human replacement, but as a reflexive companion during collaborative autoethnography and sparring partner during reflexive thematic analysis.

The findings show that AI can effectively initiate the reflective process, but the interpretation and sense-making remain to be human domain. Therefore, including AI during CAE and RTA processes requires clearly defined boundaries allowing for catalytic support be balanced by human interpretive and creative powers, as there is clear difference between the reflexive qualitative analysis and algorithmic logic of pattern recognition.

Limitations

Several limitations need to be recognized. Methodologically, the study involved a small CAE group of six doctoral students limiting the power of inference. Technically, Riff chatbot was used in a beta version, and only default character mode was used amongst variety of others available. Also, AI usage was strategically limited to selected phase limiting the evaluation of its full options. Analytically, the engagement across reflective stages was varied what could influence thematic depth and ability to compare Riff outputs. The lack of illustrative examples - included in the referenced publication - also represents important limitation. Further research might examine AI-supported reflection across larger and more diverse groups, comparing chatbot characters modes' potential and exploring sustained application of chatbot during the whole qualitative research process. Comparative studies may help clarify the respective strengths and limitations of AI-facilitated and human-led inquiries.

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Perceived Support from Professors: Students’ Perspectives on Academic and Interpersonal Support

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Abstract: One of the main factors that influence university student’s academic engagement, motivation, and emotional well-being is the perceived support from professors. The aim of this study is to explore how university students perceive and interpret professors’ supportive and unsupportive behaviours and how these perceptions shape their motivation, confidence, engagement, and sense of belonging.

A qualitative research design was used for the study. The sample included fifteen female undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education at International Balkan University in Skopje, N. Macedonia, i.e. the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and the Department of English Language Teaching. The data for the study was collected using individual semi-structured interviews and was analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns in the students’ interpretations.

Five themes emerged from the findings: guidance and clarity in teaching, encouragement and emotional support, constructive feedback and fairness, approachability and respectful communication, and the impact of unsupportive behaviours. Students shared that supportive behaviours such as clear guidance, encouragement, fair treatment, and respectful communication enhanced their confidence, motivation, and willingness to engage, while unsupportive behaviours had the opposite effect by decreasing their motivation, lowering their confidence, and undermining psychological safety and learning engagement.

The recommendations that can be taken out of this study are to strengthen faculty development initiatives focused on inclusive communication, emotional intelligence, and constructive feedback practices. The findings also contribute to the ongoing discussions on teacher inclusion and well-being by highlighting the central role of the professor-student relationships in fostering supportive and motivating higher education environments.

Keywords: *perceived professor support, student wellbeing, higher education*

1.Introduction

The quality of the relationship between university level students and their professors has become a very important discussion in relation to the academic engagement, inclusion, and student well-being in contemporary higher education, by emphasizing the role it plays in shaping the quality of academic experience and the student development. As the universities are transitioning day by day toward student-centred pedagogies and operating within rapidly digitalising environments, the relational and affective dimensions of teaching are gaining renewed importance.

Research consistently demonstrates that perceived support from professors is associated with increased motivation, persistence, and academic success. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of the teacher-student relationships in the higher education, there is a limited amount of qualitative research and exploration of how students themselves perceive and interpret professors’ academic and interpersonal behaviours and how these perceptions and interpretations influence their motivation, confidence, and sense of belonging. This study addresses this gap by exploring university students’ experiences of perceived support from professors.

The following are the research questions that guided this study:

1. What types of professors’ behaviours do students perceive as supportive or discouraging? (specific actions, communication, and attitudes)
2. How do students interpret professors’ academic and interpersonal behaviours in relation to their learning and motivation?
3. In what way does perceived support from professors’ shape students’ engagement, confidence, and sense of belonging at university?

From the research questions the following objectives of this study were defined:

1. to identify behaviours that students perceive as supportive or discouraging,
2. to explore how students interpret academic and interpersonal support, and
3. to examine how perceived support shapes motivation, confidence, engagement, and belonging.

By focusing on the viewpoints of the students and by analysing their perspectives the study adds new and relevant information to the current

discussions and understanding that how students perceive academic and interpersonal support from professors is essential for fostering inclusive and well-being oriented learning environments.

2. Literature Review/Theoretical Framework

The teacher-student relationships have been studied and examined for some time and usually in school contexts, but they have not been researched enough in university settings (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Existing studies confirm the influence that the teacher-student relationship has on the quality of teaching and learning (Klem & Connell, 2004). Among the many factors that influence student engagement and achievement, *perceived support from professors* has emerged as one of the strongest predictors of academic motivation, persistence, and overall well-being (Komarraju, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Tinto, 2017). *Perceived support* as a psychological experience in an educational setting is not just a list of provided services, it is not only about the direct and concrete help or support that the professors give such as academic feedback or guidance, but it is also about how students interpret the professors' behaviour, communication style i.e. it emphasizes how students feel treated by their professors (Wentzel, 1998).

According to many studies, students who feel supported and respected by their professors, are more likely to participate actively in different contexts, they are more likely to seek help whenever they need help and assistance, and are more likely to show persistence when going through academic challenges (Hagenauer & Volet 2014; Wilson et al., 2012).

On the other hand, studies also show that when students perceive that there is a lack of empathy on the side of professors, or that the professors are not showing availability or fairness, feelings of alienation and feelings of disengagement can appear, which than can have negative effects on learning outcomes (Clegg, 2010). Research also shows that the students who today are labelled as Millennials i.e. students who were born between 1981 and 1991, prefer more active learning approaches and interactive activities, because they want to be able to interact with the professors and with each other in more informal way and a more relaxed learning environment where they will also be able to apply practically what they are learning (Bart, 2011). This gives motivation to students to focus on learning and invest on learning and achieving learning goals. When we talk about the professor-student relationship we see that this relationship is both instructional and interpersonal, so understanding students' perceived support of professors is very important for improving teaching quality, for reducing student stress, and for creating and fostering inclusive learning environments.

It should be mentioned that much of the research on this topic relies on quantitative measures of interaction frequency or satisfaction and this offers very little insight into how students construct meaning around professors' behaviours. Also, studies often treat support as a unidimensional construct without making a sufficient distinguishing between academic and interpersonal or instrumental and emotional dimensions. This study and the construct of perceived support draw from the Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), according to which the comfort, help, and information individuals receive from others can improve health, lessen stress, and reduce the likelihood of crime and delinquency. The theory emphasizes different types of support such as emotional, informational, tangible, and appraisal support. It is important to also emphasize that Albert Bandura's (1997) Theory of Self-efficacy provides an additional conceptual view. The feedback that students receive from their professors, as well as the encouragement and fairness, can have an influence on students' beliefs about their capabilities.

The construct also draws on educational relationship models that emphasize the role of emotional and instrumental assistance in promoting adjustment and performance (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In a university setting, the success of students is driven by two types of support that are provided by faculty and institutions, which are different from each other but which also complement each other and together increase the students' belief in themselves as well as their motivation and desire to learn. These two types of support are *academic support* which includes feedback, clear communication and instructional guidance, as well as emotional support which includes care, encouragement, and understanding (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). These forms of support play an active role in affecting students' self-efficacy i.e. their belief in their own capability to complete academic tasks (Bandura, 1997), students' engagement i.e. their active participation (Kahu, 2013), and their motivation to learn i.e. their internal drive to gain knowledge (Wentzel, 1998).

Overall, if a critical synthesis is to be done on the existing research on this topic, it can be concluded that there are three main gaps in the literature:

1. Overreliance on quantitative measures of perceived support
2. Limited qualitative exploration of students' lived interpretations.

These gaps are addressed in this study by offering a qualitative exploration based on the Social Support Theory and the Self-efficacy Theory, on students' interpretations of professors' actions and behaviours.

3. Methodology

For this study a qualitative research design was implemented in order to explore how university students perceive and interpret professors' behaviour

and personal, and academic support. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables a rich, in-depth understanding of students’ experiences and meanings they assign to their interactions with professors.

It is important to emphasize that *perceived support* is not an objective measure of what professors do, or of what is offered as support, but rather about interpretation i.e. how students interpret those actions and behaviours. For example, there may be two different students who experience the same behaviour from the professor (e.g. critical feedback) but they do not perceive it in the same way. They perceive that behaviour differently depending on their own previous experiences, or their expectations, or the context and the relational dynamics. This interpretative dimension makes the usage of a qualitative approach suitable for the exploration of this topic, because this approach gives the opportunity to explore closely how students interpret the behaviour and the interactions with professors and how they describe the feelings they experience. Through open-end questions and conversation students are able to share their views on all the elements that shape their perceptions and experiences and this gives the opportunity to gain a more holistic understanding of the *perceived support* concept and to identify themes related to empathy, communication, feedback, fairness, which otherwise in standardized data would remain unseen.

The sample that was used for this study consisted of fifteen undergraduate university level students from the Faculty of Education at International Balkan University, Skopje, N. Macedonia. The students were from second, third, and fourth year and from the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG) and the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT). All participants that were included in the study were female between ages 19 and 22 years. Students’ participation in this study was voluntary and they were asked to give verbal informed consent prior to the interviews.

A semi-structured interview was used for the collection of the data for this study. This type of approach allowed the participants to express their experiences in their own words, it gave them time to think and then share and it also gave the opportunity for follow-up questions to be asked and to explore the emerging themes. Each of the conducted interviews lasted approximately 20 to 30 minutes and was carried out in a quiet and comfortable environment within university setting. During the interviews detailed notes were taken, participants’ main points were written down along with the examples that they shared, as well as their emotional expressions. For the interviews ten open-ended questions were used, which were created based on the study’s research questions and research objectives. Questions focused on students’ experiences of academic and personal/emotional support, their interpretation of professors’

behaviours and how such experiences influenced their motivation, confidence, and learning engagement.

4. Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the interviews revealed several interrelated themes describing how students perceive professors' support and the ways in which professors' behaviours play a role in their motivation, confidence, and engagement. There are five themes that emerged:

1. Guidance and Clarity in Teaching
2. Encouragement and Emotional Support
3. Constructive Feedback and Fairness
4. Approachability and Respectful Communication
5. Impact of Unsupportive and Discouraging Behaviour

Guidance and Clarity in Teaching

Participants emphasized that one of the strongest indicators of professional support is clear guidance about the course, guidance in understanding the course content, on how to prepare for exam. Students valued professors who explained the material in an understandable way and give clear instructions and directions (*“I expect from the professor to give us guidance on how to study for the exam, to help us better understand the course content and the lecture, to use clear language when explaining.”*).

Students also expressed appreciation for professors who show understanding when they are unable to attend classes, professors who share study materials such as Power Point presentations and notes and help with the introduction and adaptation to the course. Such behaviours were interpreted as helpful (*“I feel supported when they share the PPT presentations and materials with the students”*). They also pointed out how important it is for them to have professors who are approachable and accessible.

This clarity and accessibility were described as making students feel more secure, confident, and better adapted to the course.

2. Encouragement and Emotional Support

Emotional support and encouragement were repeatedly described as crucial to students' sense of confidence and belonging. It was emphasized that encouraging words and statements, as well as words of affirmation such as *“You can do it”* or *“That’s a good answer”* were very positively accepted by the students and were experienced as motivating and uplifting (*“I feel very happy when I hear those words, it makes me more confident”*; *“It feels very*

nice when professors say 'you can do it' or 'just try', I feel their support with these words")

Students associated such encouragement with increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and a greater willingness to participate in class discussions. Professors who showed patience and gave students time to answer questions were also viewed as supportive (*"I feel supported when the professor asks a question and gives you time and space to think, because sometimes students whose English is better jump in with the answer not letting the others get a chance."*).

3. *Constructive Feedback and Fairness*

Constructive feedback was identified as a key dimension of academic support. Participants valued professors who give feedback, during class or provide private individualized comments on homework or exams, focusing on improvement rather than criticism (*"I feel supported when they give you feedback on homework or exam, talk to you in private about what you need to improve, what the mistakes are and how to correct them."*; *"We had one professor who after every quiz we did in class, or after every exam would encourage us to go see the test or the quiz, to see what mistakes we made, how we can correct them, what to focus on more for the next time"*).

Fair and equal treatment of all students was another essential element of perceived support. Participants mentioned that fairness and equality created a positive emotional climate and a sense of respect (*"When they are fair, equal in treatment of every student, and give constructive criticism, is the best, I really feel supported."*).

4. *Approachability and Respectful Communication*

During the interviews the students emphasized the importance of having professors that are approachable and who are respectful in communication. The professors who were open, flexible, and easy to communicate with were seen as approachable, caring, and understanding whereas professors who were rigid in their behaviour or acted as having superiority against others and especially students, were perceived as disrespectful and discouraging (*"The professor should be open and approachable, students should not feel scared to approach a professor"*; *"I think professors should be easy to communicate and they should not use humiliating behaviour or humiliating words"*; *"I feel like professors should respect students just like students respect professors"*)

5. *Impact of unsupportive or discouraging behaviour*

When the students perceived professors as unavailable, unclear, or as unfair they said that they felt demotivated, they felt anxiety and self-doubt. As unsupportive behaviours the students listed the following: ignoring students,

showing favouritism, using humiliating words and humiliating tone (*"When professors do not answer e-mails, or make lectures long and confusing or when they act superior that really affects my motivation, it decreases"*; *"When professors show favouritism, or when they pass criticism publicly I feel like giving up before even starting"*; *"It makes me feel really bad when professors do not recognize effort"*). These types of experiences have a negative effect on students, it affects their confidence in their abilities, their willingness to participate, and their overall academic engagement. Opposite to this, the professors who showed support fostered optimism, persistence, and trust (*"When professors are supportive I feel more motivated to learn, I feel like I can learn"*; (*"Supportive professors make me feel more confident, and less afraid to make mistakes"*).

Students also mentioned practical aspects of communication, such as professors responding to e-mails from students, being available during consultation hours, or being available to ask them something or to consult them about certain things, giving clear instructions about lessons or assignments, as very significant for the students. They interpreted these behaviours as signs of professionalism and care.

In general, students interpreted the support from professors as a combination of clear instruction, encouragement, fairness and respectful communication. As supportive professors were considered the professors who not only conveyed academic knowledge but also fostered confidence, belonging, and motivation through their attitudes and behaviours. On the other hand, behaviours such as lack of communication, rigidity, or public criticism were considered unsupportive or discouraging behaviours and were seen as barriers to learning and emotional well-being.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

As a conclusion to the study, it can be said that the findings of this study confirm and extend previous research on the importance of the professor-student relationships and perceived support in higher education. The results from the study show that the students' perceptions of professors' behaviour plays a very important role in their motivation, academic engagement, and emotional well-being. The themes that were identified from the analysis of the interviews, such as guidance and clarity in teaching, encouragement and emotional support, constructive feedback and fairness, approachability and respectful communication, and impact of unsupportive and discouraging behaviour demonstrate that students view support as a multi-layered construct i.e. a combination of different types of assistance where both academic and personal/emotional dimensions are included.

From a psychological perspective, it can be concluded that the supportive behaviours of professors not only enhance learning outcomes but also contribute to students' self-efficacy, sense of competence i.e. belief in their abilities, as well as a contribution to their psychological well-being.

This findings of this study showed that perceived support from professors is not only about instructional effectiveness but it is also about having empathy, being fair, and communicating openly, directly, and respectfully. It can also be concluded that while the actions and behaviours of the professors which the students perceived as supportive contributed to their confidence, motivation, and engagement, the unsupportive behaviours such as rigidity, lack of communication, favouritism, or public criticism, undermined students' psychological safety, confidence, motivation, and willingness to participate and engage.

This study that has been carried out has several limitations. First of all the study involved a very small sample. Second, the sample included only female students, third the students were from only one faculty of the university, which limit the generalizability of the findings.

For the future the research could be expanded and a larger sample could be included with a more diverse group of participants, including male students, students from all study years, and students from other faculties of the same university, but also students from other universities.

In conclusion, it can be said that by cultivating a climate of respect, fairness, and encouragement, professors can foster more effective learning, as well as healthier and more motivated students. Based on this it can also be recommended that in practice, higher education institutions promote faculty development programs that are focused on emotional intelligence, inclusive communication, and constructive feedback strategies. Also training of professors to use positive reinforcement, equitable treatment, and empathy-based interaction can be promoted in order to strengthen students' intrinsic motivation, because fostering an environment where professors are trained to adapt their communication styles and to be sensitive to diverse backgrounds of students, can improve the overall educational quality.

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Innovation and Technology in Education: Integrating Artificial Intelligence through a Cross-Curricular ICT and English Approach

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Abstract: The contemporary educational landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by rapid advancements in innovation and technology. This evolution necessitates the development of sophisticated cross-curricular models capable of integrating digital tools seamlessly and meaningfully across diverse academic disciplines. This paper meticulously explores a pioneering approach to embedding Artificial Intelligence (AI) within upper secondary education, employing a synergistic framework that unites Information and Communication Technology (ICT) with English language instruction. Our central objective is to significantly enhance student engagement, cultivate robust digital competence, and refine crucial communication skills. The proposed pedagogical model is meticulously designed to strategically incorporate AI-powered tools such as adaptive learning platforms, intelligent feedback systems, and conversational applications into English-mediated tasks that delve into complex technological concepts. Fundamentally, this approach positions technology as an indispensable pedagogical support, rather than a mere substitute for human instruction, thereby actively fostering the development of essential 21st-century skills, including collaborative learning, critical thinking, and learner autonomy. The research design employs a rigorous mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data will be systematically collected through carefully constructed student questionnaires, which will precisely measure engagement levels, digital awareness, and the perceived impact on learning outcomes. Concurrently, qualitative data will be acquired via in-depth focus group discussions, offering rich, nuanced insights into the learners' lived experiences with this interdisciplinary, technology-enhanced instructional paradigm, all informed by practical classroom observations. We anticipate several key outcomes: a substantial increase in student motivation,

demonstrable improvements in interdisciplinary understanding, and a heightened awareness regarding the responsible and ethical deployment of AI. Ultimately, this research endeavors to propose a transferable and sustainable educational model that aligns perfectly with global innovation-oriented educational frameworks.

Keywords: *Innovation in education; Artificial Intelligence in education; Cross-curricular teaching; ICT integra*

1. Introduction

The relentless march of digital technologies, particularly the pervasive influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), has undeniably reshaped educational paradigms across the globe. In response to this epochal shift, educational institutions are increasingly confronted with the imperative to equip learners not only with foundational knowledge but also with a comprehensive repertoire of digital competencies, incisive critical thinking abilities, and highly effective communication skills. These attributes are no longer supplementary but are, in fact, indispensable for navigating the intricate complexities of our technology-driven global society. Traditional, compartmentalized disciplinary approaches frequently prove inadequate in preparing students for the interconnected challenges that define the modern world. Consequently, cross-curricular methodologies, especially those that judiciously integrate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) with language education, present uniquely fertile grounds for learning. These integrated frameworks not only facilitate the practical application of advanced AI tools but simultaneously elevate both technical proficiency and linguistic competencies, creating a symbiotic learning environment (Allushi Maloku & Sharko, 2026). This paper endeavors to introduce a meticulously crafted pedagogical model, specifically tailored for upper secondary education, which orchestrates the integration of AI through a synergistic ICT and English language approach. The foundational premise underpinning this model is to harness AI not merely as a technological embellishment, but as an intrinsic pedagogical support system designed to profoundly enrich the learning experience. By strategically embedding AI-powered tools within English-mediated tasks, students are afforded authentic and compelling opportunities to engage directly with cutting-edge technological concepts, cultivate critical digital literacy, and meticulously refine their communication skills in a manner that is both relevant and deeply engaging. The subsequent sections of this paper will systematically delve into the extant scholarly literature, meticulously detail the methodological approach adopted, comprehensively

outline the proposed instructional model, discuss the anticipated results with a forward-looking perspective, and ultimately conclude with an exploration of the broader implications and significant contributions emanating from this study.

The Imperative for Educational Innovation in the Digital Age

The 21st century is characterized by an unprecedented pace of technological advancement, with digital innovations permeating every facet of human existence. Education, as a cornerstone of societal progress, must not only keep pace with these changes but actively anticipate and shape them. The traditional model of education, often criticized for its passive learning approaches and disciplinary silos, is increasingly ill-equipped to prepare students for a future dominated by automation, data analytics, and artificial intelligence. There is a growing consensus among educators, policymakers, and industry leaders that a fundamental shift towards more dynamic, interdisciplinary, and technology-enhanced learning environments is not merely desirable but absolutely essential (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019). This shift demands innovative pedagogical approaches that can effectively integrate new technologies, such as AI, into the curriculum in ways that foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication - skills often referred to as the '4 Cs' of 21st-century learning (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2019). Moreover, the globalized nature of modern challenges, from climate change to public health crises, underscores the need for educational systems that can cultivate interdisciplinary understanding and equip learners with the ability to synthesize knowledge from diverse fields. Language, particularly English as a global lingua franca, plays a crucial role in facilitating this interdisciplinary dialogue and knowledge exchange. Therefore, integrating ICT and AI within English language education offers a powerful avenue to address these contemporary educational imperatives, preparing students not just for academic success but for active and informed participation in a complex, technology-driven world.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the educational sphere represents a dynamic and rapidly evolving domain, characterized by both immense transformative potential and considerable pedagogical complexities. A consistent thread running through existing research underscores the escalating significance of AI as a potent instrument for personalization, adaptive learning, sophisticated formative assessment, and comprehensive learner support (Crompton, 2024). AI-driven platforms possess the

remarkable capacity to customize content to cater to the unique needs of individual students, furnish immediate and highly targeted feedback, and deploy intelligent tutoring systems that fluidly adapt to diverse learning paces and styles. This profound level of personalization is critically important for addressing the heterogeneous learning requirements prevalent in modern classrooms and for fostering an educational environment that is inherently more inclusive. Studies that specifically focus on cross-curricular teaching methodologies unequivocally demonstrate that the judicious integration of ICT with language learning substantially augments student engagement and deepens contextual understanding (Keränen, 2021). When students are actively engaged in applying their language skills to articulate or resolve problems intrinsically linked to technology, the learning experience transcends rote memorization, becoming inherently more authentic and enduring. This interdisciplinary synergy proves particularly efficacious in subjects such as English, where language acquisition can be richly contextualized through discussions and project-based activities involving state-of-the-art technologies. Nevertheless, the truly effective pedagogical integration of AI is not devoid of its inherent complexities; it mandates a meticulous alignment with established curricular objectives, a rigorous consideration of ethical implications, and a lucid comprehension of AI's inherent capabilities and its intrinsic limitations (Filiz, 2025).

AI in Language Learning

AI's burgeoning application within the realm of language learning, frequently termed AI-Assisted Language Learning (AIALL), represents a significant evolution built upon decades of foundational research in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL). AIALL tools, encompassing intelligent chatbots, sophisticated speech recognition software, and advanced automated writing evaluation systems, proffer unparalleled opportunities for immersive and profoundly interactive language practice (Bahari, 2025). These innovative tools are capable of delivering instantaneous feedback on pronunciation nuances, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and even the subtleties of presentation skills. They can adeptly simulate realistic conversational scenarios, thereby enabling students to hone their speaking and listening proficiencies in a low-stakes, supportive environment, engaging in dialogues that span from technological concepts to intricate ethical dilemmas related to AI. Research conducted by Zhao (2025) compellingly indicates that the strategic deployment of AI in English instruction markedly invigorates student interest and engagement, culminating in demonstrably enhanced learning outcomes (Zhao, 2025). This observation resonates harmoniously with constructivist learning theories, which fundamentally underscore the active

construction of knowledge through dynamic interaction and experiential engagement (Torres, 2025).

Cross-Curricular Approaches and Digital Competence

The imperative of cultivating robust digital competence among students constitutes a recurrent and central theme within contemporary educational discourse. Educational institutions are increasingly expected to nurture not only technical proficiencies but also the sophisticated ability to critically appraise digital information, comprehend the multifaceted ethical ramifications of technology, and engage responsibly with digital tools and platforms (Punzo, 2025). Cross-curricular approaches, by their very nature, furnish an ideal framework for achieving this multifaceted objective. By seamlessly integrating ICT with subjects such as English, students are empowered to articulate complex technological concepts with clarity, incisively analyze digital content, and communicate effectively about intricate issues pertaining to AI and digital citizenship (Behnamnia et al., 2024). This holistic approach transcends the mere utilitarian use of tools, actively promoting a deeper, more nuanced understanding of technology's profound societal impact.

Ethical Considerations of AI in Education

The rapid and widespread proliferation of AI tools, particularly the advent of generative AI, introduces an entirely new stratum of ethical considerations for educators. Concerns regarding the sanctity of data privacy, the insidious presence of algorithmic bias, the integrity of academic work (e.g., the authenticity of AI-generated content), and the potential for AI hallucinations (the generation of misinformation) are all issues of paramount importance (Song, 2025). Consequently, an efficacious pedagogical model for AI integration must explicitly confront and address these complex issues, actively fostering critical evaluation skills and assiduously promoting responsible AI use among the student populace. Educators assume a pivotal role in facilitating thoughtful discussions surrounding these ethical quandaries, meticulously guiding students to evolve into discerning users and conscientious creators of AI-generated content (Abdallah, 2025). The C.H.A.T.S. Model, for instance, offers a structured pedagogical framework specifically designed to navigate and address these challenges through strategic integration (Koehler & Mishra, 2009).

Theoretical Frameworks for Technology Integration

To furnish a robust theoretical underpinning, this study consciously aligns itself with established and widely recognized frameworks for technology

integration within educational contexts. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, for example, meticulously emphasizes the intricate interplay between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge - a tripartite understanding that effective educators must intrinsically possess (Puentedura, 2014). Our proposed model endeavors to significantly enhance teachers' TPACK by offering a structured and coherent approach to integrating AI tools within specific content domains (e.g., ICT concepts) and through innovative pedagogical strategies (e.g., cross-curricular, collaborative learning). Furthermore, the SAMR Model (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) provides an invaluable analytical lens through which to evaluate the depth and sophistication of technology integration (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The aspirations of the proposed model are firmly set on achieving modification and redefinition, where AI tools are not merely superficial additions but fundamentally transform learning tasks, moving far beyond the simple substitution of traditional instructional methods.

3. Methodology

This investigation employs a comprehensive mixed-methods research design, strategically combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to furnish a holistic and profound understanding of the impact resulting from AI integration in upper secondary education. This particular design is exceptionally well-suited for educational research, primarily because it facilitates the triangulation of data, thereby significantly enhancing the validity and reliability of the emergent findings by capturing both the broad spectrum of student perceptions and the intricate depth of their lived experiences (OECD, 2021). The research will be meticulously conducted within authentic upper secondary classroom environments, a choice that inherently ensures ecological validity and relevance to real-world educational settings.

Participants and Setting

The participants in this study will comprise students actively enrolled in integrated ICT and English lessons within a carefully selected cohort of upper secondary schools. The selection process for participants will be designed to ensure a diverse and representative cross-section of academic backgrounds and varying levels of prior exposure to digital technologies. The intervention itself will encompass a dedicated and sustained period during which AI tools are systematically integrated into the curriculum, thereby allowing for prolonged engagement and the meticulous observation of evolving learning

outcomes. Furthermore, all educators involved in the study will undergo initial, comprehensive training focused on the effective and ethical utilization of the AI tools, as well as the implementation of the cross-curricular pedagogical approach.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data will be systematically collected through the administration of structured student questionnaires. These questionnaires will be rigorously designed to precisely measure several pivotal constructs: Student Engagement, Digital Awareness and Competence, and Perceived Learning Impact. Qualitative data will be meticulously obtained through focus group discussions conducted with a carefully selected subset of student participants. These discussions are anticipated to yield rich, descriptive narrative insights into their subjective experiences and nuanced perceptions of the interdisciplinary learning environment.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data derived from the questionnaires will undergo rigorous analysis utilizing descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations) to succinctly summarize student responses. Inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests, Analysis of Variance [ANOVA]) will be employed to discern statistically significant differences or relationships between the various measured variables. Qualitative data gleaned from the focus group discussions will be subjected to a meticulous thematic analysis, involving the systematic coding and categorization of recurring themes and patterns to identify pivotal insights and emergent understandings. The strategic triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative findings is expected to provide a comprehensive, robust, and nuanced interpretation of the study's overall results.

Instructional Model

The proposed instructional model is meticulously engineered to facilitate the seamless integration of AI-supported ICT tools into English language tasks, thereby cultivating a dynamic, interactive, and profoundly enriching learning environment. This model transcends superficial technological integration, aspiring instead to a transformative educational experience where AI functions as an intelligent, indispensable assistant, augmenting both the teaching and learning processes in synergistic ways.

AI-Supported Tools and Applications

This model strategically leverages a diverse array of AI applications, each carefully selected for its inherent pedagogical potential and its precise

alignment with predetermined learning objectives: Adaptive Learning Platforms, Intelligent Feedback Systems, and Conversational AI Applications. English Language Tasks and Activities: AI tools are thoughtfully embedded within a diverse spectrum of English language tasks, each inherently designed to explore technological concepts, thereby simultaneously fostering both linguistic and digital competencies: Collaborative Writing, Digital Presentations, and Problem-Solving Activities.

Teacher Role and Facilitation

Within this innovative model, the traditional role of the educator undergoes a significant and transformative evolution, shifting from a mere dispenser of knowledge to that of a dynamic facilitator, an insightful mentor, and a guiding force. Key responsibilities for the teacher in this enhanced paradigm include fostering reflection and critical thinking, promoting ethical awareness, providing scaffolding and support, and ensuring curriculum integration.

Practical Implementation Scenarios

To illustrate the practical application of this instructional model, consider the following scenarios:

Developing an AI Ethics Report, Creating a Digital Presentation on Machine Learning, and Problem-Solving with AI in Environmental Science. These scenarios highlight how the model integrates AI tools not as isolated features, but as integral components of meaningful, English-mediated tasks that promote deep learning and skill development across disciplines.

4. Expected Results and Discussion

The systematic implementation of this integrated AI and cross-curricular ICT and English approach is confidently anticipated to engender several profoundly significant positive outcomes, collectively contributing to the creation of a more dynamic, engaging, and ultimately more effective learning environment for upper secondary students. These expected results are firmly rooted in contemporary educational research and the robust theoretical underpinnings of the proposed model.

Firstly, a substantial and measurable increase in student motivation and engagement is a primary anticipated outcome. By thoughtfully embedding AI-powered tools within relevant, interactive, and intrinsically motivating English-mediated tasks, students are highly likely to perceive the learning process as more stimulating and personally resonant. The adaptive nature inherent in AI tools possesses the capacity to cater to individual learning styles and paces, thereby mitigating frustration and actively fostering a profound

sense of accomplishment - both of which are recognized as pivotal drivers of sustained motivation (Zhao, 2025).

Secondly, the model is robustly projected to culminate in improved communication skills. As students actively participate in collaborative writing endeavors, prepare and deliver digital presentations, and engage in problem-solving activities that necessitate the articulation of complex technological concepts in English, their linguistic proficiency, breadth of vocabulary, and rhetorical abilities are expected to naturally and significantly enhance. The intelligent feedback systems, seamlessly provided by AI tools, will offer immediate and highly targeted guidance, facilitating continuous refinement in both written and oral communication (Bahari, 2025).

Thirdly, a discernible and notable enhancement in digital competence is anticipated. Beyond merely acquiring technical proficiency in operating AI tools, students will cultivate a deeper, more nuanced understanding of core AI principles, sophisticated data analysis techniques, and the fundamental tenets of digital citizenship. The inherently cross-curricular nature of the model ensures that students learn to critically evaluate digital information, comprehend the intricate ethical implications of AI, and evolve into responsible users and innovative creators of technology (Punzo, 2025).

Finally, the study confidently anticipates a greater awareness of responsible AI use. Through carefully guided discussions and the critical evaluation of AI-generated content, students will progressively develop a robust ethical framework for their interactions with AI. This encompasses a thorough understanding of critical issues such as algorithmic bias, the paramount importance of data privacy, and the potential for the dissemination of misinformation (often termed 'hallucinations') originating from generative AI systems (Song, 2025).

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This paper has meticulously articulated a compelling rationale for the strategic integration of Artificial Intelligence into upper secondary education through a pioneering cross-curricular approach that synergistically unites Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and English language instruction. The proposed model offers a sustainable and pedagogically robust framework for fostering profound innovation in education, placing paramount emphasis on cultivating student engagement, digital competence, and refined communication skills. By judiciously positioning AI as an indispensable supportive tool, rather than a mere replacement for human pedagogy, the model actively promotes the development of critical thinking, acute ethical

awareness, and profound learner autonomy, thereby aligning seamlessly with the dynamic and evolving demands of our technology-driven global society.

6. Limitations and Future Research

While the proposed model presents a robust and conceptually sound framework, it is crucial to acknowledge certain inherent limitations, particularly given its current conceptualization and its presentation as an expected results paper. A primary limitation stems from the conspicuous absence of empirical data, as this paper primarily delineates an instructional model and its projected outcomes rather than presenting verifiable findings from an already implemented study. Consequently, rigorous future research is not merely advisable but absolutely imperative to empirically validate these anticipated results through meticulous investigation.

Specifically, future scholarly endeavors should focus on empirical validation, longitudinal studies, teacher training and development, specificity of AI tools, and mitigation of AI risks. By diligently addressing these identified limitations and assiduously pursuing the outlined avenues for future research, the academic community can collectively refine and substantially strengthen the pedagogical integration of AI in education.

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Ancestral Future: Education as Technology and the Case of a Peripheral Women’s Collective in Brazil

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Abstract: This work proposes the circle/wheel as an ancestral–future technology for the sharing of Life within and beyond formal schooling. Based on doctoral research with *RoLê das Domésticas*—a collective of peripheral women working as domestic workers in Brazil—the study departs from a situated experience to articulate a broader political–poetic framework. We argue that contemporary digital technologies can converge with ancestral technologies long produced and collectively sustained in marginalized communities, challenging reductionist and Cartesian paradigms that separate past and future, analog and digital, theory and practice. Methodologically, we advance *exodology*: a dynamic and living research orientation guided by displacement, deterritorialization, crossroads, and circularity. Within this movement, we engage concepts such as *encruzilogic* and *kaligraphy*. Rather than fixed procedures or measurable outcomes, research is conceived as relational movement—evolving with communities and expanding possibilities for participation and co-authorship. In this configuration, education is understood not as formation into pre-existing molds, but as the activation and intensification of life’s potencies. What emerges is not a closed set of results but a process we name *community-making*—the collective production of conditions for *living-with*, in which technologies (digital and non-digital) serve the expansion of life instead of its diminishment. Cinema-education and its collective practices are mobilized within this process, alongside literary engagements that grounded the project, as well as other possible and *in-possible* languages. In the context of digital innovation, we contend that the core question is not technological advancement itself, but how technologies may be reoriented toward a *world-worlds*: a world *plural-in-itself*, sustained through community-engaged co-creation.

Keywords: *Ancestral technologies; Educational innovation; Community-based education; Community methodologies; Digital–ancestral convergence; Participatory research*

1. Introduction (we call it Opening)

This work is a confluence. To begin with, a confluence of “I” and “we.” That is why we say *we* throughout this writing. Rafa, as author, is only one—more—expression of this collectivity. In fact, along our trajectories—also academic ones—we have been working intensely with the idea of co-authorship. Where everything is, in some way, co-authored.

Another confluence—or transfluence, in a usage we share with our brother Nêgo Bispo (Santos, 2023, p. 49)—is that of the peripheries with the university, science, and academia. We came from the Brazilian peripheries to the university. The university is a colonial invention—although it holds great potential to become otherwise, in its becoming. Many academic logics thus reproduce colonial patterns. This manifests linguistically (between all forms of languages), epistemologically, normatively, formally, and also in methodologies and bibliographic references. The *Piseagrama* collective (Carnevali et al., 2023) reaffirms this in the text contextualizing their organization of the anthology *Terra*. It is wonderful that we have books (and now papers like this) as written sources of knowledge. But our knowledges are multiple—humanly speaking—and arise from multiple sources. When we come from a periphery like ours, our references include books (written language), but they do not exclude what lies beyond them. Thus, a story we hear orally on our street is worth as much as one contained in a book borrowed from the university’s central library. It is beautiful when these knowledges meet—transflow—and complement each other.

Another confluence: this is the first time we write a scientific article in English. In the language we call “one of the Brazilian languages”—the one in which we have written most so far—we frequently play with words, drawing from their semantics and etymologies; this is an active part of our research. Now we will see how to transpose—and transflow—these movements into this new form of writing.

And finally—here, in our Brazilian, we would change the word *enfim* (finally, at the end) for the expression *sem-fim* (without end)—a confluence of the past and what is to come. Of what is ancestral to us with our future. Our brother Ailton Krenak (2022) has been one of the voices that, together with ours, speaks of this conjunction: where our future becomes safer and better guided through encounters (compositions and compostings) with our ancestry.

Here we may ask: what is the relationship between the digital, new technologies, and our ancestry? And further: how do both relate to education today? And then another: in which aspects of our lives are these three—ancestry, future, and education—not present and interconnected?

In some way, these are some of the questions to which this paper is devoted. Not necessarily to answer them. In Brazil, when someone appears too committed to finding a solution to something that already seems to exist, one asks: "Hey, are you trying to reinvent the wheel?"

Yet, as useless as it may seem, that is precisely—and imprecisely—what we have been doing.

Before returning to academia—after a considerable gap between undergraduate studies and a master's degree that eventually became a doctorate—we participated in organizing a community cultural collective in our peripheral neighborhood of origin, called *Encruzilhada Estrela Dalva*. This name may be contextualized in many ways, and we now choose to situate some of them here. *Encruzilhada* literally means "crossroads", but it also refers to a highly significant Afro-diasporic concept. *Estrela Dalva* is a star with a name—Dalva—and also one of the ways we refer to the planet Venus in Brazil. At the same time, *Estrela Dalva* is the name of the bar where we began gathering in the community; a bar located at a crossroads.

As this collective, we have carried out many projects over the past fifteen years. Always at the confluence of the arts, culture in a broad sense, and education. All of this mixed and flowing together with, basically, everything else. It is how we see things—beings. And that is why we say that: yes, we have been trying to reinvent the wheel.

For us, the wheel is an ancestral technology. Of encounter, contact, and flow. The square also has its importance, but at some point colonialism appropriated it—as it does with everything that serves it. Classrooms became square. School buildings, desks, and chairs as well. Everything in straight lines and right angles. Linear and vertical. Hierarchical. Boxed. Labeled. The rules and norms also became square, along with all the molds of formation processes (and in our Brazilian, *fôrma* means "mold," very close to *forma* "form," from which derives the idea of "formation," commonly used in Brazil to describe an effect of education).

One of our projects—the one we chose to present as our master's project, later recommended by the examination board to become directly a doctorate—is *RoLê das Domésticas*. In our Brazilian, *rolê* is a slang to express a ride, a stroll or a spin—like a chill—and it is also in this case an abbreviation of *Rodas de Leituras* (Readings Wheels). *Domésticas* refers to domestic workers—women from our periphery and community. Women who, among many other deprivations, were denied access to school and formal education.

With these confluences, we move forward in this introduction—this opening. We call it so because we seek a human science made in openness rather than closure. For the increase of life's potencies, not their diminishment. It is an opening of works, as we say in Brazil. An opening of the wheel. So that all

readings and presences may arrive and incorporate themselves into this circle. And thus we continue composing the turns of this article. When Maldonado-Torres (2008) speaks of the decolonial turn—*giro des-colonial*, like in “gyre,” a spin—we say *gira*. A *gira*—so similar to *giro*—that also refers to Afro-diasporic knowledges—but not only. With a meaning that we come to feel better as we delve deeper into these cultural experiences.

One final note before we proceed: when we consider the de-, dis-, anti-, or counter-colonial, we are resisting colonialism. This is tremendously important. But it is not what we wish to do forever. While many think in terms of maintaining resistance, we consider our possibilities of—simply—existing. Thus, our *gira* resists nothing. It simply exists. *In-itself* and *in-everything*.

2. The Group (we call it *RoLê das Domésticas*)

The group we formed is an expression of Life in its *gira*. Our mother is a domestic worker. She taught us how to read and write at home before we went to school. In our more recent writings, we have worked with the understanding that these peripheral women—domestic workers in Brazil, as in many parts of the world—stand at the structural base of society. In the Brazilian case—similar to that of other countries—this configuration dates back to the period of enslavement and colonial violence against people brought (kidnapped) from Africa, as well as Indigenous peoples native to the American continent, among other populations of the Earth.

In Brazil, for example, there were the *mucamas*: women who moved between the slave quarters (*senzala*) and the big house (*casa-grande*). Much like our mother and the other women in our group move between the gated condominiums of the wealthy families for whom they work and the favelas and poor communities where they live. Brazilian authors, our sisters, such as Lélia Gonzalez (2020) and Sueli Carneiro (2005, 2011), in these and other works, address a diversity of ethno-racial issues related to women, Black people, multiple peripheries, and what Gonzalez calls an “Amefrican” question—within which we frequently find important reflections on domestic workers in these contexts, from the *mucamas* onward.

Carolina Maria de Jesus, also our sister and a Brazilian author, used a metaphor to refer to the favela as a “dumping room”—a place where society piles up all its disorder, all that it deems unimportant. Meanwhile, the more structured areas of large cities function as the “living room,” where everything is organized, clean, beautiful, fragrant, and pleasant—all working well for the lives of those who benefit from colonial structures.

This entire organization, however, is made possible in practice by domestic workers. In fact, our group began as a collective readings circle/wheel to read

Quarto de despejo (Jesus, 2014), which presents excerpts from Carolina’s diaries. The circle was an additional and decisive stimulus enabling the women to truly engage in reading. Some of them had never been formally literate and could not read on their own. Beyond this, there are several other reasons we could mention—and have discussed elsewhere—but there is a basic fact in this entire process that must be presented here: the total lack of time and conditions for these women to dedicate themselves to activities oriented toward themselves, toward self-care: educational, cultural, and artistic experiences.

Their workdays are multiple and grueling—immense efforts for survival, their own and their families’. Many are sole providers, single mothers, and heads of household. All their time is consumed by exhausting labor, often undervalued and, at times, criminally exploited. They organize the appearance of society’s “living room,” using all their time—their labor, movements, and energies—for that purpose, leaving no time for themselves, their families, their communities, or their own “dumping rooms.”

For this reason, the first challenge of CCCEED—our abbreviation for the name of our community cultural collective—was to make participation stipends viable for the small group of women who composed our initial version of *RoLê das Domésticas*. Once or twice a month, on Saturday afternoons, they received the equivalent of a day’s pay for cleaning work in order to gather for two to four hours in our collective house, sharing coffee and cake—and life with one another—reading together and composing possibilities.

3. Methodology/ies (we call it Crossroads—our *Encruzilhadas*)

If we live within a still-prevailing world-system, with its biased, reductionist, Cartesian, and colonial logics, we propose the concept of *encruzilogic*. Nothing more—nothing less—than a crossroads logic: intertwined, transfluent, and non-binary. As at a crossroads, where paradox is not only possible but desirable. As in our paper (Carvalho, 2025), where we say that the Shakespearean dilemma loses dramatic force—while life gains potency—when we begin to be *and* not be at the same time.

For this reason, we have worked with a series of concepts co-created by us throughout these research journeys. Thus, we assume not one methodology but methodologies; not one procedure but procedures. As in the readings within our wheels—always plural. As multiplicity.

We are especially moved by what we call *exodology*: the method of exodus. Of deviations, errors, and errancies. It is from here, in fact, that the term *kaligraphy* (Carvalho, 2026) emerges, when we begin to consider our *RoLê* as a circle/wheel of readings and writings in which reading means every possible

way of receiving communicative signs and frequencies—of meaning and expression—while writing becomes every possible way of emitting such frequencies and signs.

Our multiple methodologies apply equally to our academic research, writing, and to our group practices. In our peripheries, we write it like this: *tudojuntoemisturado* (alltogetherandmixed), and *aomesmotempoagora* (atthesametimenow)—as single, connected expressions. This is how we see not only our research, writing, and practices, but Life as a whole. Our ways of seeing, living, and *living-with* the world. In our Brazilian, this is written *ver, viver e com-viver o mundo*, suggesting a direct relationship among these modes: *com-viver* as *living-with*, *viver* as something we emit—we write according to *kaligraphy*—and *ver* as what we kaligraphically read in all signs of our experiences here, with the Earth.

Thus, our methodologies are always escaping us. We acknowledge this: Life brings us certain queries and, just as we approach the answers, Life changes the questions. There is a constant process of deterritorialization that leads to reterritorialization, which soon deterritorializes again. This leaves us in a nomadism of knowledges—a nomadic consideration—consistent with *exodology*. Something very close to what brother Nêgo Bispo affirms when he speaks of “beginning, middle, and beginning” (Santos, 2023, p. 49). As we say: beginning, middle, and re-beginning. Never an end.

Colonial standards and their still-prevailing world-system continuously stimulate stamping and sealing, labeling and categorizing, packaging and boxing-in everything in this life. But Life escapes. Life wants to live. And in the un-limit of Life—not in its limitation.

These, then, are some of the multiple guiding lines—and not-lines—of our research, writing, and group practices in *RoLê*, from which we may proceed to address some of the words of interest in this article—as well as their possible and *in-possible* meanings.

4. Education, Future, and Ancestrality (we call it Life)

For us, there is no impossible—only the *in-possible*: that which is not yet possible, but toward which we are moving. Little by little. Bringing it into the realm of what becomes possible in our lives—while our lives also enter into its new possibilities.

When we speak of education, we often speak of formation too. And when we speak of formation, we may be referring to fitting lives—beings and things—into pre-conceived molds. In this sense, to educate may become to train, discipline, or indoctrinate. Therefore, educating must also become a possible *de-educating*—as well as an *in-possible* one. A transformation more akin to

transfluence. The transmutation of metamorphoses. An informing and a deforming. This also leads us to reconsider possible—and *in-possible*—meanings of informal or non-formal education, as we practice at CCCEED.

To educate, we must be willing to move. And movement is work—it requires work in the physical sense of the term, as in physics. It is where we expend our energies. The pedagogue (παιδαγωγός)—when we consider the Greek origin of pedagogy—did not designate the fixed place of the formal teacher but rather the one who accompanied children along their paths to and from the formative space—often enslaved persons who guided them on these journeys. It is also curious that the word school (σχολή)—also from Greek—originally referred to leisure (which we prefer to call fun), free time, and rest. This makes it all the more challenging to understand how school became what it increasingly is today—from early childhood centers to universities.

What if we made life more like a school in its original sense? What if we educated more like those precursor pedagogues? These were also questions we asked in our research, in *RoLê das Domésticas*, and at CCCEED.

Before the invention of education, knowledge was already being shared. And these ancestral sharings occurred in circles. Always in *roda* “wheel.” If not physically, then energetically—circular and spiral. Where things and beings can flow, con-flow, and trans-flow. Without the anti-movements we call *counterculture*, *countercurrent*, and *counterflow* in our writing (Carvalho, 2026).

On our journey, we arrived at cinema. Collective cinema practices, community cinema, cinema-education—approaches strongly developed by some groups in Brazil.

Before returning to the university, we were already working as social educators and transmedia artists. Engaging multiple languages and forms of expression, including cinema itself—the question of the image, of the visual, and of ways of seeing the world. Always kaligraphically, as well as audiovisually. Along the way, we incorporated references such as Migliorin (2022) and *Fórum Nicaragua* (2018). We were at OLHO—The Audiovisual Studies Laboratory at the School of Education at Unicamp—with Wenceslao Machado de Oliveira Junior (Wences) as our advisor (also a brother) and an important reference in cinema-education in Brazil and beyond.

This cinema we encountered and practiced was a “minor cinema,” which can be related to Deleuze and Guattari’s (2002) concept of minor literature, as well as to Deleuze’s (2005) reflections on cinema itself and Rodowick’s (1997) engagement with Deleuzian perspectives on it. It differs from what we call *big cinema*—whose paradigmatic expression might be Hollywood, or in Brazil, Globo’s television soap operas. Ours was a “tiny little cinema,” made with

simple, inexpensive mobile phones—without professional cameras or lenses—using basic free editing applications.

Here we enter the digital—and analog—field of what is currently understood as technology in debates about innovation. As a contribution of this paper, we propose that there are technologies of passivity and technologies of activity; of activation and of paralysis; of representation and of presentation; of resistance and of existence; of reading and of writing—and so on.

Books are a technology. As *Piseagrama* collective (Carnevali et al., 2023) reminds us, even a technology of colonization. In their original analog form, books often functioned as tools for a minority to dominate a majority through restricted access. People—like the women of *RoLê das Domésticas*—learned that books were important without being granted access to them. Many were never taught to read. Thus, they were subjected to the supposed power contained in books without any agency over them. When we seek an education that *de-educates*, that transforms, we demystify the book while co-creating access and opportunity to it—both for reading and writing.

Screens—culminating today in mobile phones, for example—followed a different path. At a certain point, access to these devices became nearly global. The colonial strategy here is to guarantee access—access to advertisements, fake news, algorithms, and artificial intelligence systems that maintain domination. People become trapped in these technologies, and their contents are easily mobilized to sustain the still-prevailing world-system. In Brazil, this was long said about soap operas and television news. Although both may serve transformation—as universities also hold the potential not to be colonial—mass media has historically been (widely) used to colonize in our country and elsewhere.

This has produced an educational discourse that is often “anti-screen,” common among families and schools, as though screens themselves were harmful. We thus find ourselves in a contemporary tension: digital technologies advance rapidly—more screens, online interactivity, artificial intelligence, increasingly comprehensive applications, and related developments. What, then, are we to do?

Everything in excess can be harmful. When life lacks balance—when it becomes extreme, partial, addictive—nothing will serve us well. We also perceive that beings and things may be used in *countercurrent* ways—ways that diminish life’s potencies rather than expand them. The digital does not escape this.

Yet there is a crucial difference at stake. Between, for example, a child holding a screen controlled by colonial forces—dictating how life should be—and that same child (already another one) holding a screen that, through loving

mediation within a responsible community, becomes a tool for co-creating life with the Earth. A screen as a tool for creation and change.

The same has occurred with books. Initial access to bibliographic technology soon becomes occupation. First, we read stories. We see how some stories like ours resist within so much colonization. Then we write our own stories—*in-themselves*. And in doing so, we inscribe them into the *in-everything*. Parts of a collective process. Of all of us together. From which we are no longer excluded. This is how books diversify. And our stories take their place there as well. Activated. As our cinemas become activated. And so do many other possibilities of activation, always interconnecting.

The women of *RoLê das Domésticas* did not read books. One day, they gained access. They began reading collectively. Soon, they were writing their own books—expanding the literary circle so that it was no longer excluding them. When these women take their mobile phones—previously portals for receiving ready-made content—and begin producing their own collective experiences, the relationship shifts. The phone ceases to be a top-down colonial channel and becomes a wheel of creation. A fluid, transfluent relation. Catharsis, compensatory entertainment, and anesthetizing distractions give way to co-creative hope and shared authorship—with the power to transform the world. Transflowing it into what we call a *world-worlds* (a world *plural-in-itself*), where we may simply exist and live-with.

And so we ask: What should any technology be for, if not to increase the potencies of life within us?

5. Conclusions (we call it Considerations Without End and Community-Making)

Digital innovation is very welcome, as long as it is considered within the broader context of the circle. Reinventing the wheel in our time, without exclusion. Its resources must be understood not in isolation, but in relation to everything.

In our condition as educators, during our doctoral journey we witnessed a debate that placed Paulo Freire (1987) in tension with Jacques Rancière (2011). As if one defended an education that leads toward emancipation, and the other an education that should begin from it. We never saw opposition between them. Differences, yes—many—but not opposition. On the contrary, we perceive in both the force of composition. An education in the circle—a *Wheel of Education*—where we are already emancipated, while at the same time walking together toward our emancipations. After all, we are dealing with layers. All crossroads within Life, in its multidimensionality.

RoLê das Domésticas was not born as a project intended to engage digital technologies. Yet it moved in that direction. Everything relates and interconnects. We continue reinventing the wheel, and it keeps expanding—excluding fewer and fewer beings and things. Soon cinema became part of it. Soon mobile phones as well. Soon connectivity and internet access. Literacy not only of letters—to ensure, for example, the reading of a book—but digital literacy too. “Alltogetherandmixed.” “Atthesametimenow.”

Our group demonstrates a practice, showing that many specific practices can emerge from it. No one needs to be left out. In our collective we say: only lovelessness does not enter; everything else is welcome. Thus, we affirm the possibility of sharing. Of composition and *living-with* among groups and works. Of confluence and transfluence between apparently opposed questions that may in fact complement one another. We are open to love and to dialogue. Our concepts and writings are open to co-authorship. Our research is in the circle, *na roda*. For all—possibly and *in-possibly*.

Everything we have done in our research has brought us to what we call *community-making*. It is this making that increases the potencies of life. In it resides love, the circle/wheel, human and more-than-human life. Beings and things. With the Earth—not over it, but with it. This is what all education—and all technology—should serve.

Depending on how we use new digital technologies, we may indeed be innovating. In the sense of this re-beginning we have mentioned. Where life no longer needs to resist but simply exist. Where exclusion ceases. Where every life experience is also an educational experience—and education itself, *in-itself* and *in-everything*, is already a technology. Where we may live-with all of this together. Mixed. In a *RoLê-RoLês*, as in a *world-worlds*. In our ancestral future.

Any other supposedly innovative or technological use would merely maintain the same colonial project—and its still-prevailing world-system.

So this is it. This text, which did not necessarily seek to answer any specific question, began with an opening and will end (without ending) with another: in the face of so many possibilities and *in-possibilities* within our reach—what will we do?

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From Implementation to Innovation: School-Based Curriculum Development and Teacher-Led Proposals in Primary Education

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Abstract: In the context of increasing demands for curriculum flexibility and educational innovation, School-Based Curriculum Development (SBCD) has gained international relevance as a mechanism for aligning national curriculum goals with students’ developmental needs and local school realities. This study examines the implementation of SBC in Albanian primary education, with particular attention to the complementary roles of curriculum modules and curriculum projects as key instruments of school-based curriculum practice.

The study draws on data collected through a national questionnaire survey involving 2,357 primary school teachers and applies a quantitative descriptive research design supported by thematic analysis. The findings indicate that curriculum modules play a crucial role in structuring age-appropriate, interdisciplinary learning experiences closely connected to students’ everyday lives, especially in lower primary grades. In contrast, curriculum projects emerge as powerful tools for experiential, inquiry-based, and action-oriented learning, enabling deeper engagement with environmental education, citizenship, and community-related themes.

Results reveal that environmental education and sustainability represent the most dominant thematic areas across both modules and projects. A high level of alignment is observed between teachers’ implemented practices and nationally proposed interdisciplinary modules, confirming strong coherence between policy and classroom practice. The analysis further demonstrates a clear developmental progression across grades, with a gradual shift from experiential and play-based themes to more analytical, civic-oriented, and project-based learning in upper primary education. Teachers’ forward-looking proposals highlight a growing emphasis on digital competence, innovation, and interdisciplinary project-based learning.

Overall, the study positions curriculum modules and projects as complementary pillars of SBC in Albanian primary education, supporting curriculum relevance, pedagogical coherence, and future-oriented learning.

Keywords: *School-Based Curriculum Development, Primary Education; Interdisciplinary Learning; Curriculum Innovation*

1.Introduction

In contemporary education systems, curriculum development is increasingly understood as a dynamic process that extends beyond centralized policy design toward localized pedagogical innovation. Internationally, School-Based Curriculum Development (SBCD) has emerged as a key mechanism through which schools adapt national curriculum frameworks to students' needs, community contexts, and evolving societal challenges. This shift reflects broader educational transformations emphasizing flexibility, interdisciplinary, and teacher agency in curriculum implementation.

Within this perspective, Albania has introduced School-Based Curriculum as an integral component of the pre-university curriculum framework. According to national curriculum policy, school-based curriculum represents the portion of the curriculum selected and developed by schools within the allocated instructional time, taking into account students' interests, prior knowledge, school capacities, regional characteristics, and contemporary social needs. The framework enables schools to organize learning through curriculum subjects, curriculum modules, and curriculum projects, promoting interdisciplinary learning and project-based approaches.

The updated Albanian Curriculum Framework (2024) further reinforces this orientation by emphasizing competency-based education, student-centered learning, interdisciplinary integration, and continuous curriculum improvement as guiding principles of educational development.

These principles position schools not merely as implementers of prescribed curricula but as active contributors to curriculum innovation and contextual adaptation.

In primary education, the school-based curriculum is implemented through a dedicated weekly instructional period, creating structured opportunities for teachers to design thematic modules and integrative projects aligned with students' developmental stages. Such an approach supports experiential learning, promotes transversal competencies, and strengthens connections between school learning and real-life contexts.

Despite its policy importance, empirical research examining how school-based curriculum is implemented in practice, how teachers interpret curricular

autonomy, and how classroom experiences inform future curriculum innovation remains limited in the Albanian context. The present study responds to this gap by analysing national-level data collected from primary school teachers regarding their implementation practices and curriculum proposals. Aligned with the objectives of the international conference *Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society*, which seeks empirical and innovative perspectives on educational transformation this study explores how school-based curriculum development moves from implementation toward innovation through teacher-led curricular proposals. The main purpose of this study is to examine the implementation and developmental potential of school-based curriculum development in Albanian primary education, focusing on the relationship between existing classroom practices and teachers’ proposals for future curriculum innovation. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Analyse the thematic areas most frequently implemented within school-based curriculum modules in primary education.
- Examine the degree of alignment between teachers’ implemented modules and interdisciplinary modules proposed by national curriculum authorities.
- Investigate how curriculum implementation varies across grade levels (Grades 1–5), identifying patterns of developmental progression.
- Explore contextual differences related to region, school sector, and urban–rural settings.
- Identify emerging thematic priorities proposed by teachers for future curriculum development, particularly in relation to innovation, digital competence, and interdisciplinary learning.

Through these objectives, the study seeks to understand how school-based curriculum functions simultaneously as:

a mechanism of curriculum implementation, a space for pedagogical autonomy, and a platform for bottom-up educational innovation driven by teachers’ professional experience. Guided by the study objectives and grounded in the national questionnaire administered to primary school teachers, the research addresses the following questions:

1. What thematic areas dominate the implementation of school-based curriculum modules/projects in Albanian primary education?
2. To what extent do teachers’ implemented modules align with the interdisciplinary modules/projects proposed by the national curriculum authority (ASCAP)?
3. How does the selection of school-based curriculum modules vary across grade levels (Grades 1–5)?

National Context: School-Based Curriculum in Albania

School-based curriculum development in Albania is embedded within the broader reform of competency-based education introduced in the national pre-university education system during the last decade. The updated Albanian Curriculum Framework (2024) positions curriculum flexibility, learner-centered pedagogy, and interdisciplinary learning as central principles guiding educational development and innovation. Within this framework, schools are granted structured opportunities to adapt curriculum implementation according to students' needs, local contexts, and emerging societal priorities. The School-Based Curriculum represents a formally regulated component of the national curriculum. Rather than functioning as an optional or extracurricular activity, it constitutes an integral part of instructional time allocated to schools. The framework defines school-based curriculum as the portion of the curriculum selected and developed at the school level, based on students' interests, prior experiences, school resources, and community characteristics. This approach aims to strengthen the connection between national educational objectives and local learning realities while maintaining coherence with competency-based standards.

In primary education, SBC is implemented through a dedicated weekly instructional period, creating a structured pedagogical space where teachers can design and implement learning experiences beyond the boundaries of traditional subject organization. Schools may realize the school-based curriculum through three main formats: curriculum subjects developed at the school level, curriculum modules, and curriculum projects. Among these, modules and projects are the most widely applied forms in primary education due to their flexibility and developmental suitability.

A defining feature of the Albanian school-based curriculum is the central role assigned to teachers as curriculum designers. Teachers participate in selecting themes, adapting modules, and proposing new curriculum areas based on classroom experience and student interests. This professional autonomy is exercised within national guidelines, ensuring a balance between flexibility and system coherence.

The inclusion of teacher-led curriculum proposals reflects a shift from curriculum implementation toward curriculum co-construction. Schools become active learning organizations capable of responding to evolving educational needs while contributing feedback to national curriculum development processes.

The Albanian model of school-based curriculum seeks to combine innovation with institutional stability. By allocating dedicated time, providing regulatory guidance, and encouraging interdisciplinary approaches, the system supports experimentation without compromising curricular consistency. The increasing

emphasis on digital competence, innovation, and future-oriented skills further demonstrates the evolving role of SBC as a driver of educational transformation. However, while policy frameworks clearly articulate the objectives and structures of school-based curriculum development, empirical evidence regarding its implementation patterns and innovation potential remains limited. Understanding how teachers interpret and enact SBC in practice therefore becomes essential for evaluating its effectiveness and informing future curriculum reforms.

A central dimension of SBC concerns the role of teachers as innovators. Research consistently shows that curriculum reform succeeds when teachers are empowered to interpret, adapt, and redesign learning experiences (Fullan, 2007). Teacher-led curriculum proposals provide valuable bottom-up feedback for policy improvement, transforming schools into sites of professional learning and innovation (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Studies indicate that when teachers' experiential knowledge informs curriculum development, educational reforms become more sustainable and contextually relevant (Priestley et al., 2015). This perspective positions teachers not merely as policy implementers but as co-constructors of curriculum change.

2. Literature Review: International Perspectives on School-Based Curriculum Development

School-Based Curriculum development emerged internationally as a response to highly centralized curriculum systems that limited teachers' capacity to adapt learning to local contexts and student needs. Early scholarship defined SBC development as a process through which schools and teachers actively participate in curriculum planning, adaptation, and evaluation within national policy frameworks (Marsh, 1990; Skilbeck, 1984). Rather than replacing national curricula, SBC aims to balance centralized standards with localized pedagogical decision-making. Research during the late twentieth century emphasized that curriculum effectiveness increases when teachers are involved not only as implementers but also as curriculum designers (Stenhouse, 1975). This perspective marked a shift from curriculum as a fixed prescription toward curriculum as a dynamic and context-sensitive process shaped by professional judgment and classroom realities. Contemporary curriculum theory further conceptualizes SBC as a form of curriculum making, where teachers interpret policy, translate competencies into practice, and construct learning experiences collaboratively (Priestley & Biesta, 2013). Within this framework, teacher agency becomes a central condition for educational innovation and sustainable curriculum reform.

International education reforms increasingly promote guided autonomy, whereby schools exercise curricular flexibility within clearly defined national standards (OECD, 2020; OECD, 2024). Comparative studies demonstrate that successful SBC systems maintain coherence through shared learning goals while allowing contextual adaptation. For example, Finland’s curriculum model grants schools responsibility for local curriculum design aligned with national competencies, fostering strong professional ownership among teachers (Halinen, 2018). Similarly, Norway’s curriculum reform integrates local curriculum planning as a mechanism for improving relevance and student engagement (Mølsted, 2013). Research indicates that such models enhance motivation, innovation, and responsiveness without compromising equity when adequate professional support exists (Hopmann, 2008). In East Asian contexts, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, school-based curriculum initiatives were introduced to encourage innovation while preserving centralized curriculum structures (Cheng, 1996; Chun, 1999). These systems demonstrate that structured autonomy can successfully bridge policy intentions and classroom practice.

A consistent finding across international research is that SBC frequently manifests through thematic and interdisciplinary curriculum structures. Interdisciplinary learning enables students to connect knowledge across subject areas and apply learning to real-life contexts (Beane, 1997). Studies show that themes related to environmental education, citizenship, wellbeing, and cultural identity commonly dominate school-developed curricula because they allow integration of multiple competencies simultaneously (UNESCO, 2017; Bolstad, 2004). Environmental education, in particular, has been widely adopted as a core thematic area within school-based curricula due to its experiential and socially relevant nature (Tilbury, 2011). Recent empirical research confirms that interdisciplinary modules and project-based structures enhance engagement and deeper understanding among primary school students (Drake & Reid, 2020). These approaches align closely with competency-based education models, which emphasize transferable skills rather than isolated subject knowledge.

Developmental Progression in Primary Education Curriculum

International curriculum research highlights the importance of aligning curriculum structures with children’s developmental stages. Bruner’s (1960) theory of the spiral curriculum emphasizes that learning concepts should evolve progressively from concrete experiences toward abstract reasoning. Empirical studies from Nordic education systems demonstrate that school-based curriculum themes typically shift from experiential and play-oriented learning in early grades toward analytical and civic-oriented learning in later

primary years (Heikkilä, 2021; Forsberg, 2017). This developmental progression supports cognitive growth while maintaining continuity across grade levels. Such findings reinforce the pedagogical rationale for modular and project-based curriculum formats, which allow gradual increases in complexity while preserving thematic coherence.

Curriculum Projects and Experiential Learning

Project-based learning constitutes a major pedagogical expression of SBC internationally. Rooted in Dewey’s experiential learning theory (Dewey, 1938), curriculum projects emphasize inquiry, collaboration, and real-world problem-solving. Research shows that curriculum projects foster transversal competencies such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Thomas, 2000; Bell, 2010). In primary education, project-based approaches also strengthen motivation and student agency by connecting learning with authentic experiences. Furthermore, projects have been identified as effective tools for inclusive education because they allow differentiated participation and multiple forms of student expression (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Increasingly, projects integrate digital tools and media literacy, supporting preparation for participation in digital societies (OECD, 2021).

The Albanian model of School-Based Curriculum reflects many of the principles identified in international SBC research: structured autonomy, interdisciplinary organization, developmental progression, and teacher participation in curriculum design. However, empirical evidence examining how these principles operate in practice remains limited. By analysing teachers’ implementation experiences alongside their curriculum proposals, the present study contributes to international scholarship by exploring how SBC evolves from implementation toward innovation within a competency-based education system.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative descriptive research design complemented by qualitative thematic analysis to investigate the implementation and innovation potential of School-Based Curriculum development in Albanian primary education. The design was selected to enable the identification of national patterns, thematic trends, and developmental variations in teachers’ implementation practices while also capturing teachers’ professional perspectives regarding future curriculum development. Given the exploratory nature of the study and its focus on understanding implementation processes

rather than establishing causal relationships, a descriptive approach was considered appropriate. The research integrates policy analysis with large-scale teacher data in order to connect curriculum framework intentions with classroom-level realities.

The study is situated within the Albanian pre-university education system, where the School-Based Curriculum constitutes an officially regulated component of instructional time in primary education. Schools are provided with autonomy to design curriculum modules and projects aligned with national competency-based curriculum while responding to students’ interests and local contexts. Primary education (Grades 1–5) represents a particularly relevant context for examining SBC because the curriculum explicitly encourages interdisciplinary learning, thematic organization, and developmental progression across grade levels.

Participants and Data Sources

The primary data source consists of a national questionnaire administered to primary school teachers across Albania. A total of **2,357 teachers** participated in the study, representing diverse geographic regions, school sectors (public and private), urban and rural contexts, levels of professional experience.

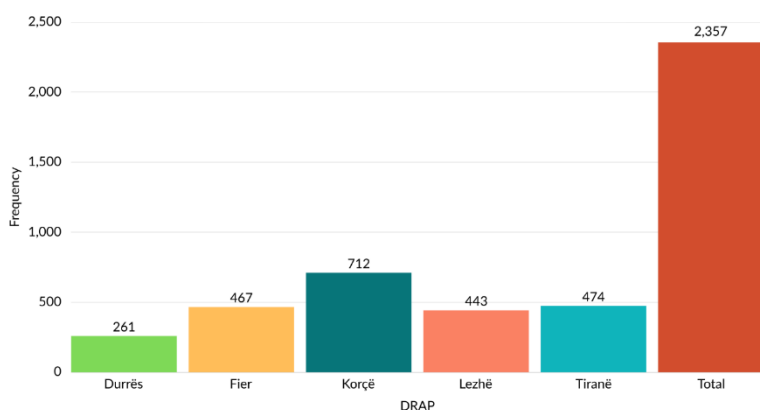


Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of Teachers by Regional Education Directorates (DRAPs)

The large sample size allows for reliable identification of national implementation tendencies and increases the representativeness of findings. The study draws on three complementary data sources:

- Teachers’ reported implementation of school-based curriculum modules and projects.
- Teachers’ evaluation of interdisciplinary modules proposed by the national curriculum authority (ASCAP).

- Teachers’ proposals for future curriculum themes and innovations.

Instrument and procedures

The questionnaire was designed specifically to examine school-based curriculum practices and consisted of four main sections:

- Background information, including demographic and professional variables (region, school type, teaching experience, and context).
- Implemented curriculum practices, where teachers identified modules and projects implemented during the period 2014–2025.
- Alignment with nationally proposed modules, requiring teachers to indicate grade-level suitability of interdisciplinary modules developed at national level.
- Future curriculum proposals, allowing open-ended responses regarding themes teachers consider necessary for future development. Open-ended responses enabled teachers to report authentic classroom experiences, which were later categorized through thematic analysis.

Data were collected through standardised, anonymous online questionnaires administered nationally. Participation was voluntary, and respondents completed the self-evaluation instruments within a defined data collection period.

The large sample sizes and nationwide coverage enhance the representativeness and robustness of the datasets, allowing for system-level analysis rather than institution-specific conclusions.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a multi-stage process combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to identify frequency distribution of thematic areas, percentage representation of implemented modules, alignment levels between implemented and proposed modules, grade-level distribution patterns, contextual variations across regions and school settings. Frequencies and percentages were used as the primary indicators due to the exploratory and system-level nature of the study.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Responses to open-ended questions were subjected to thematic coding. Reported modules and proposals were grouped into thematic categories such as environmental education and sustainability, literacy and communication,

citizenship and inclusion, creativity and arts, technology and innovation. This process enabled the identification of dominant themes and emerging curriculum priorities.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by the study’s research questions, focusing on five analytical dimensions: Dominant thematic areas of implementation; Alignment between policy proposals and teacher practice; Developmental progression across grades; Contextual consistency across regions and school types; Emerging innovation-oriented curriculum needs. This framework allowed the study to examine SBC simultaneously as a policy mechanism, pedagogical practice, and innovation process.

Validity and Reliability

Several strategies were employed to enhance research validity:

- The questionnaire was aligned with official curriculum documents and policy terminology.
- The large national sample strengthened external validity.
- Convergence across multiple data sections (implementation, evaluation, and proposals) supported internal consistency.
- Thematic categorization followed systematic coding procedures to reduce interpretative bias.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. No personal identifiers were collected, and data were used exclusively for research and educational development purposes. The study adheres to ethical standards for educational research and respects principles of confidentiality and professional integrity.

Methodological Contribution

By combining national-scale teacher data with curriculum policy analysis, the methodology enables a comprehensive understanding of how school-based curriculum moves from formal implementation toward teacher-driven innovation. This approach contributes empirically grounded evidence to international discussions on SBC and curriculum decentralization.

4. Results/Findings and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of data collected from 2,357 primary school teachers regarding the implementation

and future development of School-Based Curriculum in Albania. Results are organized according to the research questions guiding the study.

Dominant Thematic Areas in School-Based Curriculum Implementation (RQ1)

The analysis of teachers’ responses indicates that school-based curriculum implementation in Albanian primary education is strongly characterized by thematic and interdisciplinary learning. As shown in Figure 2 among all reported modules and curriculum activities, environmental education and sustainability-related themes emerged as the most dominant area, representing approximately one-fifth of all reported implementations.

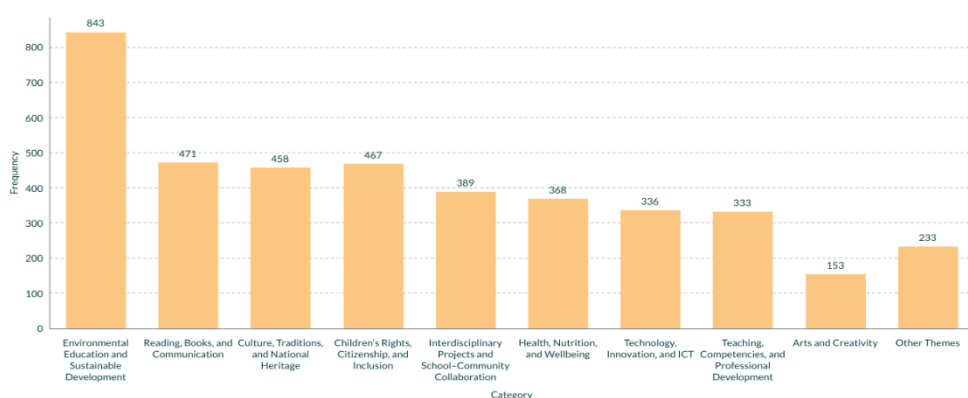


Figure 2. Categories of Curriculum modules and projects Implemented by Primary School Teachers for SBC

Teachers frequently selected themes connected to students’ everyday experiences and immediate environments, including nature, seasons, environmental responsibility, and community awareness. Other highly represented thematic areas included: Reading, Books, and Communication (11.6%), Culture, Traditions, and National Heritage (11.3%), Children’s Rights, Citizenship, and Inclusion (11.5%)

The prevalence of these themes suggests that teachers use the school-based curriculum primarily as a pedagogical space for contextualized and experiential learning rather than subject-specific reinforcement.

Alignment Between Implemented Modules and Nationally Proposed Modules (RQ2)

Findings reveal a high level of alignment between modules implemented by teachers and interdisciplinary modules proposed by the national curriculum authority (ASCAP). Across thematic categories, teachers’ selections of

proposed modules ranged between high and very high acceptance levels, demonstrating strong coherence between curriculum policy and classroom practice.

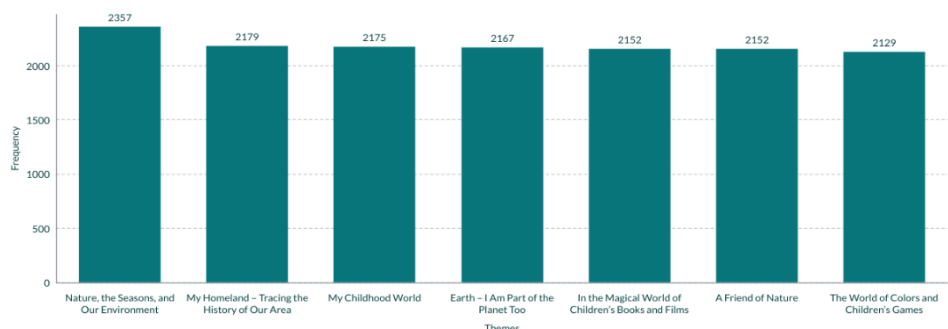


Figure 3. SBS themes (modules and projects) proposed by ASCAP, for primary teachers

The overlap between implemented themes and nationally suggested modules indicates that teachers perceive proposed curriculum structures as relevant, feasible, and aligned with students’ needs. This result suggests that the Albanian model of school-based curriculum successfully balances curricular autonomy with national guidance.

Grade-Level Variation and Developmental Progression (RQ3) (Figure 3).

A clear developmental pattern emerged across primary grade levels (Grades 1–5). Teachers’ module selections demonstrate a progression consistent with students’ cognitive and social development.

Grade 1 focuses predominantly on experiential and child-centered themes, such as personal identity, play, nature, and inclusion; Grades 2–3 introduce broader social and environmental understanding, integrating communication and collaborative learning; Grades 4–5 increasingly emphasize citizenship education, cultural heritage, problem-solving, and project-based learning. This progression reflects a gradual transition from concrete and experience-based learning toward more analytical and socially oriented learning experiences.

Emerging Themes and Teacher-Led Curriculum Proposals (RQ4)

Analysis of teachers’ open-ended responses regarding future curriculum development identified several emerging priorities. As shown in Figure 4, the most prominent proposed themes included: digital competence and technology integration, innovation and creative problem-solving, interdisciplinary project-based learning, inclusion and social-emotional development. Notably, themes related to digital competence appeared more frequently in future proposals than in past implementation practices, indicating a perceived need for curriculum expansion toward future-oriented

competencies. Teachers’ proposals demonstrate a shift from implementation toward innovation, positioning themselves as active contributors to curriculum evolution rather than passive implementers.

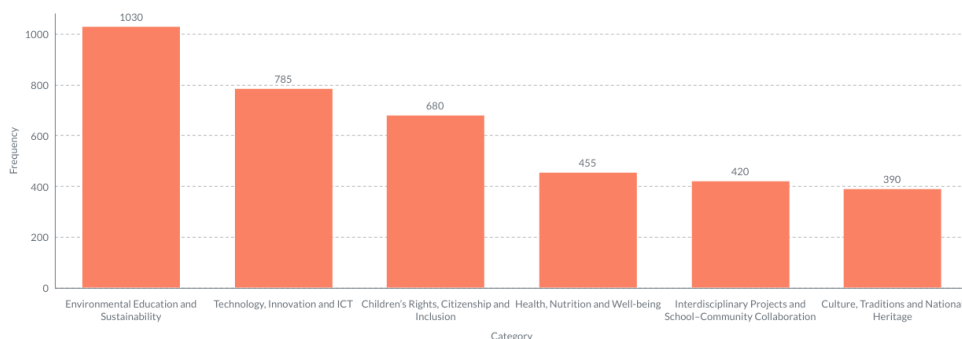


Figure 4. Categories of Curriculum themes (modules and projects) proposed by Primary School Teachers for SBC

Overall, the results indicate that school-based curriculum development in Albanian primary education:

- is dominated by interdisciplinary and environmentally oriented themes;
- shows strong alignment between national curriculum proposals and classroom implementation;
- follows a clear developmental progression across grades;
- demonstrates consistency across regions and school contexts;
- reveals growing teacher demand for innovation and digital-oriented curriculum themes.

These findings provide empirical evidence that the school-based curriculum functions as both an implementation mechanism and a platform for teacher-led curriculum innovation.

Discussions

The findings of this study provide important insights into how School-Based Curriculum development operates in practice within Albanian primary education and how implementation processes gradually evolve toward curriculum innovation. When interpreted in relation to international literature, the results confirm several key characteristics associated with effective school-based curriculum systems while also highlighting context-specific developments.

One of the most significant findings concerns the dominance of interdisciplinary and experience-based themes, particularly those related to

environmental education and students’ everyday realities. This pattern aligns with international research suggesting that school-based curriculum initiatives frequently prioritize themes that enable integration across subject areas and promote meaningful learning experiences (Beane, 1997; Bolstad, 2004; UNESCO, 2017).

The strong presence of environmental and community-oriented topics indicates that teachers use the school-based curriculum as a pedagogical space for contextualizing learning rather than extending traditional subject instruction. Similar tendencies have been documented in countries where SBC supports competency-based education by connecting learning to real-life contexts (Drake & Reid, 2020). In this respect, the Albanian experience reflects broader international shifts toward holistic and interdisciplinary curriculum design.

The high level of alignment between implemented modules/projects and nationally proposed interdisciplinary modules/projects represents a particularly important finding. International studies emphasize that curriculum decentralization is successful when autonomy is accompanied by clear policy guidance—a model often described as guided autonomy (OECD, 2020; Halinen, 2018).

The Albanian Curriculum Framework appears to achieve this balance. Teachers demonstrate professional autonomy in selecting and adapting modules while remaining closely aligned with national curriculum priorities. This coherence suggests that school-based curriculum development in Albania functions not as fragmentation but as structured flexibility, supporting both innovation and equity across schools. Such findings reinforce arguments that curriculum reforms become sustainable when teachers perceive national frameworks as supportive rather than prescriptive (Priestley & Biesta, 2013).

The observed progression from experiential themes in lower grades toward civic, analytical, and project-based learning in upper primary grades confirms theoretical expectations regarding developmental curriculum organization. Bruner’s (1960) spiral curriculum theory proposes that learning evolves from concrete experiences toward increasingly complex conceptual understanding. Comparable developmental patterns have been identified in Nordic education systems, where locally developed curriculum themes adapt to students’ cognitive and social maturation (Heikkilä, 2021; Forsberg, 2017). The Albanian findings therefore suggest that teachers intuitively align school-based curriculum implementation with developmental pedagogy, even within a relatively recent reform context. This progression demonstrates the pedagogical value of combining curriculum modules and projects, allowing gradual increases in complexity while maintaining thematic continuity.

Curriculum Projects as Drivers of Engagement and Competency Development

Teachers’ increasing use of curriculum projects and their emphasis on experiential learning correspond closely with international research on project-based learning. Studies show that project-oriented approaches foster collaboration, critical thinking, and student engagement—competencies central to twenty-first-century education (Bell, 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

In the Albanian context, projects appear to function as mechanisms through which competency-based curriculum principles become operational in classroom practice. By connecting learning with environmental action, citizenship, and community participation, projects enable students to apply knowledge in authentic situations, thereby strengthening transversal competencies.

Teachers as Agents of Curriculum Innovation

Perhaps the most significant contribution of the study lies in teachers’ forward-looking curriculum proposals. The emergence of themes related to digital competence, innovation, and interdisciplinary learning suggests that teachers are not merely implementing curriculum policy but actively envisioning its future development.

This finding strongly supports international scholarship positioning teacher agency as a central driver of curriculum innovation (Fullan, 2007; Priestley et al., 2015). Teacher-led proposals represent a bottom-up feedback mechanism that can inform national curriculum evolution and ensure responsiveness to emerging educational needs.

The shift identified in this study—from implemented themes toward innovation-oriented proposals—illustrates a transition from curriculum enactment to curriculum co-construction.

Consistency Across Contexts and Implications for Equity

The limited variation observed across regions and school contexts is another notable outcome. While decentralization sometimes risks increasing inequality, the Albanian results indicate a shared pedagogical orientation across schools. This consistency suggests that national curriculum guidance provides a stabilizing framework that supports equitable learning opportunities.

International comparisons indicate that such coherence is essential for maintaining quality standards within decentralized curriculum systems (Hopmann, 2008; OECD, 2024).

Implications for Curriculum Policy and Practice

The results highlight the importance of sustaining a balanced curriculum governance model combining national guidance with school-level flexibility. The Albanian experience suggests that structured autonomy enables innovation without generating fragmentation, offering a valuable model for education systems seeking to modernize competency-based curricula.

Policy makers may consider institutionalizing mechanisms through which teacher-led curriculum proposals systematically inform curriculum updates. Such bottom-up feedback loops can strengthen policy responsiveness and ensure that curriculum reforms remain grounded in classroom realities. Furthermore, integrating digital competence as a cross-cutting dimension within school-based curriculum structures represents an important strategic direction aligned with global educational priorities.

For schools and teachers, the findings reinforce the pedagogical value of combining curriculum modules and curriculum projects. Modules provide structure and developmental continuity, while projects enable inquiry, collaboration, and real-world application of knowledge. Teachers' active participation in curriculum design strengthens professional agency and promotes reflective practice. Supporting collaborative planning among teachers may further enhance innovation and consistency in school-based curriculum implementation. Additionally, the study highlights the potential of school-based curriculum to foster inclusive and meaningful learning experiences by connecting education with students' lived experiences and community contexts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the implementation and innovation potential of School-Based Curriculum development within Albanian primary education, focusing on teachers' practices and curriculum proposals emerging from classroom experience. Drawing on data collected from 2,357 primary school teachers, the research provides empirical evidence on how school-based curriculum functions as both an implementation mechanism and a platform for educational innovation. The findings indicate that school-based curriculum implementation in Albania is strongly characterized by interdisciplinary and experiential learning approaches. Teachers predominantly select themes connected to environmental education, social interaction, creativity, and everyday life contexts, demonstrating a clear orientation toward student-centered learning. The high level of alignment between implemented modules and nationally proposed interdisciplinary modules suggests that the Albanian

curriculum framework successfully balances curricular autonomy with national coherence.

A significant contribution of the study lies in identifying a clear developmental progression across primary grades. Learning experiences evolve from experiential and play-based themes in early grades toward civic, analytical, and project-oriented learning in later grades, reflecting principles of competency-based education and developmental pedagogy. Equally important, teachers’ future-oriented proposals reveal a transition from curriculum implementation toward curriculum innovation. The growing emphasis on digital competence, interdisciplinary learning, and creative problem-solving indicates that teachers perceive school-based curriculum as a dynamic space for responding to emerging societal and educational demands. Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed:

- Strengthening professional development focused on interdisciplinary and project-based pedagogies.
- Expanding digital competence integration within school-based curriculum modules and projects.
- Encouraging systematic teacher feedback mechanisms to inform national curriculum revisions.
- Supporting collaborative curriculum design at the school level, fostering professional learning communities.
- Maintaining structured curriculum autonomy, ensuring innovation while preserving equity across schools.

The Albanian experience of school-based curriculum development reflects broader international trends that emphasize school autonomy, and contextualized learning. Similar approaches have been implemented in various education systems under the concept of School-Based Curriculum development, where schools adapt national curricula through locally developed learning structures. Overall, the study demonstrates that when supported by clear policy frameworks and teacher agency, school-based curriculum development can serve as a powerful driver of educational transformation.

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Implementing Virtual Reality Lessons for Albanian Language Grammar: A Study of Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

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Abstract: Digital technologies are being utilized more and more in education to enhance student learning and engagement. This research examines the implementation of Virtual Reality (VR) lessons in Albanian Language Grammar and their impact on student involvement and educational results. An easy VR educational app was developed to assist students in learning through engaging and immersive experiences. The research took place in a secondary school classroom over a duration of two weeks. VR lessons were incorporated into standard instruction. Data were gathered through pre- and post-tests targeting vocabulary and reading comprehension, along with classroom observations and brief reflections from students. The results indicate that VR lessons enhanced students' interest, motivation, and engagement during classes. Students showed enhanced learning results in comparison to conventional teaching methods. In general, the research indicates that VR can serve as an effective resource for enhancing language learning when it is thoughtfully incorporated into classroom activities.

Keywords: *Virtual Reality; Albanian Language; Student Engagement; Educational Technology*

1.Introduction

1.1 Background: Digital Transformation in Education

The swift growth of digital technologies has greatly impacted modern education. Today's classrooms frequently incorporate interactive platforms, multimedia tools, and immersive experiences to improve teaching and learning. This push toward digital integration aims to modernize education with customized solutions that cater to the preferences of digital-native students. Technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR), Augmented Reality

(AR), and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing education by creating more experiential, student-centered learning environments.

Among these innovations, VR has attracted particular attention for its ability to create immersive, interactive environments that simulate real-world experiences. Unlike traditional two-dimensional learning tools, VR allows students to actively explore, manipulate, and engage with content in three-dimensional spaces.

1.2 Challenges in Teaching Albanian Language Grammar

Despite advances in educational technology, the teaching of Albanian language grammar in secondary education often remains rooted in traditional, teacher-centered methodologies. Grammar instruction frequently relies on textbook explanations, memorization of rules, and written exercises. While these approaches can provide foundational knowledge, they may not sufficiently promote deep understanding, contextual application, or long-term retention.

Students often perceive grammar lessons as abstract, repetitive, and disconnected from meaningful communication. This perception can lead to reduced motivation, limited classroom participation, and lower cognitive engagement. In addition, vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, both tightly connected to grammatical skills, may decline if instruction does not include interactive and contextual components.

The challenge, therefore, is to identify innovative pedagogical tools that can turn grammar learning from a passive task into an engaging and meaningful experience.

1.3 Importance of Virtual Reality

From an educational standpoint, VR is a transformative teaching tool. Its importance lies not in the technology itself, but in how it reshapes teaching and learning processes. VR creates immersive, meaningful environments that support active engagement, experiential learning, and deeper understanding.

Unlike traditional instructional methods that often rely on passive information delivery, VR enables learners to interact directly with content in contextualized settings. Concepts are integrated into realistic scenarios that allow students to explore, manipulate, and apply their knowledge. This experiential dimension supports stronger cognitive connections and promotes long-term retention. Students take an active role rather than passively receiving information. By exploring, solving problems, and interacting in immersive settings, learners develop knowledge through hands-on experience. This approach supports constructivist ideas, highlighting that meaningful engagement is key to understanding. Research on 3D/virtual learning

environments highlights that features such as rich representation, interactivity, and the ability to experience phenomena from multiple perspectives can support meaning-making and understanding (Dalgarno & Lee, 2010). When learners respond to the virtual setting as if it is real, the experience becomes more impactful and can support learning through meaningful participation (Slater, 2009).

1.4 Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of implementing Virtual Reality lessons in the teaching of Albanian language grammar at the secondary school level. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Evaluate the impact of VR lessons on student engagement.
- Measure improvements in vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension.
- Explore students’ perceptions and experiences of learning grammar through VR technology.

To meet these goals, the study examines the following research questions:

1. Does incorporating Virtual Reality enhance student engagement in Albanian grammar lessons?
2. Does VR usage lead to better vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension results than traditional teaching methods?
3. How do students view the experience of learning Albanian grammar through VR-based lessons?

2.Literature Review

2.1 Virtual Reality in Education

The concept of virtual reality (VR) dates back to mid-20th-century advances in simulation technology, predating its recent technological applications. During the 1980s and early 1990s, VR began to gain recognition as computing power increased. The term “virtual reality” was popularized by Jaron Lanier, founder of VPL Research, who developed early VR gloves and goggles. In educational contexts, VR was initially used primarily in military and aviation training simulations, where immersive technologies were employed to replicate high-risk scenarios safely (Merchant et al., 2014). These early applications demonstrated VR’s potential to provide experiential learning without exposing learners to real-world hazards. VR is increasingly recognized as a transformative educational technology due to its immersive and interactive features. It allows learners to interact with 3D, computer-created environments that mimic real or imaginary worlds. Unlike conventional digital tools, VR creates a sense of presence, making students

feel physically and mentally involved in the learning process (Radianti et al., 2020). This immersive experience boosts focus, motivation, and active engagement.

2.2 VR in Language Learning

Vocabulary acquisition is fundamental to language proficiency, and immersive environments can significantly enhance this process. Traditional vocabulary instruction often relies on memorization and repetition, which may limit contextual understanding. In contrast, VR allows learners to encounter new words in meaningful, interactive settings. Research shows that immersive environments with contextualized vocabulary exposure enhance both retention and understanding (Chen, 2016). Connecting words to visual objects, actions, and scenarios helps learners build stronger cognitive links. Moreover, the multimodal aspects of VR, integrating visual, auditory, and kinesthetic stimuli, further aid memory consolidation and improve recall (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018). These features make VR particularly effective for vocabulary learning in secondary education contexts. Studies suggest that immersive language environments promote improved syntactic awareness and practical application of grammar rules (Lin & Lan, 2015).

3. Development of the VR Application

3.1 Design Objectives

The development of the VR application was guided by pedagogical and technological objectives to enhance instruction in Albanian language grammar. The primary goal was to transform grammar learning from a rule-based and text-centered activity into an interactive, immersive, and student-centered experience.

First, the application was designed to make grammar interactive, rather than presenting grammatical rules through static explanations. Students engage directly with linguistic elements in a virtual environment. They manipulate words, construct sentences, and identify grammatical categories through active participation. Grammar concepts are embedded in realistic scenarios that simulate everyday communication contexts. This approach supports deeper understanding by situating abstract rules within authentic language use. By incorporating immersive environments and game-like features, the app seeks to spark curiosity, maintain focus, and encourage intrinsic motivation.



3.2 Technical Framework

The VR application was developed using Unity, a widely used game development engine that supports immersive 3D environments and interactive educational simulations. Unity was selected due to its flexibility, compatibility with VR hardware, and ability to integrate multimedia elements such as audio narration, animations, and interactive objects.

For hardware implementation, the application was tested using Meta Quest 2, a standalone VR headset that does not require external sensors or a connected computer. This device was chosen for its accessibility, portability, and ease of classroom integration. Its user-friendly interface allows students to navigate virtual environments using handheld controllers and head movement.

The user interface (UI) design followed principles of simplicity and clarity to ensure usability for secondary school students. Large, readable text, intuitive navigation menus, and clear visual cues were incorporated to minimize cognitive overload. Interactive objects were highlighted visually to guide student attention, and audio instructions were included to support multimodal learning.

3.3 Application Structure

The VR application was organized into four modules aligned with curriculum objectives in the Albanian language grammar. Each module focuses on specific linguistic skills while maintaining a coherent, immersive environment. Students explore virtual environments in which objects are

labeled and interactive. Vocabulary items are introduced contextually, allowing learners to associate words with visual and situational cues. Grammar rules are embedded within interactive simulations. For example, students select appropriate verb forms or identify parts of speech within dialogues presented in the virtual setting. Learners manipulate virtual word blocks to construct grammatically correct sentences. Immediate system feedback indicates whether the structure is accurate, encouraging experimentation and correction. Short narrative texts appear within immersive story environments. After reading, students respond to comprehension questions integrated into the virtual space.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Participants

The study was conducted with 18 students enrolled in a secondary school. The participants were between 15 and 16 years old. At this educational stage, students are expected to demonstrate intermediate proficiency in Albanian language grammar, including knowledge of parts of speech, sentence structure, and reading comprehension skills. The research took place in a private secondary school located in an urban area. The school follows the national curriculum for Albanian language instruction. The selected class had previously received traditional grammar instruction, primarily through textbook exercises, teacher explanations, and written assignments. None of the students had prior experience using VR technology for educational purposes. Participation in the study was voluntary, and appropriate permissions were obtained from school administration and parents. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and anonymity of student data, were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

4.2 Research Design

The study employed a quasi-experimental research design with a pre-test and post-test. This design was selected to evaluate changes in student engagement and learning outcomes following the implementation of VR-based instruction. The intervention was conducted over a two-week period, during which VR lessons were integrated into regular Albanian language grammar classes. Rather than replacing traditional instruction entirely, VR activities were incorporated as complementary learning sessions within the existing curriculum. This approach ensured that the experimental intervention remained aligned with curricular objectives and classroom schedules. The independent variable in the study was the use of the VR application for grammar instruction, while the dependent variables included:

- Student engagement (behavioral, emotional, and cognitive)
- Vocabulary acquisition
- Reading comprehension performance

4.3 Instruments

Multiple data collection tools were used to ensure methodological triangulation and improve the reliability of the results. A structured classroom observation checklist was employed during both traditional and VR-based lessons. The checklist focused on observable indicators of engagement, including active participation in tasks, on-task behavior, verbal interaction and demonstrated persistence in completing activities.

At the end of the VR experience, students completed brief reflection forms to capture their perceptions and learning experiences. These forms included open-ended questions about their VR experience, the perceived differences from traditional lessons, their levels of interest and motivation, and the perceived impact of the VR activities on their understanding of grammar concepts. These reflections provided qualitative insights into student perceptions. An engagement measurement rubric was developed based on three key dimensions: behavioral engagement, which assessed students' participation and task completion; emotional engagement, which examined levels of interest, enthusiasm, and enjoyment; and cognitive engagement, which evaluated effort, concentration, and problem-solving. Each dimension was rated using a structured scale during classroom observations, enabling systematic comparison between traditional lessons and VR-integrated sessions.

5. Results

5.1 Learning Outcomes

Analysis of the quantitative data demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in student performance following the two-week VR intervention. The mean pre-test score was 62.4% (SD = 8.7), while the mean post-test score increased to 78.9% (SD = 7.9), representing a mean gain of 16.5 percentage points.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the effect of the VR-based instruction on student achievement. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores, $t(17) = 8.42$, $p < .001$. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranged from 12.3 to 20.7 percentage points.

The calculated effect size (Cohen's d for paired samples) was 1.98, indicating a large effect according to conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 1988). This

suggests that the VR intervention had a substantial impact on student learning outcomes.

When analyzing specific skill domains, vocabulary scores improved by an average of 14% (SD difference = 6.1), while reading comprehension improved by 19% (SD difference = 7.4). The largest gains were observed in items requiring grammatical inference and contextual analysis.

Although the sample size was relatively small ($n = 18$), the magnitude of the effect and consistency of improvement across participants suggest that the intervention meaningfully enhanced grammar-related learning outcomes.

5.2 Student Engagement Findings

The findings showed increased student engagement during VR sessions compared to traditional lessons, with higher participation, reduced off-task behavior, and greater willingness to complete tasks. Students demonstrated stronger emotional and cognitive engagement, expressing enthusiasm and improved understanding of grammar, while observation rubric scores confirmed higher levels of persistence, focus, and problem-solving during immersive activities.

Compared to traditional instruction, VR sessions maintained students' attention for longer periods, as the immersive and multisensory activities sustained focus throughout the tasks. Task completion rates were also higher, with students finishing grammar activities more efficiently and showing fewer incomplete responses, likely supported by the immediate feedback provided in the application. Additionally, the classroom atmosphere became more dynamic and collaborative, characterized by increased energy, positive peer interaction, and shared learning experiences.

6. Discussion

The findings indicate that integrating VR technology positively influenced both academic performance and student engagement, as reflected in improved vocabulary and reading comprehension scores. Immersive learning environments appear to enhance understanding and retention of grammatical concepts by embedding abstract rules within meaningful, simulated contexts, allowing students to apply grammar interactively rather than memorize isolated structures. The results also demonstrate a clear relationship between engagement and achievement, with higher behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement during VR sessions corresponding to measurable academic gains. These outcomes align with previous research highlighting the benefits of immersive technologies for motivation and learning performance (Makransky & Lilleholt, 2018; Radianti et al., 2020). Overall, the study

suggests that VR can function as an effective supplementary tool in grammar instruction, enhancing engagement and achievement when thoughtfully integrated into existing curricula.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the impact of Virtual Reality lessons on student engagement and learning outcomes in Albanian language grammar instruction. The findings demonstrate measurable improvements in vocabulary and reading comprehension performance, alongside increased behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

The results confirm that VR enhances student motivation and participation when integrated thoughtfully into classroom instruction. However, VR should be viewed as a supportive educational tool rather than a replacement for traditional teaching methods. Its greatest value lies in complementing existing pedagogical practices through immersive and interactive experiences.

Despite the promising findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The experiment lasted only two weeks, limiting conclusions about long-term retention and sustained engagement effects. Additionally, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the results, underscoring the need for future research with larger, more diverse participant groups. Minor technical challenges, such as device calibration and navigation adjustments, temporarily affected instructional time, although these issues were resolved.

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Mapping AI Literacy Among Elementary Teachers Through a Tpack Lens: A Scoping Review

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Abstract: This scoping review systematically maps how artificial intelligence (AI) literacy is conceptualized and integrated among elementary school teachers using the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. Following Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage methodological protocol and PRISMA-ScR guidelines, a comprehensive search was conducted in the Scopus database using a Population–Concept–Context (PCC) strategy, resulting in 18 peer-reviewed articles published between 2016 and 2025. Thematic synthesis of the literature revealed four key findings: (1) AI literacy is commonly framed around technical skills, with insufficient emphasis on ethical awareness and data literacy; (2) TPACK is frequently referenced but rarely integrated beyond technological knowledge; (3) teachers face consistent challenges such as limited training and curriculum ambiguity; and (4) there is a strong demand for professional development programs that embed AI literacy within pedagogical practice. This study contributes novel insights by focusing specifically on elementary-level educators an underexplored population in AI literacy research and by highlighting the gap between conceptual frameworks and classroom application. It recommends the development of context-responsive training, clearer curriculum guidelines, and interdisciplinary approaches to teacher preparation. The review offers a conceptual roadmap for policymakers,

curriculum developers, and teacher educators to advance responsible and pedagogically grounded AI integration in elementary education.

Keywords: *AI literacy, TPACK, elementary teachers, scoping review, digital pedagogy, teacher development*

1.Introduction

In recent years, the global education landscape has undergone profound transformation driven by rapid digitalization and technological innovation. Artificial intelligence (AI), in particular, has emerged as a disruptive force with the potential to reshape how knowledge is created, accessed, and delivered in educational contexts. As societies increasingly orient themselves toward data-driven and AI-mediated environments, the integration of AI into teaching and learning has become a critical concern for preparing future generations to participate meaningfully in a digital society (Ng et al., 2021).

Within elementary education, teachers play a pivotal role as facilitators of learning and as key agents of digital transformation. Beyond technical proficiency, AI literacy for elementary teachers entails pedagogically meaningful use of AI tools, critical understanding of AI concepts, and ethical awareness of issues such as data privacy, bias, and responsible technology use (Yim, 2024). However, existing studies suggest that AI integration at the primary level remains limited and fragmented, with many teachers emphasizing technical tool use while insufficiently addressing pedagogical adaptation and ethical reflection (Zhou et al., 2025).

This gap may be linked to the absence of a comprehensive pedagogical framework that effectively bridges content knowledge, pedagogy, and emerging AI technologies. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Koehler, 2006) offers a relevant foundation for understanding technology integration, yet its application to AI-related contexts has often remained superficial, focusing primarily on technological dimensions rather than deeper instructional design and ethical considerations. Moreover, prior research on AI literacy has predominantly concentrated on higher education, policy, or assessment development, leaving empirical investigations of elementary teachers’ AI literacy relatively underexplored (Veldhuis et al., 2025; Zhou et al., 2025). These limitations reveal a critical research gap: the lack of a comprehensive synthesis of how AI literacy among elementary teachers has been conceptualized and examined through a TPACK lens. Addressing this gap is essential, as elementary schools increasingly represent the frontlines of digital transformation, and teachers’ professional

capacities will significantly shape how AI is introduced and enacted in early education.

To respond to this need, this study conducts a scoping review to map existing research on AI literacy among elementary school teachers through the TPACK framework. The review aims to identify dominant conceptualizations, methodological trends, and research gaps, thereby contributing future-oriented insights for teacher education, professional development, and pedagogically grounded AI integration. In doing so, the study aligns with the conference theme *“Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society”* by examining how teachers’ professional knowledge can be strengthened to support responsible and meaningful educational innovation in the AI era.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This scoping review synthesizes and critically maps research on artificial intelligence (AI) literacy among elementary school teachers through the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. It aims to identify conceptual trends, methodological patterns, and research gaps in how AI literacy is defined and integrated in elementary education. The concept of AI literacy has evolved alongside the expansion of AI in educational contexts. Early definitions emphasized technical competence, focusing on understanding AI concepts, algorithms, and applications (Long & Magerko, 2020). Subsequent frameworks expanded this view to incorporate cognitive, ethical, and socio-cultural dimensions, arguing that AI literacy should enable individuals not only to use AI systems but also to critically evaluate their implications (Ng et al., 2021). Recent Scopus-indexed studies increasingly converge on a multidimensional perspective encompassing (1) technical and computational understanding, (2) ethical and socio-critical awareness, and (3) applied or pedagogical competence in responsible AI use (Yim, 2024; L. Zhou, 2025).

Despite this theoretical maturation, empirical research frequently operationalizes AI literacy narrowly, focusing on tool-based skills or general awareness surveys (Veldhuis et al., 2025). Reviews highlight inconsistencies in definitions, measurement instruments, and research populations, resulting in conceptual fragmentation (Chiu et al., 2023). Moreover, scholarship disproportionately centers on secondary and higher education, while elementary teachers receive comparatively limited systematic attention (Yim, 2024). Although digital competence frameworks such as DigCompEdu (Redecker, 2017) address general technology integration, they do not fully capture AI-specific domains such as algorithmic bias, data governance, and automated decision-making (Ng et al., 2021). Empirical studies further

identify recurring challenges, including limited formal AI-related pedagogical training (X. Zhou et al., 2025) curricular ambiguity (Yim, 2024), and an overemphasis on operational tool use rather than critical engagement (Southworth et al., 2023). Professional development often prioritizes technical upskilling while neglecting ethical reasoning and subject-specific integration (Chiu et al., 2023), suggesting that AI competence is frequently conceptualized as additive rather than integrative.

The TPACK framework (Koehler, 2006) offers a theoretically robust lens to address these limitations by conceptualizing effective technology integration as the interaction among Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogical Knowledge (PK), and Technological Knowledge (TK). While recent studies have begun applying TPACK to AI contexts (Veldhuis et al., 2025), many equate AI competence primarily with TK, overlooking its deeper intersections with PK and CK (Zhou et al., 2025). This is problematic because AI technologies involve adaptive algorithms, probabilistic outputs, and opaque decision-making processes that require expanded interpretations of CK (algorithmic transparency), PK (ethical-pedagogical mediation), and TK (critical data literacy). Synthesizing the literature reveals four persistent gaps: (1) conceptual fragmentation in definitions and measurement (Chiu et al., 2023; Southworth et al., 2023); (2) disproportionate focus on higher education rather than elementary teachers (Yim, 2024); (3) superficial application of TPACK emphasizing technological knowledge (X. Zhou et al., 2025); and (4) limited analysis of how theoretical frameworks translate into instructional design. Grounded in TPACK (Koehler, 2006) and informed by multidimensional AI literacy models (Long & Magerko, 2020; Ng et al., 2021), this study employs TPACK not merely as a descriptive structure but as a critical lens to evaluate the depth and quality of AI literacy integration in elementary education research.

3. Methodology

This study employed a scoping review design to systematically map research on artificial intelligence (AI) literacy based on the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework among elementary school teachers. A scoping review was chosen over a systematic review due to the exploratory nature of the topic and the heterogeneity of existing studies, particularly in how AI literacy is defined, applied, and measured across different educational contexts.

The review followed the five-stage framework proposed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and was reported in accordance with the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) checklist (Tricco et al., 2018). This

methodological approach is suitable for identifying trends, conceptual boundaries, research gaps, and informing future research and policy in emerging domains.

Table.1 Stages of Scoping Review

Stage	Objective	Key Activities	Output
Stage 1: Identifying Research Questions	Define the scope of the review	Formulate research questions on AI literacy, TPACK, and elementary teachers	Research questions
Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies	Locate relevant literature	Systematic database searches using predefined keywords	Initial set of records
Stage 3: Study Selection	Select studies aligned with the review scope	Deduplication, title/abstract screening, full-text review	Included studies
Stage 4: Data Charting	Organize and extract key information	Extract variables such as publication year, method, context, TPACK use	Data extraction table
Stage 5: Collating and Reporting	Synthesize and present the findings	Thematic analysis and visualizations	Descriptive and thematic results

Stage 1: Identifying the Research Questions

The review was guided by the following research questions:

1. How is artificial intelligence (AI) literacy conceptualized and applied within the TPACK framework in elementary education contexts?
2. What are the prevailing trends, focal topics, and research methodologies used in studies on AI literacy based on TPACK among elementary school teachers?
3. What research gaps remain regarding the integration of AI literacy through TPACK in relation to teachers' pedagogical practices and student learning outcomes in elementary education?

These questions were formulated based on a preliminary analysis of the literature and aligned with the Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework to ensure conceptual and contextual relevance throughout the scoping review process.

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

A systematic search was conducted in the Scopus database. Scopus was selected due to its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed international journals and conference proceedings across education and technology

disciplines. The search used Boolean operators (AND, OR) to combine keywords such as:

1. “Artificial Intelligence in Education”
2. “AI Literacy”
3. “TPACK”
4. “Elementary School Teachers”
5. “Primary Education”

The search strategy was structured according to the PCC framework:

Table 2. Search Strategy

Component	Operational Definition
Population	Elementary school teachers involved in the implementation of technology or artificial intelligence (AI) in the learning process.
Concept	Artificial intelligence (AI) literacy based on the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, emphasizing the integration of technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge.
Context	Learning practices in elementary education settings, particularly those aimed at improving teachers’ pedagogical practices and student learning outcomes in the era of digital transformation.

Stage 3: Study Selection

The unit of analysis in this review consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles that met predefined inclusion criteria. Records were imported into Mendeley for reference management. After removing duplicates, studies were screened by title and abstract for relevance. Eligible studies were then assessed in full text for final inclusion. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined to maintain consistency and transparency.

Table 3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles and proceedings	Editorials, opinion papers
Publication year	2016–2025	Outside the specified range
Language	English or Indonesian	Other languages
Educational level	Elementary education	Higher education or non-school contexts
Focus	AI literacy and/or TPACK integration	Technical AI without pedagogical focus

The full selection process is illustrated using a PRISMA-ScR flow diagram (Figure 1 in the Results section).

Stage 4: Data Charting and Extraction

A structured data extraction form was developed to capture key information from each study, including authors, year, country, participants, conceptual framing, research design, and key findings. The extracted data were summarized and categorized to identify descriptive patterns and thematic trends across the included studies.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting the Results

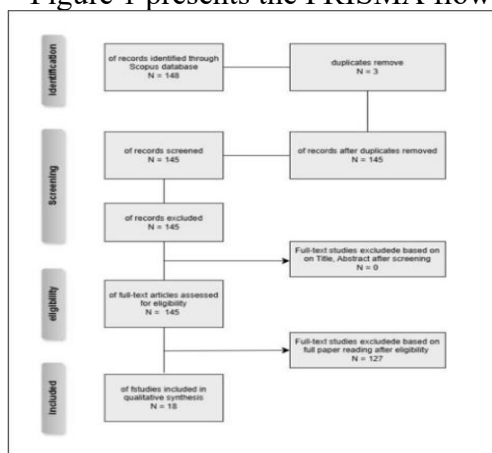
Findings were synthesized using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Results are presented through descriptive summaries and thematic categorization aligned with the research questions. Due to space limitations, detailed extraction matrices are summarized in aggregate form.

This study analyzed publicly available peer-reviewed literature and did not involve human participants or primary data collection. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. All sources were appropriately cited to ensure academic integrity and transparency.

4. Results and Discussions

The study selection process followed the PRISMA-ScR guidelines. A total of 148 records were initially identified via Scopus. After removing three duplicates, 145 records remained for screening. Full-text assessment led to the exclusion of 127 studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria. Ultimately, 18 studies were included in the final synthesis.

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA flow diagram of the selection process.



To address the research questions, both descriptive and thematic synthesis were conducted. The descriptive findings are presented below, followed by the thematic analysis in relation to the research objectives.

1. Overview of Included Studies

The final synthesis included 18 studies. These studies spanned diverse geographic regions (predominantly Asia and Europe), educational levels (mainly K–12 and teacher professional development), and research methods (reviews, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods).

Table 4. Descriptive Summary of Included Studies

Category	Summary	TPACK Alignment	Summary
Publication Years	Most studies published between 2020–2025, with peaks in 2023 and 2025.	TK dominant	Majority
Geographic Focus	Mainly Asia (China, Japan, Singapore, Korea), followed by Europe.	Partial TPK	Several
Educational Context	Primarily K–12 and teacher PD; few in higher education.	Full TPACK	Very limited
Research Methods	39% Reviews; 17% Qualitative; 17% Quantitative (e.g., SEM); 11% Mixed.		

Additionally, the focus areas and methods of the included studies are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Overview by Research Focus and Methodology

Focus Area	No. of Studies	Methodologies Used
AI Literacy Dimensions	7	Review, Survey, Interview
TPACK Integration	6	Survey, Case Study, Mixed Methods
Teacher Challenges	5	Case Study, Interview, Literature Review
PD & Curriculum Design	7	Review, Framework Dev., Survey

2. Research Focus and Conceptual Framing

Most studies explored teacher perceptions, readiness, and conceptual understanding of AI literacy. While the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework was frequently referenced, integration across all three domains technological (TK), pedagogical (PK), and content (CK) was limited. Of the 18 studies, 8 primarily emphasized Technological Knowledge (TK), 5 addressed Technological Pedagogical Knowledge (TPK), 3 explored Technological Content Knowledge (TCK), and

only 2 demonstrated full TPACK integration. A few studies proposed PD models that deliberately combined AI literacy with TPACK, indicating a growing interest in more systematic integration.

3. Thematic Synthesis

From the 18 studies, four major themes emerged:

1. AI Literacy Dimensions

Many studies highlighted technical understanding, ethical awareness, and data literacy as foundational to AI literacy.

2. TPACK-Based Integration

While TPACK was often used, its application remained mostly within the TK domain, with limited integration of pedagogical or content knowledge.

3. Teacher Challenges

Barriers included lack of training, insufficient resources, and vague curricular guidance.

4. Professional Development Needs

Several studies emphasized the need for structured, ongoing professional learning that combines AI skills with pedagogical strategies.

Based on the synthesis of the selected studies using the outlined scoping methodology, we now turn to a critical discussion of the key patterns and implications that emerged. This section interprets the findings through theoretical lenses and highlights how they contribute to understanding AI literacy among elementary educators. The distribution indicates a predominance of TK-focused studies compared to integrative TPACK approaches.

4. Discussions

This scoping review sought to examine how AI literacy among elementary school teachers has been conceptualized and integrated through a TPACK lens. Addressing RQ1 and RQ2, the findings indicate that AI literacy is predominantly framed within the technological knowledge (TK) domain, with comparatively limited integration across pedagogical (PK) and content (CK) dimensions. Although TPACK is frequently referenced, its operationalization often remains partial, suggesting that AI literacy research has yet to achieve fully integrative pedagogical grounding.

The predominance of TK-focused studies reflects a technocentric orientation in current scholarship. While technical competence such as understanding AI tools, algorithms, and data systems is necessary, it does not guarantee meaningful classroom integration. In elementary education contexts, where developmental appropriateness and pedagogical mediation are central, an

overemphasis on technology risks reducing AI literacy to tool proficiency rather than transformative instructional practice. This pattern aligns with prior findings indicating that teachers often perceive AI primarily as an instructional aid rather than as a catalyst for curricular redesign (Radloff et al., 2025; Yue et al., 2024).

The limited presence of full TPACK integration further underscores a structural gap between conceptual frameworks and classroom application. Studies frequently cited TPACK but operationalized it mainly through technological enhancement rather than through the dynamic interaction of content, pedagogy, and technology. This confirms concerns raised by Ning et al. (2024) and Celik (2023), who argue that AI-TPACK models must extend beyond technical intersections to incorporate ethical reasoning and subject-specific representation.

Ethics emerged as a cross-cutting dimension across the reviewed literature. Several studies emphasized issues of bias, privacy, fairness, and algorithmic transparency (Akgun & Greenhow, 2022; Aldemir et al., 2025). These findings suggest that AI literacy in elementary contexts cannot be confined to functional competence. Instead, it requires critical evaluation skills and ethical-pedagogical mediation. The proposal of expanded models such as “Intelligent-TPACK” (Celik, 2023) and AI-TPACK frameworks (Ning et al., 2024) reflects growing recognition that AI integration necessitates an additional ethical layer. Building on this, the present review supports conceptual refinement toward a TPACK+E model, where ethics is positioned as a core domain rather than a peripheral consideration.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of structured professional development (PD). Across studies, short but well-designed PD interventions improved teachers’ confidence and AI-TPACK alignment (Radloff et al., 2025; Runge et al., 2025). However, most initiatives remain pilot-based and lack longitudinal evaluation. In elementary settings, PD should prioritize integrative design embedding AI within subject-specific pedagogy, project-based learning, and critical digital literacy rather than isolated technical workshops.

Policy implications also emerge from the synthesis. As AI tools become increasingly accessible, including generative systems, policymakers must establish clear teacher competency standards and ethical usage guidelines. Without coherent policy frameworks and infrastructure support, AI adoption risks exacerbating inequities related to access, digital divides, and algorithmic bias (Holmes & Porayska-Pomsta, 2022; UNESCO, 2023; Williamson & Eynon, 2020). Aligning teacher preparation programs with international competency frameworks, such as UNESCO’s AI progression model (Miao &

Cukurova, 2024), may provide a structured pathway from foundational awareness to creative and critical AI use.

Addressing RQ3, several research gaps remain evident. Empirical classroom-based studies are limited, particularly those examining how teacher AI literacy influences student learning outcomes. Content-specific investigations such as AI integration in science versus literacy instruction are also underexplored. Moreover, few studies employ rigorous validation methods, such as structural equation modeling or intervention-based designs, to test AI-TPACK constructs (Ning et al., 2024). Future research should therefore move beyond perception-based surveys toward classroom implementation studies and cross-cultural comparative analyses.

Theoretically, this review contributes by empirically mapping the pedagogical depth of AI literacy research through a TPACK lens at the elementary level an educational population that has received limited systematic attention. Rather than treating AI literacy as an extension of general digital competence, the findings underscore the need for integrative frameworks that explicitly address technological, pedagogical, ethical, and content-based intersections.

In sum, while AI literacy discourse is expanding, its pedagogical integration in elementary education remains uneven. Advancing the field requires shifting from technocentric adoption toward theoretically grounded, ethically informed, and context-responsive instructional design. By synthesizing existing scholarship through TPACK, this study provides a conceptual roadmap for strengthening AI literacy research and practice in foundational education settings.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This scoping review synthesized 18 studies to examine how AI literacy among elementary school teachers has been conceptualized and integrated through a TPACK lens, revealing a persistent technocentric orientation in which AI literacy is largely framed within technological knowledge (TK) with limited integration across pedagogical (PK) and content (CK) domains. Although extended models such as AI-TPACK and Intelligent-TPACK have been proposed, their empirical application in elementary contexts remains limited and ethical dimensions are often insufficiently embedded. The review contributes by identifying conceptual fragmentation, limited classroom-based and subject-specific research, and the need for integrative, ethics-informed AI-TPACK models. Implications include embedding AI literacy in teacher education and professional development through sustained, integrative approaches aligned with equity-oriented policy frameworks. However, findings should be interpreted cautiously due to the focus on Scopus-indexed

English publications, the predominance of small-scale or conceptual studies, and the underrepresentation of in-service teachers. Advancing AI literacy in primary education therefore requires moving beyond tool familiarity toward integrative, ethical, and pedagogically grounded frameworks supported by stronger empirical, longitudinal, and cross-cultural research.

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Games and Their Role in Learning Mathematics in Primary Education Classes

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Abstract: Games are acknowledged as highly effective tools for fostering mathematical understanding and learning among primary education students. In the context of mathematical classes, game activities offer students a valuable opportunity to integrate games into their learning experiences, thereby enriching mathematical imagination—a pivotal aspect of contemporary educational demands. Integrating games into classes aims to enhance the efficiency of learning mathematics while simultaneously fostering students' enjoyment of the educational process. This study seeks to explore the role of mathematical games in the learning process of primary school students. Conducted across 36 primary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia, the study engaged 478 primary grade teachers and 138 mathematics educators, totaling 616 participants. Data collection involved the use of research techniques and Likert-scale-based research questionnaires. The study employed descriptive, comparative, and statistical methods, with data analysis performed using SPSS.

Keywords: *mathematics, games, learning, primary school grades*

1. Introduction

The paper underscores the significance of incorporating games in the learning process of mathematics within the classroom setting. Games are ideal for teaching mathematics so that children learn and practice numbers, better understand mathematical concepts, practice mathematical skills, and are involved in solving different mathematical problems. By playing mathematical games, the child spontaneously develops his mathematical abilities and acquires the mathematical knowledge provided by the teaching objectives. (Branka Dzajkowska and a group of authors, 2016). The game is such an activity that has the characteristic of motivating the student to be fully involved in an intellectual and emotional aspect. Such involvement "motivates children to play to the end, to start a new game, to win. In this way, they learn and develop the mathematical skills required in the game. (Snezana, Jankulovska. Gorica, Mickovska, 1997). Play is a spontaneous, free activity that takes place without external necessity. The need for play in children arises from the inner need for activity. It also has its own logic that differs from external reality (as adults perceive it). In the game, reality is reworked according to children's experiences. By playing, the child achieves everything impossible in the real world. In the game, the child is the "master of the situation"

The collective insights indicate a growing integration of games into our educational landscape, reshaping the conventional perception of learning. Within the context of this paper, games are delineated as instrumental tools for enhancing mathematics comprehension, fostering interest and motivation, promoting socialization, honing cognitive and psychomotor skills, nurturing critical and multidirectional thinking, and stimulating creativity and innovation, among other skills. (Eyal Liat, Hayak Merav, 2024)

Consequently, this infusion of gaming elements renders the learning experience more engaging and enjoyable, while also positively impacting attitudes toward fellow students and classroom learning. The potential long-term effects extend to the overall development of a student's personality and contribute positively to their educational journey and lifestyle.

In the context of contemporary education, particularly within a digital and innovation-driven society, game-based learning represents an important pedagogical approach aligned with modern teaching strategies. The integration of games supports the development of 21st-century skills, enhances student engagement, and reflects the shift toward interactive and technology-supported learning environments. Games play a significant role in the learning process, especially in mathematics education. They motivate students, enhance engagement, and support the development of cognitive and

problem-solving skills. In contemporary education, game-based learning aligns with digital transformation and innovative teaching approaches. (Ajdini, 2023)

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Research highlights the importance of games in education. Plass emphasize motivation and engagement, while Suh highlight increased participation. Stevanovic and Hughes underline the developmental role of play. (Hughes, 1999) Despite extensive research, there remains a need for empirical studies in real classroom contexts. The role of games in education has been widely explored in pedagogical and psychological research. Scholars emphasize that play is not merely an entertaining activity but a fundamental mechanism for cognitive, social, and emotional development. According to Plass, Homer, and Kinzer game-based learning enhances motivation and engagement, which are critical factors influencing learning outcomes. (Plass, J.L., Homer, B.D, Kinzer, C.K, 2015). Suh et al. highlight that gamification significantly improves student participation and interaction, especially in science and mathematics education. (Ayoung Suh, Christian Wanger, Lili Liu, 2018) Similarly, Stevanovic views play as both a method and a tool of education, emphasizing its dual function in facilitating knowledge acquisition and skill development. (Stevanovic, 2003).

From a constructivist perspective, learning through games allows students to actively construct knowledge through interaction, collaboration, and problem-solving. However, despite the growing body of research, there remains a need for empirical studies that examine the practical implementation of game-based learning in real classroom contexts, particularly in primary education settings. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing teachers' perspectives and experiences

2.1 Math Game-Based Learning in Primary School Settings

The implementation of gamification in science education is an intriguing area for many researchers because it is something familiar to students and at the same time, attracts their interest. Moreover, it can facilitate scientific thinking compatible with scientific theories, methodologies, and learning strategies related to education and gamification. (Havziu-Ismaili, 2019). However, gamification implementation is generally considered successful in terms of user engagement (Ayoung Suh, Christian Wanger, Lili Liu, 2018). The notion that play evolves into an enjoyable pursuit within chosen occupations further underscores the enduring impact of childhood play activities on shaping individuals into productive and fulfilled adults. This perspective aligns with

the modern understanding that the engagement of children in game-based learning not only enhances their immediate understanding of mathematics but also lays the foundation for a lifelong positive association with learning. Stevanovic's assertion that play serves as both a form and a tool for the education of children complements Dewey's perspective, emphasizing the dual role of play as both a method of instruction and a medium through which essential educational objectives are achieved. This nuanced understanding reinforces the idea that games serve as more than mere activities; they are integral tools for nurturing well-rounded learners. (Stevanovic, 2003) According to Plass, Homer, and Kinzer (2015), the literature frequently emphasizes the necessity for sustained student motivation and engagement in learning, providing a compelling argument for the incorporation of games in educational contexts. (Plass, J.L., Homer, B.D, Kinzer, C.K, 2015). Rooted in motivational, affective, and socio-cultural attributes, games are designed to invigorate learning. Within the broader learning context, motivation and emotion have been identified as pivotal factors influencing cognitive processes and outcomes.

2.2 Strategies for organizing game activities in Mathematics Education

In the orchestration of game-based activities for teaching mathematics in the classroom, educators are advised to carefully consider several essential factors. Educational experts emphasize the initial step of thoughtfully selecting games, underscoring the importance of aligning these games with the curriculum and program objectives specific to the unit or class. The seamless integration of games into lesson plans is highlighted as a crucial factor for achieving intended learning outcomes (Szilágyi, Szilvia & Körei, Attila. , 2025)

Emotional engagement is another significant aspect that educators must take into account when incorporating game-based activities. Recognizing the impact of emotions on lasting learning experiences, the inclusion of a variety of emotions transforms the traditional learning paradigm and enhances student engagement. Variety and intensity are elements that should not be overlooked, necessitating careful planning to ensure a balanced mix within game activities and alleviate anxiety levels. This approach creates a supportive environment, encouraging active participation in the learning process, even among more hesitant students. The constructivist teacher paradigm advocates for the implementation of games that comprehensively cover various mathematical concepts, fostering logical thinking and addressing diverse problems. Given the student-centric approach of the state curriculum in the Republic of Macedonia, teachers have the flexibility to choose and adopt suitable tools that align with this approach and facilitate the attainment of anticipated learning

outcomes. This practice allows students to take the leadership role and show more responsibility for the learning process, while the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator, guiding the game activity to meet educational objectives effectively. Teachers who apply game-based teaching and learning are aware that the process will not function without organization in groups, beyond individual and pair settings. This facilitates the development of teamwork, encouraging students to collaborate, seek assistance, and offer help, thereby nurturing essential social skills. No learning can occur without order and discipline. In this line, teachers are responsible for creating an environment of order and discipline during game-based learning. Additionally, they should consider the nature of game activities, ensuring that each student has a designated place and patiently waits for their turn to participate. Inclusive education is of paramount importance because it avoids favoring more active students, striving to provide equal opportunities for passive students to actively engage in the learning process. This ensures inclusivity and equitable involvement in game-based educational activities. These considerations collectively contribute to the effective organization of game activities in the mathematics classroom, fostering a conducive and enriching learning environment

3. Methodology

Research Objectives:

The incorporation of games into the classroom serves various objectives, with a primary focus on enhancing the efficiency of mathematics instruction and fostering student satisfaction in the learning process. This strategic use of games aims to counteract the decline in students' interest and motivation to learn mathematics during the critical early stages of foundational knowledge acquisition. This research centers on examining the role and representation of games in the teaching of mathematics within primary classrooms, specifically by classroom teachers in the Republic of North Macedonia. The study seeks to shed light on how teachers integrate game-based learning strategies to enhance students' understanding of mathematics.

Main Hypothesis:

The systematic integration of educational games into primary mathematics instruction positively influences students' mathematical proficiency, cognitive engagement, and overall satisfaction with the learning process.

Special Hypothesis 1: Specifically, we hypothesize that students exposed to a curriculum enriched with carefully designed and well-implemented mathematical games will exhibit higher levels of mathematical understanding,

problem-solving skills, and sustained interest in the subject compared to those in traditional instructional settings.

Special Hypothesis 2: Math teachers acknowledge the success of students when classroom teachers employ games as part of the instructional approach.

Special Hypothesis 3: Learning mathematics through games in the classroom constitutes an engaging form of work, offering a valuable opportunity to enhance learning collaboratively with peers. Additionally, this approach contributes to the development of crucial skills and aspects of the learner.

To investigate and substantiate the assertion that the integration of games enhances the learning of mathematics in classroom instruction, a mixed research design was employed. The study involved a sample of 660 teachers, comprising 478 classroom teachers and 138 mathematics teachers with experience teaching or working with sixth-grade students. The research spanned 36 schools across the Republic of North Macedonia and was conducted from May to June 2022.

Teachers were asked to select from five options provided on Linkert's scale to express their agreement with the statement: 1 – I strongly disagree, 2 – I disagree, 3 – I partially agree, 4 – I agree, 5 – I strongly agree. To assess the significance of differences among teacher groups based on their work experience, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed. The variation in arithmetic means among respondents from different work environments (urban-rural) was analyzed using an independent samples t-test. In addition to the quantitative research, qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with experts in the field. This included discussions with five advisors from the Bureau for Educational Development, three classroom advisors, and two advisors specializing in teaching mathematics.

4. Results

Table 1. Cross-tabulations according to the work place

	City	Village	Total
I strongly disagree,	7	5	12
Disagree	21	19	40
Partially agree	58	53	111
Agree	71	66	137
Strongly agree	98	80	178
Total	255	223	478
The <i>t</i> -value is 0.29367. The <i>p</i> -value is .388244. The result is <i>no</i> significant at <i>p</i> < .05.			

The variances in arithmetic means among respondents working in urban or rural settings, specifically in relation to the statement "The implementation of games is a valuable opportunity to enhance mathematics instruction in secondary school," were computed using an independent one-sample t-test, as depicted in the table above. The t-test results indicate a lack of statistically significant difference ($t=-0.29367$, $p=0.388244$). The outcome does not achieve significance at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 2: Cross-tabulations due to work experience

DATA COLLECTION				
WORK EXPERIENCE	N	Average	Standard Deviation	Standard mistakes
0-10 YRS.	5	27.6	23.2981	10.4192
11-20 YRS.	5	27	20.3593	9.1049
21-30 YRS.	5	25	18.6682	8.3487
31-40 YRS.	5	15.2	9.9599	4.4542
+40	5	0.8	0.4472	0.2

Table. 3 Cross-tabulations due to work experience

ANOVA					
VARIATION SOURCE	DF	SS	MS	f F-Stat	P-Value
BETWEEN GROUPS	4	2597.84	649.46	2.3109	0.0931
IN GROUPS	20	5620.8154	281.0408		
	24	8218.6554			

Upon conducting the variance analysis, it is evident that there is no statistically significant difference among employees with varying levels of experience or working time concerning the assertion: "The incorporation of games is a beneficial opportunity to enhance mathematics instruction in elementary school." The calculated f-ratio stands at 2.3109, and the associated p-value is 0.0931. Consequently, the outcome does not reach significance at the $p < .05$ threshold.

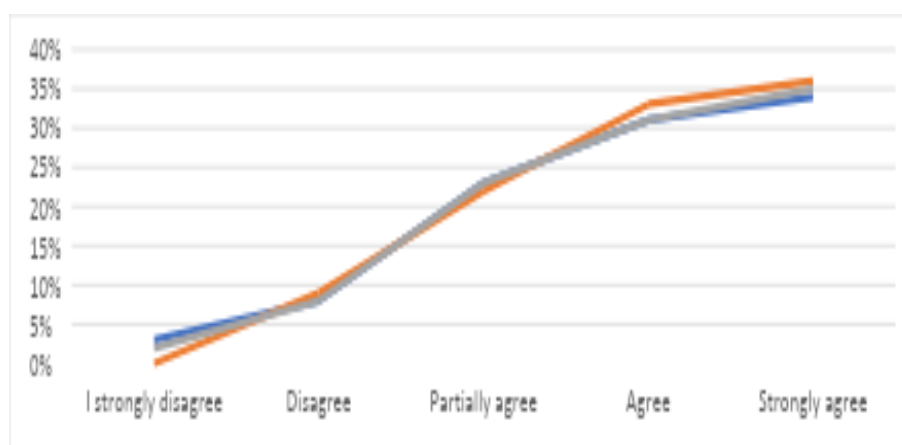


Figure 1. The application of the game in the teaching of math enables the easier acquisition of knowledge in math.

In Figure 1, the disposition of both classroom teachers and mathematics subject teachers is depicted concerning the statement: "The incorporation of games in mathematics instruction facilitates the smoother acquisition of mathematical knowledge." It is evident that the majority, constituting a cumulative percentage of 66%, including both classroom and mathematics teachers, endorse this statement. In contrast, only 10% of the total number of teachers express an opposing view. This indicates strong support for the statement among the respondents.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the positive role of game-based learning in mathematics education, aligning with previous research that highlights its impact on motivation and engagement (Plass, J.L., Homer, B.D, Kinzer, C.K, 2015). The absence of statistically significant differences between teachers based on experience or school location suggests that the benefits of educational games are universally recognized across different teaching contexts. Furthermore, the results indicate that games contribute not only to cognitive development but also to social interaction and collaborative learning, which are essential components of modern education. These findings support the constructivist approach, where students actively participate in the learning process. In the context of a digital society, the use of games represents an innovative teaching strategy that aligns with current educational transformations. Game-based learning can be further enhanced through digital tools and platforms, offering new opportunities for interactive and personalized learning experiences.

6. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

Drawing upon both theoretical knowledge and empirical research findings, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the significant role that games play in the learning of mathematics, providing an authentic overview of their current utilization in primary education in the Republic of North Macedonia. The research outcomes suggest a unanimous perspective among classroom teachers that the implementation of games represents a valuable opportunity to enhance mathematics learning in classroom settings. This consensus transcends factors such as the school's location and the teacher's level of experience, emphasizing the belief that games contribute to increased student activity and facilitate a more accessible acquisition of knowledge in the classroom. Insights garnered from mathematics teachers align with these findings, indicating that students exposed to game-based teaching exhibit higher levels of success and engagement in mathematics classes. The correlation between game application and improved student outcomes is notably recognized in the responses from mathematics teachers.

Classroom and mathematics advisors contribute a valuable perspective, emphasizing that optimal learning occurs when students engage in play with their peers. These advisors underscore the educational and motivational benefits of games, noting that games capture students' attention and foster logical thinking. According to them, learning mathematics through play serves as an engaging and effective approach, enhancing comprehension and developing a spectrum of skills, including cognitive, psychomotor, and creative abilities in students. The study demonstrates that the integration of games in mathematics teaching significantly contributes to improving students' understanding, engagement, and overall learning experience. Teachers widely recognize games as valuable tools that facilitate easier knowledge acquisition and promote active participation in the classroom. The findings reinforce the importance of incorporating innovative and student-centered approaches in teaching practices, particularly in the context of ongoing educational reforms and digital transformation.

Limitations of the Study- Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The research is based solely on teachers' perceptions and does not include direct assessment of student performance. Additionally, the study is limited to primary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research could include student perspectives and experimental designs to further validate the impact of game-based learning

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Transition from High School to University: Challenges and Coping Strategies

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Abstract: The transition from high school to university is a crucial stage for students, and it is described as a critical developmental period where significant psychological, social, and academic changes occur. This qualitative study explores how first-year university students experience this transition, the challenges they face, and the coping strategies they use. In this study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 first-year psychology students (8 females and 2 males) at International Balkan University in Skopje, North Macedonia. The findings describe that students experience the transition as an emotionally complex process characterized by anxiety, uncertainty, and loneliness. However, they also see this period as excitement, autonomy, and personal growth. The main challenges that students experience during the transition are academic demands, emotional adjustment, social integration, and practical responsibilities. Despite experiencing challenges, students can make sense of these challenges as opportunities for maturity and self-development. The study also concluded that students mostly use social support coping strategies (family and peers). It was also found that students use emotion-focused strategies, such as positive reframing of events, and accepting them as they are. Lastly, it was found that students use time management as a problem-focused coping strategy. The study highlights the importance of supportive environments, and especially targeted university well-being services, in facilitating successful adjustment during the transition to higher education. It also shows the importance of having these services in universities, where students should feel free to visit, especially during stressful and important periods of their lives.

Keywords: *Educational transition, Psychological well-being, Coping strategies, Academic challenges*

1. Introduction

The transition from high school to university represents a major developmental period that occurs in emerging adulthood. It is characterized by increased academic demands, expanded autonomy, identity exploration, and restructuring of social networks. Within contemporary educational systems, this transition can become more complex with the development of globalization (increased number of international students), evolvement of academic demands, and other related challenges.

In North Macedonia, even though higher education is not compulsory, enrollment to a university is seen as an important step for professional development. As universities also experience challenges such as adapting to digitalization and innovation, students are required not only to manage academic expectations, but also to cope with emotional and social adjustments in a rapidly changing environment.

The relevant research describes the transition from high school to university as stressful, uncertain and vulnerable process that also has effect on mental health (Cleary et al., 2011). However, it is also suggested that this transition is important for personal growth, resilience, and identity development (Fromme et al., 2008). This dual position explains the dual nature of transition both from negative and positive sides.

Although numerous studies have documented stressors associated with the transition to university, much of the existing literature focuses on other aspects of it such as behavioral risks, academic performance indicators, or quantitative measures of psychological distress. Nevertheless, existing literature gives less attention in understanding and interpreting experiences that students subjectively experience and explain. Also, there is lack of research that describes how students construct meaning around challenges and coping strategies.

Moreover, there are limited qualitative research examining the lived experiences of emerging adults that study in North Macedonia. This absence restricts a deeper understanding of how students perceive, interpret and manage transitional stressors.

Additionally, understanding the psychological and behavioral changes that students experience and how they make sense of these changes through transition in increasingly digitalized and innovation-driven educational systems is essential for designing well-being services where students might overcome the difficulties and challenges with less untroubled approach and adapt to the university life more navigable.

Due to the stated reasons, this study aims to interpret the psychological, social and emotional challenges experienced by first-year university students during

the transition from high school. It also aims to explore the coping strategies that students use to manage the stressors that arrive during the transition.

2. Literature Review

This chapter of the study, theories about transition, academic challenges, and coping strategies will be explained. Also, through the critical review, the gaps in the research will be identified.

1. Transition to University

The transition from high school to university for a student is a milestone in his or her life which usually ends with personal growth and behavioral change (Fromme et al., 2008). However, this transition is not always easy, since most of the students can experience different types of challenges during this period. These challenges might be psychological such as potential stressors, the loss of high school friendship, dealing with different learning methods, increased autonomy in life decisions, and other challenges. Also, according to Cleary et al. (2011), students can also experience physical challenges, such as moving to another city or country, getting to know their roommates, and other related challenges. While these two concepts explain two different aspects of the transition (behavioral and psychological), they mostly rely on quantitative data, which may limit deeper exploration in understanding the transition from meaning-making perspective of students' adaptation.

Existing research highlights academic pressure, physical challenges such as separation from family, and social adaptation as the highest stressors that can occur during the transition. On the other hand, it focuses on gaining more autonomy, independency, self-regulation that can be counted as positive parts of the transition. Thus, it shows that even though challenges as seen as risk factors, they also function in developmental catalyst.

2. Coping Strategies

Moreover, to overcome the challenges that students might experience during the transition, they need to find ways to cope with them and generate coping strategies. Coping strategies, as described in Lazarus and Folkman (1984) are adaptive responses to stressors. They have two functions which first of them is to be helpful to target the problem and trying to deal with it; and the second function is to help a person to target the emotions and trying to adapting them in the situation so the person can feel less tension, physiological activity and emotion reaction (Gustems-Carnicer & Calderón, 2012). Within the context of university transition, problem-focused coping strategies may include time management, academic planning, and related concepts that students can use.

On the other hand, students can use cognitive reframing, acceptance, and other mechanisms as emotion-focused coping strategies. Understanding these strategies in deeper level provides insights into listing different mechanisms used by them (especially with the digitalization and innovation), and how adaptive these mechanisms are in the transition period.

Another important coping strategy that a student might use is social support. Even if there is no direct support from another person, the knowledge about available social support is important enough to make a person cope with stressful events. Thus, social support is accepted as one of the important coping strategies that helps to deal with decreasing distress and challenges (Stephenson et al., 2020).

3. Phenomenological Perspective and Identified Gap

Even though coping strategies are clearly structured and documented, they are mostly seen as a measurable trait or behavioral outcome. Existing literature is less focused on how students express these coping strategies and how they understand the importance of the challenges in the development of identity.

Moreover, while coping strategies help to understand how they buffer stress, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows exploration of what kind of specific strategies they might use that are grounded in emotional and problem-focused mechanisms. By combining these perspectives, the present study extends the coping theory into a phenomenological domain, examining how students interpret challenges not only as a support for overcoming stress but also as opportunities for growth, identity development, self-discovery, and other positive aspects of the process.

3. Methodology

In this chapter of the study; research design, instruments that were used during the study, procedure of the study, participants and ethical considerations will be explained.

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The purpose of IPA is to explore how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, particularly in relation to significant life transitions. Thus, this method suits the best when it comes to understanding meaning making processes of students and exploring their challenges as well as coping strategies. The focus is on the subjective meanings participants attach to their experiences, rather than on generating generalizable data (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Instruments and Procedure

Data were collected by semi-structured individual interviews. The interview questions were prepared in the scope of the research questions. The questions included open-ended questions in order to explore their lived experiences when it comes to transition, challenges, emotional reactions, coping strategies, and other related concepts. The interviews were not audio-recorded, so immediate documentation and careful note-taking was used (by the usage of Microsoft Word). This means that detailed written notes were taken during each session. Immediately after each interview, notes were expanded into comprehensive narratives, so it was assured that an accurate representation of participants was provided. Moreover, reflexive notes helped to document the captured contextual and emotional nuances that were observed during the interviews.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and they signed an informed consent. The interviews were held in a quiet place in the university and each of them lasted around 60 minutes.

Participants

In this study, purposive sample strategy method was used. Participants were first-year university students in their first semester at International Balkan University, Psychology department. 8 female and 2 male students participated in the study (total of 10 participants). All of the participants were from North Macedonia, while 8 of them were from Skopje and two of them from Tetovo. The entire participants were chosen from the past academic year high school graduates.

Data Analysis

The analysis involved stages as repeated reading of transcripts, initial exploratory noting, identification of emergent themes. Each transcript was analyzed individually, and initial codes as well as their meanings were listed. The codes later were grouped into broader themes in order to see the shared experiential patterns.

For the data management tool and organizing the codes, Microsoft Excel was used. It allowed to create coding tables and track theme development and also compare patterns across participants.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was signed right before the interviews. Anonymity and confidentiality were protected, and participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are presented according to four major themes that emerged from the analysis: the first one is "experiencing the transition", the second one is "challenges during transition", the third one is "meaning-making processes, and lastly, the fourth one is "coping strategies". These themes reflect patterns that are identified through participants own narratives.

Experiencing the Transition

Students described the transition from high school to university as a complex and emotionally charged process which is also characterized as excitement, independence, as well as uncertainty. Most of the students portrayed this process as "challenging, scary, and intimidating", while some of them explained the situation as "excitement, hopefulness and feeling of more independency". Moreover, supportive and understanding professors were also mentioned by some students, indicating that it is helpful to the adjustment process.

"The transition was a little bit scary, not knowing the student life and being this independent. But experiencing it so far has been amazing. Professors and students are much more understanding and accepting"

"... most of the students were very open minded – as well as the professors, so it was a very welcoming atmosphere".

During their first weeks of university life, students' emotions were fluctuated between "stress, anxiety and loneliness" and "motivation, curiosity and relief". Couple of students mentioned that at first, they felt exhausted and overwhelmed but with time they began to enjoy exploring the campus and the new learning environment. For some of the students, experiencing the "freedom and autonomy" that arrived with university life were sources for them to be more motivated and feeling proud.

The first impression of students for the university life was mostly centered on greater independence, openness and self-direction. Many of them found the environment "more relaxed and welcoming" than high school, however, they also acknowledged that it was "harder and more demanding". Only few students noted that university required a "more serious attitude" and "better time management.

When reflecting their overall adjustment, most of students reported it as good, fine, or better than expected. They described meeting "new people, gaining new experiences and becoming more confident" as the most rewarding aspects of this process. Other students used words such as fun, motivating, and interesting, though some also admitted that sometimes it made them feel "chaotic" or "stressful".

These findings support previous research that see transition period to be both vulnerable and space for personal growth (Cleary et al., 2011; Fromme et al., 2008). While earlier studies mentions stress and mental health problems that occur during the transition, the present findings demonstrates the idea that students also experience excitement and independence which shows the positivity of the transition. Thus, it reinforces the idea that it is both challenging and developmental period.

Challenges During Transition

Students identified a wide range of challenges that they experienced during the transition which were grouped into academic, social, emotional, and practical categories.

As it is expected, the most frequently mentioned challenges that students experienced were academic challenges. Students mentioned "having harder material and longer lecture hours than high school and also experiencing language barriers and greater responsibility for learning". Some students expressed exam-related anxiety and uncertainty that they are facing about "professors' expectations".

Moreover, social challenges were especially salient. Several students said that making friends was intimidating or anxiety-inducing, while others found it easy and natural due to the welcoming atmosphere the university has. Only few students mentioned feeling overwhelmed or struggling to fit in at the beginning.

"It was hard for me to not get too much in my head and motivate myself to go to classes, change has always been a scare thing to me..."

When it comes to emotional challenges, it was reported by many students. The most mentioned emotional challenges were exam stress, loneliness, missing family and friends, self-doubt and confusion about expectations. A few students mentioned experiencing panic attacks or symptoms of depression. Interestingly, only one student stated that she actually enjoyed the challenge and did not view it as a negative aspect.

"Personally, I did not have any struggles because I am a very extroverted person and finding friends was easy".

Lastly, practical and physical challenges were also mentioned by students. Living away from family, financial difficulties, transportation problems, and managing time were among the most frequently repeated challenges. Adjusting to new routines and balancing studying, work and personal life were also described an ongoing difficulties.

The academic and emotional stressors align with existing literature meaning that they are the fundamental challenges that occur during the transition (especially academic pressure and social adaptation). However, students' own

experiences show that these stressors are accepted distinctly, depending on their individual differences (personality, social context, prior expectations, and other differences). This finding aligns with previous quantitative research that highlights individual variability in adaptation.

Making Sense of the Challenges

Despite the difficulties, students described a reflective and positive understanding of their experiences. Many interpreted their challenges as opportunities for personal growth. Students frequently said that the transition taught them discipline, resilience and self-awareness. Some of students stated that it helped them “realize everything will work out in the end” or they try to “think of difficulties as natural parts of university life”.

Nevertheless, students viewed these experiences as contributing to their personal maturity. They describe this process as allowing them to become “more serious, independent, confident and responsible”. Couple of students shared that throughout the process they gained insight to “manage their own decisions, communicate better with themselves, and see mistakes as learning experiences”.

One very important recurring meaning was that growth often comes through discomfort. Students acknowledged that “stress and uncertainty” were not purely negative aspects of the process, on the contrary, they saw those aspects as necessary for developing persistence and identity. They expressed that university life taught them to balance freedom with responsibility and to value routine and consistency.

For many students, the most meaningful aspect of the transition was realizing their capacity to adapt and grow. They associated this with new friendships, freedom, education and feeling fulfilled.

“I realized that everything is going to work out in the end and that I have nothing to worry about”.

The students interpretation and acceptance of discomfort and seeing it as a part of growth reflects developmental perspectives on emerging adulthood where identity formation and autonomy are playing a central role. Unlike studies that see stress strictly as a negative concept and that has negative cognitive and behavioral outcomes, the present findings suggest that students cognitively integrate challenges into their self-concept development. This meaning-making process extends coping theory by illustrating how stressors are reframed as opportunities for resilience.

Coping and Adaptation Strategies

Students used multiple coping strategies to overcome the difficulties that they are facing. These strategies can be gathered into three main groups such as

social support, personal mindset (can fall under emotion-focused coping strategies) and organizational habits (can be counted as problem-focused coping strategies).

The most emphasized coping strategy was social support. The most frequently mentioned sources of strength that helped students during the process were family and friend support. Couple of students also cited support from romantic partners and peers who are very understanding. The reassurance and presence of close relationships (either with family or friends) helped students to manage the emotional stress that they are experiencing. This strategy was also used by those students who live away from their parents and are homesick.

“ To overcome difficulties, I would say my family and good friends’ support helped me... all the difficulties have solution and will pass by working and believing”.

On the other hand, personal coping approaches focused on positive thinking, self-reflection and acceptance. Students often reported “trying to stay calm”, “thinking positively”, or “leaving things to time”. Some students mentioned that they use distractors such as engaging in new hobbies, working out regularly which help them to regulate their stress.

Moreover, organizational strategies were also commonly used by students. Many students described using planners, study schedules, time management routines, and consistent study habits. Some of the students found joining student clubs, talking to others and staying interactive very beneficial in the process of overcoming their stress. To maintain well-being, several students participated in activities such as gym, meditation, relaxation, or visiting their families. Only few students emphasized rewarding themselves for achievement and keeping an open mind.

“What really helped was developing a routine that balanced study, rest and social time. I started to use a planner to organize my day to reduce stress and stay in my top”.

The importance of social support as a coping strategy and protective that is described in students’ narratives is consistent with the relevant research (Stephenson et al., 2020). Moreover, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping strategies that are used by students show their adaptive function as it is described in the model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). These findings suggest that successful adaptation can be done through the usage of both coping strategies rather than relying only on one of them.

From a practical perspective, these findings indicate that universities should prioritize structured social integration programs and innovative workshops that enhance problem-focused (such as time-management, balancing student and social life, and other strategies) and emotion-focused coping strategies

(such as emotion regulation, anxiety reduction, and other adaptive programs) during the first semester of their studies.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of Study

The present study explored how first-year university students experience the transition from high school and how they cope with the psychological, social, and academic challenges associated with this period. The findings demonstrate that the transition to university is neither solely a stressful event nor exclusively a positive developmental stage. Thus, it represents a dynamic process with the increase of emotional fluctuation, identity development, as well as increase of autonomy. Students described experiences of anxiety, uncertainty, and academic pressure alongside excitement, independence, and personal growth.

A central contribution of this study lies in highlighting the importance of meaning-making in the transition process. Students did not only perceive challenges as they are, but they also tried to interpret them as opportunities for resilience, discipline, and self-development. This suggests that coping during transition to university is not only a behavioral process but also interpretative, that allows stress to be integrated into evolving self-concepts. Nevertheless, the findings reinforce the importance of social support (especially family and friends' support) as one of the main factors that protect students from stress during adjustment periods. Also, the combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies illustrates adaptive flexibility in managing transitional stress.

From a practical perspective, the study indicates the importance of institutional systems, especially during the first semester of university. To make the transition process less stressful and more adaptive, universities might use mentorship programs, orientation activities during the first weeks of academic year, and arrange innovative and interactive workshops that can promote how to use coping strategies properly. Moreover, it is also important for universities to support social integration through student clubs (where students can get a chance to meet each other and socialize) as well as creating accessible psychological support services (e.g. well-being services and/or counselling services) that would enhance the adjustment period and reduce vulnerability that students might experience.

Despite its contributions, the study also shows some limitations. Firstly, the sample includes only a small number of students from a single university which limits the generalizability of the findings. On the other hand, the sample includes dominantly female participants (8 out of 10) that might influence the representation of transitional experiences and analysis.

Additionally, future research can include a larger sample and participants from various universities that would allow to generalize the results. It can also focus more on the well-being and counselling services of the universities and find how these services help the students to overcome the adjustment. Also, future research can use mixed method approaches to check statistical significance of the results.

Overall, this study gives a perspective to see the university transition as a complex and dynamic developmental stage where challenges and growth occur at the same time. The study emphasizes students’ lived experiences during the transition and how they make meaning of the process out of the narratives which allows to gain theoretical insights as well as to contribute practical implications for supporting student well-being in innovative and contemporary higher education systems.

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Teaching Albanian Syntax in Digital Environments: Contemporary Approaches and Practices

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Abstract: This study examines contemporary approaches and practices in teaching Albanian syntax through the integration of digital tools in educational settings. The research aims to explore how digital resources can support teaching and learning of syntactic structures and enhance students’ linguistic competence. The methodology combines a comparative analysis of traditional school textbooks and digital instructional materials, together with the observation of interactive student activities on online platforms and educational applications.

The findings indicate that the use of digital tools, such as grammar learning applications, interactive platforms, and educational games, facilitates the understanding and mastery of complex syntactic structures, increases student motivation and engagement, and supports adherence to linguistic norms. The study highlights practical examples of exercises and digital simulations that enable learners to apply syntactic rules in varied learning contexts and promote active participation in the learning process. Based on these findings, the paper recommends the systematic integration of digital tools into syntax instruction, the development of personalized learning modules tailored to students’ needs, and the adoption of interactive teaching practices that foster learner-centered instruction.

The expected contribution of this research is to provide a structured, evidence-based framework for the contemporary teaching of Albanian syntax, effectively combining traditional pedagogical approaches with digital tools and supporting students in achieving proficient use of language in both educational and social contexts.

Keywords: *Albanian syntax, digital pedagogy, sociocultural theory, task-based instruction, grammar learning*

1. Introduction

Rapid digitalization has transformed teaching and learning processes worldwide. Language education, in particular, has experienced profound changes through the adoption of digital platforms, applications, and online learning environments. These changes necessitate not only technical adaptation but also pedagogical innovation to ensure effective learning outcomes (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Albanian syntax represents a central component of grammatical competence and is essential for reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and oral communication. Pre-university students often struggle with subordinate clauses, complex sentence structures, and agreement patterns (Agalliu et al., 2002). Traditional textbooks primarily employ mechanical exercises that focus on rule memorization, which may hinder deeper syntactic understanding and practical application.

The Albanian educational system is increasingly embracing digital tools to complement traditional instruction. Interactive platforms, educational games, and applications offer opportunities for adaptive practice, collaborative tasks, and immediate feedback. However, research on the effectiveness of these tools for teaching Albanian syntax remains limited. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the pedagogical impact of digital resources on students' syntactic competence.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Learning is a socially mediated and constructively active process. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory emphasizes that cognitive development occurs through interaction and the use of mediating tools (Vygotsky, 1978). Digital platforms can serve as such tools, extending the zone of proximal development by providing scaffolded tasks and collaborative learning opportunities.

Bruner's constructivist framework also highlights that learners build knowledge through exploration and discovery (Bruner, 1986). Digital learning environments align with this approach by facilitating interactive problem-solving, simulation of sentence structures, and immediate corrective feedback. The **TPACK framework** provides guidance on integrating technological knowledge with content and pedagogy (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). In the context of syntax instruction, effective integration requires aligning grammatical learning objectives with interactive tools that allow real-time feedback, adaptive exercises, and differentiated learning.

2.2 Digital Grammar Learning and CALL

Research in **Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)** demonstrates that digital tools enhance grammar acquisition, learner motivation, and autonomy (Chapelle, 2001; Warschauer, 1996). Digital exercises offer varied interaction modalities—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic—that improve retention and application of syntactic rules.

Recent studies highlight the benefits of online platforms and mobile-assisted instruction, showing measurable improvement in students’ grammatical accuracy and engagement (Cebeci, 2020; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2021; Li & Ni, 2022). In Albanian, previous research has mainly focused on structural description and normative analysis (Agalliu et al., 2002), emphasizing the need for empirical studies evaluating digital integration.

2.3 Pedagogical Implications

Interactive digital tools enable:

- Real-time feedback and error correction
- Adaptive learning based on student progress
- Collaborative activities fostering social constructivist learning
- Application of syntax in meaningful contexts

These strategies encourage learner-centered instruction, in contrast to the passive reception often associated with traditional textbook-based approaches.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs an **integrated research design**, combining quantitative performance assessment with qualitative classroom observation and teacher interviews. This design allows triangulation of data to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of digital tools in syntax instruction.

3.2 Participants

Participants were 120 pre-university students (ages 15–18) from four schools in Tirana, Albania. The experimental group (60 students) received instruction with digital tools integrated into lessons, while the control group (60 students) followed traditional textbook-based instruction. Teachers (n = 6) had prior experience with both instructional methods.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

1. **Comparative Analysis of Instructional Materials** – Evaluation of traditional textbooks versus digital resources (interactive platforms, educational games, and applications) in presenting syntactic structures.
2. **Classroom Observation Protocols** – Monitoring student engagement, response accuracy, and interaction during digital activities.

3. **Performance Assessment Tests** – Measuring student accuracy in constructing sentences, using varied verb forms, subordinate clauses, and interrogative structures.
4. **Semi-Structured Teacher Interviews** – Exploring teacher experiences, perceptions of digital tools, and instructional challenges.

3.5 Procedure

The study spanned 12 weeks. Students in the experimental group participated in 3 digital-enhanced lessons per week, including interactive exercises, games, and collaborative projects. Observations were conducted weekly, and performance assessments were administered at the start, midpoint, and end of the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed through comparison of pre- and post-test scores between experimental and control groups. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were coded thematically to identify patterns in engagement, application of syntax rules, and instructional effectiveness.

4. Challenges in Teaching Albanian Syntax

Albanian syntax presents several challenges:

- Complex structures such as coordinate and subordinate clauses
- Flexible word order and emphasis patterns
- Agreement in adjectives, pronouns, and verbs

Traditional instruction often relies on memorization and decontextualized exercises (Agalliu et al., 2002). Such methods may ensure normative accuracy but limit practical application, critical thinking, and student engagement.

Interactive digital tools offer solutions through scaffolded exercises, visual sentence diagrams, immediate corrective feedback, and collaborative activities. These approaches align with socio-cultural and constructivist theories, enhancing both comprehension and production of syntactic structures (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Quantitative Findings

Performance comparisons between experimental and control groups:

Syntactic Structure	Experimental Group	Control Group	Improvement
Varied verb forms	85%	70%	+15%
Complex sentences	78%	60%	+18%

Syntactic Structure	Experimental Group	Control Group	Improvement
Interrogative sentences	90%	75%	+15%

The results show significant improvement in the experimental group, confirming the effectiveness of digital-enhanced instruction (Cebeci, 2020; Li & Ni, 2022).

5.2 Qualitative Observations

Observational data revealed:

- Increased engagement during interactive tasks
- Higher completion rates for exercises
- Improved accuracy in constructing complex sentences
- Greater motivation to experiment with syntactic structures

Teachers reported that digital tools facilitated differentiated learning and enabled adaptive instruction, consistent with TPACK principles (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

5.3 Digital Exercises and Pedagogical Strategies

Examples of effective strategies included:

- **Visual Syntax Analysis:** Sentence diagramming with real-time feedback
- **Interactive Online Platforms:** Sentence-building competitions and quizzes
- **Educational Games:** Constructing sentences from separate elements with automated suggestions
- **Collaborative Projects:** Blogs and video production applying syntax rules

These methods promote active learning, collaboration, and higher-order thinking.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

- Digital tools reinforce syntactic knowledge interactively
- Encourage critical and creative thinking
- Allow adaptive learning aligned with student level and pace
- Promote active participation and learner autonomy

The integration of these tools supports the development of both linguistic competence and engagement, addressing limitations of traditional instruction.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Digital tools significantly enhance Albanian syntax instruction. Their most effective application is as **structured pedagogical supplements**, complementing traditional instruction.

Recommendations

1. Integrate digital tools systematically into syntax curricula.
2. Develop Albanian-specific digital applications and platforms for syntax learning.
3. Provide teacher training aligned with TPACK and CALL frameworks.
4. Conduct longitudinal research on the long-term impact of digital tools on syntactic competence.

This study contributes a practical, evidence-based framework for modernizing Albanian syntax instruction, combining traditional pedagogical methods with digital learning strategies to improve both linguistic proficiency and student engagement.

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Digital Tools and AI in Education: Understanding Real Classroom Experiences

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Abstract: This study explores how teachers in pre-university education perceive and experience the use of information technology (IT) and emerging forms of artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to the democratization of schooling.

Rather than approaching educational technology through normative or prescriptive frameworks, the study is grounded in teachers' everyday classroom experiences. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to teachers and organized around key dimensions of school democratization, including digital access and equity, student participation and voice, fairness and transparency in assessment, professional autonomy, and ethical considerations.

The findings suggest that while digital tools are often associated with increased engagement and procedural transparency, their democratic potential remains uneven and highly context-dependent. Teachers' responses reveal both opportunities and tensions, particularly in relation to digital inequalities, limited participatory practices, and uncertainty surrounding AI use. By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences, the study offers empirically grounded insights that can inform reflective professional practice and more context-sensitive educational decision-making.

Keywords: *democratization of schooling; educational technology; artificial intelligence in education; teacher perceptions.*

1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital tools and artificial intelligence (AI) in education has profoundly transformed teaching, learning, and school organization. From learning management systems to AI-driven assessment and learning analytics, technology is increasingly positioned as a catalyst for innovation, efficiency, and personalization in education (Selwyn, 2016; OECD, 2021). In policy discourse, digitalization is frequently framed as an inherently progressive force capable of enhancing access, improving educational quality, and promoting equity (European Commission, 2020).

However, critical scholars argue that such narratives often overlook the complex realities of classroom practice and the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which technology is embedded (Cuban, 2001; Selwyn, 2016). In particular, the relationship between educational technology, AI, and school democratization remains insufficiently explored empirically, especially in pre-university settings. Democratization of schooling extends beyond technological access to encompass broader principles such as participation, equity, transparency, professional autonomy, and ethical responsibility (Apple & Beane, 2007; Biesta, 2011). From this perspective, digital tools may either support democratic practices by amplifying student voice and enabling inclusive learning environments, or reinforce existing inequalities and forms of control if implemented uncritically (Selwyn, 2014).

The growing presence of AI in education further intensifies these tensions. While AI systems promise objectivity, efficiency, and personalization, they also raise concerns related to algorithmic bias, data privacy, and the redistribution of agency between humans and technological systems (Williamson & Eynon, 2020; Holmes et al., 2022).

These developments point to the need for empirical research that takes teachers’ and students’ experiences seriously, rather than relying on prescriptive or technocratic assumptions.

Responding to this gap, the present study adopts an empirical approach to explore how digital tools and AI are perceived by teachers regarding the impact they have on students in pre-university education in relation to key dimensions of school democratization. By foregrounding everyday practices and stakeholder perspectives, the study seeks to contribute a contextualized understanding of the implications of educational technology use as perceived by teachers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Democratization of Schooling

Democratic education is commonly conceptualized as a process that promotes participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility within the school community (Dewey, 1916; Apple & Beane, 2007). Rather than being limited to formal governance structures, democratization is enacted through everyday interactions, pedagogical practices, and power relations within schools (Biesta, 2011).

Research emphasizes that meaningful participation requires more than symbolic involvement; it depends on institutional cultures that value professional autonomy, student agency, and trust (Fielding, 2012). Consequently, democratization is understood as a dynamic and contested process shaped by broader social and political contexts (Apple, 2013).

2.2 Educational Technology and Equity

Early narratives surrounding educational technology emphasized its potential to reduce inequality by expanding access to information and learning opportunities. However, subsequent research has demonstrated that the digital divide persists in multiple forms, including disparities in access, skills, pedagogical use, and institutional support (Warschauer, 2003; Jan van Dijk, 2020). Studies suggest that technology can exacerbate educational inequalities when introduced, even with good intentions, if attention to pedagogical design and social context is insufficient (Cuban, 2001; Selwyn, 2016). As such, equity in digital education must be understood as a relational and contextual issue rather than a purely technical one.

2.3 Digital Tools, Participation, and Student Voice

Digital platforms are often associated with increased opportunities for collaboration, communication, and student expression. When aligned with participatory pedagogies, technology can support student voice and active engagement (Redecker, 2017). However, empirical evidence indicates that digital participation does not automatically equate to democratic participation (Selwyn, 2014).

Research highlights that digital tools may reproduce hierarchical classroom relations or intensify surveillance and control, depending on how they are used and regulated (Williamson, 2017). The democratic potential of technology therefore depends on pedagogical intent and institutional culture rather than on the tools themselves.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence in Education: Democratic and Ethical Implications

AI in education has been promoted for its capacity to personalize learning, automate assessment, and support data-driven decision-making (Holmes et al.,

2022). From a democratic standpoint, such applications may enhance transparency and fairness if they are used to support formative assessment and learner autonomy.

Nevertheless, critical scholarship warns that AI systems are not neutral technologies. They embed specific values, assumptions, and power relations, raising ethical concerns related to bias, accountability, and the erosion of human judgment in education (Williamson & Eynon, 2020; Selwyn, 2022). These concerns underline the importance of examining how AI is used by students and how it is perceived and interpreted by teachers in practice.

2.5 Teachers’ Perspectives as an Empirical Gap

Despite a growing body of research on educational technology and AI, many studies remain policy-driven or technologically oriented. There is a relative lack of empirical research focusing on teachers’ lived experiences, particularly in relation to democratic values in schooling (Biesta, 2015; Selwyn, 2016).

Teachers play a central role in mediating the use of technology in classrooms. Their perceptions and practices reveal how digital tools intersect with professional autonomy, student agency, and institutional power structures. Empirical studies that foreground these perspectives are therefore essential for developing a nuanced understanding of the democratic implications of educational technology.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative, descriptive–exploratory research design aimed at examining teachers’ perceptions and experiences with digital tools and emerging AI-related practices in pre-university education, in relation to key dimensions of school democratization.

Given the predominance of normative and theoretical discussions on educational technology, the study prioritizes an empirical approach grounded in everyday school practices. The research design is cross-sectional, capturing participants’ responses at a specific point in time. This approach is appropriate for identifying prevailing patterns, tendencies, and perceived challenges associated with the use of digital technologies in schools.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The study involved 130 teachers working in pre-university and university education. Participants were recruited through voluntary participation using an online questionnaire. The sample includes teachers from:

- different educational levels (preschool, primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary, and university),
- public and private schools,
- urban and rural contexts,
- varying levels of professional experience.

Although the sampling method can be described as non-probabilistic and convenience-based, the diversity of the sample enhances the analytical value of the findings and allows for the exploration of patterns across different educational contexts.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture teachers' experiences with digital tools and technology used by teachers and students in relation to school democratization. The questionnaire was developed based on:

- key theoretical dimensions of democratic schooling,
- existing literature on educational technology and AI in education
- contextual considerations relevant to the educational setting

The instrument consists primarily of closed-ended items using Likert-type scales, alongside selected multiple-choice questions and a few open-ended items to capture qualitative insights. Items are organized around the following indicators:

1. Digital access and equity
2. Student participation and voice
3. Teacher autonomy and professional agency
4. Fairness and transparency in assessment
5. Perceived challenges and ethical considerations related to digitalization and AI

The structure of the questionnaire allows for systematic analysis of teachers' perceptions across these dimensions.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered online, ensuring accessibility and anonymity for participants. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and participated voluntarily. No identifying personal data were collected, and responses were used exclusively for research purposes. Data collection was conducted over a defined period, allowing sufficient time for participants to complete the questionnaire at their convenience.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, to identify general trends and patterns in teachers’ responses. Open-ended responses were analysed through a brief inductive content analysis to identify recurring themes and illustrative quotations. Given the exploratory nature of the study, the analysis focuses on:

- identifying dominant perceptions,
- highlighting areas of convergence and divergence,
- interpreting findings in relation to the conceptual framework of school democratization.

Rather than aiming for causal inference, the analysis seeks to provide a contextualized understanding of how digital tools and emerging AI-related practices are experienced by teachers in everyday school settings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were respected throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity was guaranteed. The study avoided the collection of sensitive personal data and adhered to ethical guidelines for educational research.

3.7 Methodological Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The use of self-reported data may be influenced by participants’ subjective perceptions. Additionally, the non-probabilistic sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. However, the study’s strength lies in its focus on teachers’ lived experiences, which provides valuable insights into the democratic implications of digitalization and AI in education.

4. Results

This section presents the main findings of the study based on questionnaire data collected from teachers. Results are organized according to key dimensions of school democratization: digital access and equity, participation and student voice, fairness and transparency, and perceived challenges related to digitalization and AI used in educational institutions.

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The teacher questionnaire was completed by 130 respondents from different educational levels, including primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and higher education. Participants also represent both urban (47%) and rural (53%) school contexts.

Educational level	Percentage
Primary education	42%
Lower secondary education	42%
Upper secondary education	9%
Higher education	7%

Table 1. Educational level at which teachers teach

The diversity of the sample allows for a contextualized interpretation of teachers’ digital experiences across different school levels and socio-geographical settings.

4.2 Digital Access and Equity

Teachers’ responses indicate notable inequalities in access to digital devices and internet connectivity. While a majority reported some access to digital tools, a substantial proportion highlighted infrastructural limitations and inconsistent availability, particularly in students’ home environments. Teachers also perceived these inequalities as directly affecting participation in learning activities. Overall, the findings suggest that digital inequality remains a structural issue with tangible consequences for classroom participation and inclusion

4.3 Student Participation and Voice in Digital Contexts

Teachers generally perceived digital tools as supportive of classroom engagement. They reported increased interaction, communication, and expression when technology was used during lessons, particularly among less vocal students. However, participation remained largely confined to teacher-directed learning activities, with limited evidence of broader student voice or school-level decision-making.

4.4 Fairness, Transparency, and Digital Assessment

Teachers expressed mixed perceptions regarding fairness and transparency in digitally mediated assessment. On the one hand, digital tools were associated with clearer assessment criteria and more transparent procedures. On the other hand, responses revealed uncertainty about whether digital assessment practices were consistently perceived as fair across different contexts. These findings highlight persistent tensions between procedural transparency and teachers’ professional judgment in assessment practices..

4.5 Learning Pace, Inclusion, and Emerging AI Practices

Teachers reported that digital tools can support individualized learning pace and, in some cases, contribute to more inclusive classroom practices.

However, experience with AI-based tools was limited. Many respondents indicated little or no direct engagement with artificial intelligence for learning purposes, suggesting that AI remains an emerging and unevenly understood presence in everyday classroom practice rather than a fully integrated pedagogical tool.

4.6 Perceived Challenges and Teachers' Reflections

Open-ended responses provided further insight into how teachers understand the role of technology in their classrooms. Rather than referring to abstract notions of innovation or transformation, most teachers described technology in practical and instrumental terms. A dominant theme across responses was the use of digital tools as a means of accessing information more quickly and efficiently, as illustrated by statements such as “*Na ndihmon për informacione të ndryshme,*” and “*Të gjej më shpejt informacionet në lidhje me detyrat*”.

Teachers also emphasized the value of technology in making learning more concrete and visually accessible. Several responses highlighted the role of images, videos, and documentaries in supporting understanding, particularly when dealing with abstract concepts. As one teacher noted, technology supports “*Konkretizimin e koncepteve abstrakte,*” while another referred to its usefulness in subjects such as biology, “*p.sh. pjalnimi i luleve*”.

In addition, many teachers associated technology with increased student engagement and motivation. Responses such as “*E bën mësimin më tërheqës,*” “*Rrit vëmendjen,*” and “*Pjesëmarrja në mësim*” suggest that digital tools are widely perceived as supporting classroom-level engagement. However, these reflections rarely extended to broader forms of student participation or shared decision-making within the school.

A smaller number of responses explicitly linked technology to inclusion and differentiated learning. Teachers noted that technology can support “*përfshirjen e të gjithë nxënësve,*” including those who experience difficulties in expressing their ideas, and that it can adapt to “*ritmin e çdokujt për të mësuar*”.

Notably, several responses were minimal or dismissive (e.g., “*jo*”, “*asgjë*”, and “*dakord*”), indicating either limited experience with digital tools or a lack of reflective engagement with their pedagogical role. These responses highlight that the integration of technology in schools is uneven and that its perceived value varies considerably across contexts and practitioners.

Overall, the results suggest that digital tools and emerging AI-related practices hold potential to support aspects of democratic schooling, such as access to information and classroom engagement. However, this potential is constrained by structural inequalities, limited participation beyond the classroom, and tensions between standardization and autonomy.

The findings underscore that technology alone does not democratize schooling. Rather, its democratic value depends on how it is integrated into pedagogical practices, institutional decision-making, and professional cultures. Teachers’ lived experiences reveal both opportunities and challenges, highlighting the importance of context-sensitive and reflective approaches to digitalization in education.

These open-ended reflections add nuance to the quantitative patterns reported above, indicating how teachers translate “digitalization” into everyday classroom meanings and priorities.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how digital tools and emerging AI-related practices are experienced by teachers in pre-university education in relation to key dimensions of school democratization. By focusing on teachers’ perceptions and everyday practices, the findings provide an empirical perspective that complements and, in some cases, challenges dominant normative narratives surrounding educational technology. This discussion interprets the findings in relation to the theoretical framework of democratic schooling and existing research on educational technology.

5.1 Digitalization, Access, and Equity

The findings indicate that while digital tools are increasingly embedded in teachers’ professional practice, access and conditions of use remain uneven across schools. Importantly, teachers did not describe digital inequality as an abstract policy issue, but as a practical constraint that directly shapes classroom participation and learning opportunities. This observation aligns with earlier research showing that the digital divide extends beyond access to devices, encompassing infrastructure quality, pedagogical support, and institutional capacity (Warschauer, 2003; Jan van Dijk, 2020).

Teachers frequently framed the value of technology in instrumental terms, emphasizing speed and access to information. One teacher summarized this perspective succinctly: *“Të gjej më shpejt informacionet në lidhje me detyrat”*. This instrumental framing suggests that digitalization is often experienced primarily as speed and access rather than as a transformative democratic practice, and that access alone is insufficient to address deeper issues of equity and participation.

From a democratic perspective, these findings suggest that digitalization does not function as an automatic equalizer. On the contrary, when introduced without sufficient attention to context, technology risks reproducing existing inequalities. Teachers’ accounts challenge policy narratives that present

digital tools as inherently democratizing, instead highlighting the need for sustained investment and contextual awareness (Selwyn, 2016).

5.2 Student Participation and the Limits of Digital Voice

Teachers’ responses indicate that digital tools are primarily associated with increased engagement at the classroom level rather than with broader forms of democratic participation. Several teachers described technology as making lessons more attractive and easier to follow, for example: “*E bën mësimin më tërheqës*” and “*Rritjen e përqendrimit e të pjesëmarrjes së nxënësit*”.

While such reflections point to the motivational value of digital tools, they also suggest that student participation is largely confined to teacher-directed activities. The use of technology rarely extends students’ influence beyond engagement in learning tasks toward involvement in decision-making processes within the school. This finding reinforces the distinction between participation as engagement and participation as democratic agency (Selwyn, 2014; Fielding, 2012).

5.3 Teacher Autonomy in Digitally Mediated Contexts

The mixed experiences reported by teachers regarding professional autonomy reflect a broader tension identified in the literature between innovation and control in digitally mediated education. On the one hand, digital tools may expand teachers’ pedagogical repertoire and flexibility; on the other hand, standardized platforms and institutional directives can constrain professional agency (Cuban, 2001; Selwyn, 2016).

In a smaller number of cases, teachers expressed uncertainty or limited perceived value regarding the use of technology, responding simply with statements such as “*Jo*” or “*asgjë*”. Although brief, these responses are significant, as they point to uneven integration of digital tools and varying levels of professional engagement with digitalization. Such findings suggest that the presence of technology in schools does not automatically translate into meaningful pedagogical use or professional empowerment.

From a democratic schooling perspective, limited teacher autonomy undermines professional voice and reduces opportunities for collaborative decision-making. The findings suggest that without sustained professional dialogue and trust, digitalization risks reinforcing vertical governance structures rather than supporting democratic professional cultures.

5.4 Digital Assessment, Transparency, and Fairness

Teachers’ concerns regarding digital assessment practices highlight a central democratic dilemma. While digital tools are perceived as enhancing transparency through standardized criteria and record-keeping, they may also

reduce pedagogical judgment and prioritize measurable outcomes over meaningful learning. Similar tensions have been documented in research on data-driven and algorithmic assessment systems (Williamson, 2017; Holmes et al., 2022). These findings suggest that fairness in digital assessment cannot be reduced to technical objectivity. Instead, democratic assessment practices require professional discretion, contextual understanding, and ethical reflection, particularly as AI-driven systems gain prominence in educational settings.

5.5 Ethical Awareness and Emerging AI Practices

Although explicit references to artificial intelligence were limited, teachers' responses reflected an emerging ethical awareness related to automation, monitoring, and data use in education. Rather than expressing clearly articulated positions on AI, many teachers described uncertainty, limited familiarity, or cautious distance from AI-based practices.

This finding is significant. It suggests that AI is not yet fully integrated into everyday classroom practice, but is nevertheless perceived as a growing presence that raises questions about professional judgment, responsibility, and control. In this sense, teachers are positioned not as passive recipients of technological change, but as practitioners negotiating unfamiliar tools within existing institutional constraints. These reflections reinforce calls for professional spaces that support critical engagement with AI, rather than treating technological adoption as a purely technical matter (Williamson & Eynon, 2020; Selwyn, 2022).

5.6 Implications for the Democratization of Schooling

Overall, the findings reinforce the argument that technology alone does not democratize schooling. Instead, the democratic value of digital tools and AI-related practices depends on how they are embedded within pedagogical, institutional, and ethical frameworks. This conclusion resonates with broader critical perspectives that emphasize the social shaping of technology in education (Selwyn, 2016; Biesta, 2011). By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of digitalization as a contested and context-dependent process. It suggests that efforts to promote democratic schooling through technology must prioritize equity, participation, professional autonomy, and ethical responsibility.

6. Conclusion

This study examined how teachers in pre-university education perceive and experience digital tools and emerging AI-related practices in relation to key

dimensions of school democratization. By moving beyond predominantly normative and policy-driven accounts of educational technology, the study foregrounded teachers’ everyday experiences as a central source of empirical insight.

The findings indicate that while digital technologies can support certain democratic principles, such as access to information, classroom engagement, and procedural transparency, their democratic value is neither automatic nor guaranteed. Structural inequalities, limited opportunities for meaningful participation, and tensions between professional autonomy and institutional control continue to shape how technology is used and experienced in schools. Importantly, the study highlights that democratizing schooling through digitalization is not primarily a technical challenge. It is an educational, organizational, and ethical one. Teachers’ perspectives reveal that technology becomes democratically meaningful only when it is embedded within supportive institutional cultures, participatory pedagogies, and professional trust. Recognizing these conditions is essential if digitalization and AI are to contribute meaningfully to more democratic forms of schooling.

7. Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have several implications for educational practice and policy.

First, efforts to promote digitalization in schools should be accompanied by strategies that explicitly address equity. This includes not only improving access to devices and infrastructure, but also supporting teachers’ and students’ digital competencies and ensuring institutional conditions that enable meaningful use of technology.

Second, the results underscore the need to strengthen teacher autonomy and professional dialogue in digitally mediated environments. Teachers should be actively involved in decisions regarding the selection, implementation, and evaluation of digital tools and AI-related systems. Such involvement is essential for fostering democratic professional cultures and for ensuring that technology serves pedagogical rather than purely administrative or managerial goals.

Third, student participation should be reconceptualized beyond digital engagement in classroom activities. Schools and policymakers should explore ways in which digital tools can support genuine student voice and participation in school-level decision-making processes, aligning technological use with democratic educational values.

Finally, as AI-related practices become more prominent, ethical considerations must move to the center of educational decision-making.

Policies should provide clear guidance on data protection, transparency, and accountability, while creating spaces for critical reflection among educators on the implications of automation and algorithmic decision-making in education.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. The reliance on self-reported questionnaire data may be influenced by participants' subjective interpretations and experiences. Additionally, the use of a non-probabilistic sampling strategy limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations.

Future research could build on these findings by incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or classroom observations, to gain deeper insights into how digital tools and AI-related practices are enacted in everyday school life. Comparative studies across different national contexts or educational systems would further enhance understanding of how democratic principles intersect with digitalization in diverse settings.

Moreover, future studies could examine students' perspectives more extensively and explore longitudinal approaches to capture changes in perceptions and practices over time, particularly as AI technologies become more embedded in educational environments.

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The Challenges of Implementing Contemporary Methods in Teacher Education

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Abstract: The study identifies the main challenges encountered during the implementation of contemporary teaching methods in developing professional competencies of students in teacher education programs. It also analyses how active and innovative methods influence students’ preparation, including the development of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, motivation, and participation during learning. The study included a quantitative research method, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Students were asked about their knowledge, experiences, and perceptions regarding the importance of using contemporary teaching methods. The results revealed that approaches such as project-based learning, group work, educational games, academic rivalry, critical reflection, problem-solving, and personalized learning significantly increase student engagement in the classroom, stimulate their interest in learning, and favour student-centered learning. Despite the professors’ readiness and knowledge, the implementation of these methods highlighted several challenges, such as: insufficient infrastructure, teaching workload, lack of student interest, and lack of continuous practical training. Familiarity with European models and the creation of a flexible classroom climate are important steps in working with students. Importance is placed on revising curricula to encourage critical thinking, improving the quality of teacher training, providing institutional support for organizing activities outside the classroom, motivating students, and creating a more flexible and supportive environment for innovative practice, with the aim of enhancing the quality of future teacher preparation.

Keywords: *Contemporary method, challenge, professional competence, active teaching*

1. Introduction

Technological developments, social changes, and the growing demand for inclusive education have pushed higher education in recent years to go through profound, interactive, and competence-oriented transformations. Contemporary teaching methods aim to place students at the center of the learning process and to enable the development of their critical, reflective, and creative skills. This movement represents a necessity for preparing new generations with the competencies required for the 21st century, while the implementation of such methods in university auditoriums remains a complex challenge.

For students enrolled in teaching education programs, this process holds a dual significance, as they on one hand benefit from these methods as recipients of knowledge and on the other are also expected to apply them as future professional practices. This study tries to provide a clear overview of the actual state of implementation of contemporary teaching methods in teaching education, to contribute to the improvement of pedagogical practices in higher education, and to analyze the perceptions and attitudes of students in Bachelor's and Master's programs regarding the use of contemporary teaching methods by their professors at the Faculty of Education, Aleksander Moisiu University of Durres.

Based on this reason, the study aims to identify the challenges associated with the implementation of contemporary teaching methods. The objectives of the study include identifying the level of students' knowledge of the use of contemporary teaching methods, analyzing their attitudes toward the application of these methods in the teaching-learning process, and identifying training needs as well as areas for improvement in teaching education programs.

The hypothesis of this study is that the implementation of contemporary teaching methods among teaching education students directly and significantly increases student engagement in the learning process. Based on this hypothesis, the following research questions were formulated:

- What is the level of students' knowledge and perception regarding the concept of active teaching methods?
- To what extent are active teaching methods employed in the teaching-learning process within higher education institutions?

- To what degree does the application of these methods influence the enhancement of student engagement and interest during classroom activities?
- What are the main barriers that hinder the transition from traditional teaching approaches to contemporary European pedagogical models?

The use of contemporary teaching methods by lecturers in the preparation of teacher education students constitutes a key factor in improving the quality of professional training and in preparing future teachers who are capable of responding to the demands of modern education. Through active, inclusive, and reflective methods, lecturers not only foster student engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration, but also model pedagogical practices that students are expected to implement in their future professional careers.

2. Literature Review

Internationalization, understood as the collaborative openness of university programs, introduces a new dimension to the relationship between universities as centers of professional formation and the contemporary labour market. According to Parker J. Palmer, knowing and learning are fundamentally communal acts. Guided by this vision, effective educators create a shared space for intellectual engagement. They promote active rather than passive learning and encourage students to become critical and creative thinkers, equipped with the capacity for lifelong learning beyond the completion of their university studies. Teaching at its best does not make it possible to transmit knowledge, but also its transformation and expansion. Through reading, classroom discussions, and, crucially, through students' questions and comments, professors themselves are encouraged to move toward new creative directions.

Teaching in higher education combines educators' deep disciplinary knowledge with creativity and the stimulation of students' active learning. Lecturers do not simply transmit knowledge; they transform and extend it. This approach fosters capable mentors, critical and creative students, and sustains the continuity of knowledge through four interrelated dimensions: discovery, integration, application, and teaching, as conceptualized in the scholarship framework articulated by Ernest L. Boyer.

Pedagogical literature in the Albanian language on higher education teaching emphasizes that the quality of the learning process is determined not only by the content of the course but also by the specific methods employed in the auditorium. Within this framework, the dimensions of high-quality teaching include active student participation, knowledge construction through experience, the development of critical thinking, and ongoing pedagogical

reflection. These principles provide a theoretical basis for the implementation of contemporary teaching methods.

In Albanian pedagogical texts, active learning is considered one of the most effective approaches for promoting student engagement and for transitioning students from a passive role to an active role in learning. Guided discussions, case analyses, and problem-based questioning help students construct new meanings and articulate their reasoning. This approach is directly related to the conceptualization of teaching as a process aimed at the quality of learning, emphasizing deep learning rather than the mechanical reproduction of knowledge.

From an international perspective, according to Ernest L. Boyer (1990, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching), effective teaching implies that educators, as scholars, are themselves learners. Often, teachers simply transmit information that students are expected to memorize and later possibly recall. While well-prepared lectures certainly have their place, teaching at its best does not merely entail the transmission of knowledge but also its transformation and expansion. Through reading, classroom discussions, and notably through students' questions and comments, professors themselves are encouraged to explore new creative directions.

Bonwell C. C. and Eison J. A. (1991), in *Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom* (ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports), examine the nature of active learning in higher education, the empirical research on its use, the common obstacles and barriers leading to resistance among academic staff, as well as ways in which instructors and support staff can implement active learning techniques. The concept of the “modified lecture” offers methods through which instructors can integrate active learning into the most commonly used teaching format: the lecture. Classroom discussion elucidates the conditions and techniques necessary for achieving a productive exchange.

Other approaches to promote active learning include visual learning, in-class writing, problem-solving, computer-based learning, collaborative learning, debates, drama, role-playing, simulations, games, and peer teaching. The problem-based learning method aligns with the competence-oriented approach emphasized in the Albanian literature. Through real or simulated problem situations, students engage in research, analysis, and collaboration. This method is consistent with the principles of constructive alignment, as outlined in *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, whereby learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment formats are all structured around the same central problem.

According to Stephen D. Brookfield (2017), in *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (2nd ed., Jossey-Bass), a critically reflective teacher identifies and examines their own assumptions that shape their practice by employing four lenses of critical reflection: (1) the students’ eyes, (2) colleagues’ perspectives, (3) theoretical literature, and (4) personal experience. Brookfield critically reflects on the challenges of teaching in the 21st century, categorizing them into: team teaching, social media, race and racism, and directed leadership.

Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. D. (2008). *Blended Learning in Higher Education*. Jossey-Bass offers a practical and clear resource for the implementation of blended learning in higher education, as well as a comprehensive review of the topic. Well-grounded in research, *Blended Learning in Higher Education* clearly demonstrates how the blended learning approach preserves the traditional values of face-to-face teaching while integrating best practices in online learning. This approach has been shown to enhance and expand the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning across various higher education disciplines.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning*. Prentice Hall introduces the Experiential Learning Theory, according to which learning occurs through active experience and reflection thereon. He proposes a four-stage learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

In Albanian pedagogical literature, project-based learning is seen as a method that connects theory with practice and promotes student autonomy. Medium- or long-term projects provide students with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge, develop research skills, and engage in collaborative work. This method operationalizes the principle of alignment between learning outcomes and instructional activities, a key element in Biggs and Tang’s approach. Group work and collaborative learning are emphasized in Albanian sources as tools for developing social, communicative, and academic skills. This method supports the idea that knowledge is constructed through interaction and dialogue, reflecting the student-centered approach described both in domestic literature and in international theories of higher education teaching.

An important dimension of quality teaching is the critical reflection of students on the learning process. Reflective journals, self-assessment, and post-activity discussions reinforce deep learning. These practices are linked to the concept of reflective teaching and formative assessment, which are regarded as integral components of quality teaching in higher education.

The model teacher is continuously monitored during all school activities, including communication style, behavior, movements, and gestures, all

observed attentively by the students. Consequently, the teacher must master the classroom situation to prevent disciplinary issues and, above all, successfully conduct the teaching process, which leads to the generation of educational value. Jensen advises teachers: "Never assume that whatever is important to you will also be important to your students" (Bardhyl Musaj, *Teaching and Interactive Learning*, Tirana, 2021). A teacher with a wealth of knowledge in their subject can conduct a clear and well-organized lesson (W. Anita, *Educational Psychology*, Tirana, 2011, p. 454).

3. Methodology

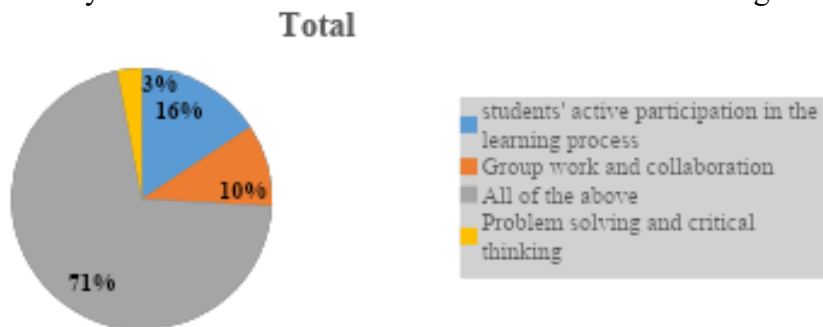
The study was conducted using a quantitative research methodology, aiming to collect data on students' perceptions and attitudes regarding the challenges associated with the use of contemporary teaching methods by instructors. The primary instrument employed was a questionnaire, developed on the Google Forms platform, which enabled rapid distribution and efficient data collection. The study sample consisted of 197 participants, all students at the Bachelor's and Master's levels, selected randomly. Participants were nearly evenly distributed across the two study cycles: 52.8% were enrolled in Master's programs, while 47.2% in the Bachelor's degrees. We observed a pronounced predominance of female participants, with 94% of the sample being females, while male participants representing only 6%, reflecting the general gender distribution within the teaching field. The questionnaire was distributed electronically, and participation was voluntary and anonymous, thereby adhering to the ethical principles of scientific research.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire, containing both closed-ended and semi-open questions, designed to gather information on students' experiences, attitudes, and evaluations. The questionnaire focused on four main pillars: conceptual knowledge, measuring the extent of students' understanding of active teaching methods; practical experience, identifying the methods currently employed by instructors in classrooms; effectiveness evaluation, assessing the degree of student engagement produced by these methods; and implementation barriers, identifying the main obstacles hindering the transition toward European educational models. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods to draw conclusions related to the study objectives.

4. Results

According to students' perceptions, active teaching methods are primarily understood as a comprehensive approach that integrates several essential

elements of the learning process. The vast majority, 71%, consider active methods to encompass all components together, including active student engagement, group work, collaboration, problem-solving, and the development of critical thinking. This indicates a full and integrated understanding of the concept of active learning. Meanwhile, 16% of students associate this approach mainly with active participation in the learning process, emphasizing their own role in knowledge construction, while 10% focus on group work and collaboration as key elements of active learning. A smaller proportion, 3%, perceive the core of active methods to lie in problem-solving and critical thinking, suggesting that these aspects are not yet widely recognized by all students as central dimensions of active learning.



Graphic 1: What are the active methods of teaching

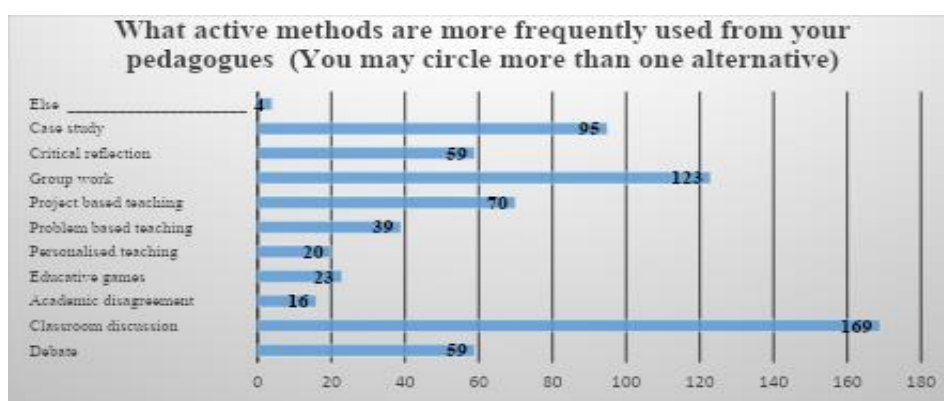
Regarding the extent to which the use of active teaching methods by instructors increases students’ motivation to participate actively in lessons, out of 197 respondents, a significant proportion reported a maximal increase in motivation: 41% strongly agreed and 51% agreed. A small minority, 8%, remained neutral. These results indicate that 92% of participants confirm that active methods enhance their willingness to engage in class. In other words, involvement through activities, discussions, and practical work is the primary means of maintaining students’ attention and interest.

The use of active methods increases my motivation to actively participate in the learning process



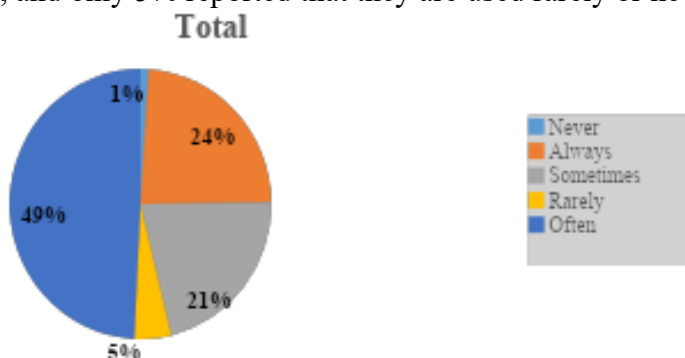
Graphic 2: The use of methods and motivation for active participation in learning process

The data indicate that, according to students’ perceptions, the most frequently used active teaching methods by instructors are classroom discussion (169%) and group work (123%), highlighting a strong emphasis on interaction, collaboration, and idea exchange within the university setting. A substantial proportion of students also noted the use of case studies (95%) and project-based learning (70%), suggesting an orientation toward concrete situations and the practical application of knowledge. Critical reflection and debate (59%) demonstrate efforts to develop analytical thinking and argumentation skills. At a lower frequency, problem-based learning (39%), educational games (23%), personalized learning (20%), and academic controversy (16%) were reported, which may indicate a more limited use of these approaches.



Graphic 3: Methods used more often from the pedagogues

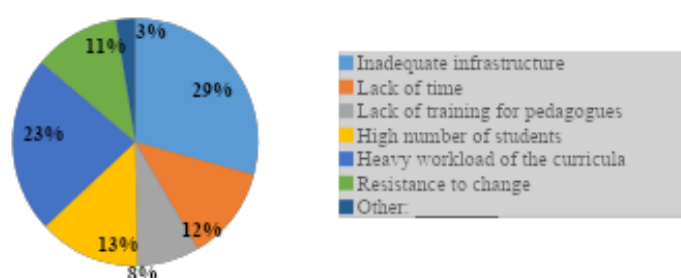
The data regarding the frequency of active teaching methods used by instructors indicate a relatively high presence of these methods in teaching practice. Out of 197 responses, 49% of students reported that instructors use active methods often, while 24% stated that they are used always. A smaller portion of respondents, 21%, indicated that active methods are used occasionally, and only 5% reported that they are used rarely or never.



Graphic 4: The frequency of active methods’ use from pedagogues

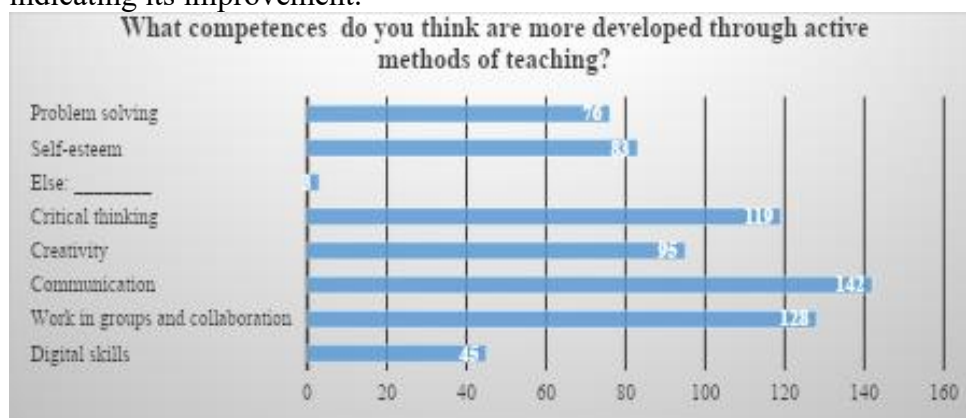
The main obstacles to the effective implementation of active teaching methods in higher education are primarily related to inadequate infrastructure, which represents the largest barrier (29%), limiting opportunities for organizing interactive and collaborative activities. Additionally, overloaded curricula (23%) and large class sizes (14%) make it difficult to manage methods that require time, careful planning, and individual engagement. Lack of time (12%), resistance to change (11%), and insufficient teacher training (8%) indicate a need for ongoing professional development, while other reasons (3%) are less prominent.

What are the main challenges in implementation of active methods in higher education?



Graphic 5: Challenges for implementation of active methods in higher education

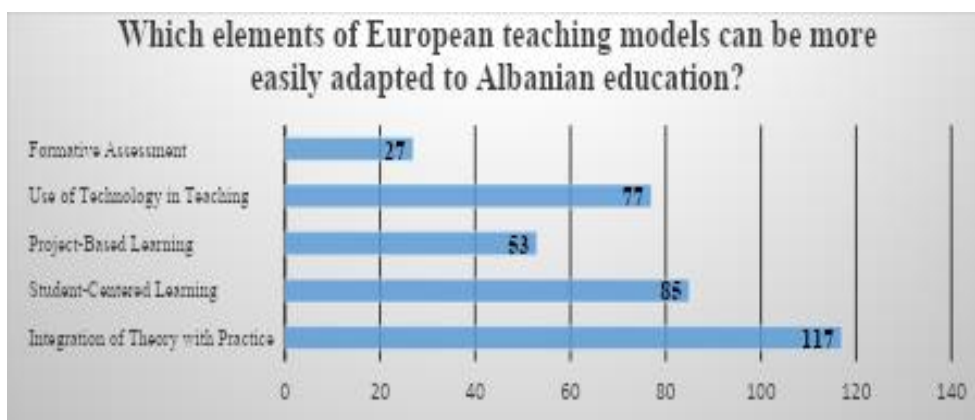
The competence most developed is communication, selected by 142 students (72.4%), followed by group collaboration, with 128 responses (65.3%). A considerable proportion of students also highlighted the development of critical thinking (60.7%) and creativity (48.5%). Meanwhile, self-confidence was mentioned by 42.3% of respondents, and problem-solving by 38.8%. The competence reported as least developed is digital skills, with 23% of students indicating its improvement.



Graphic 6: Competencies that develop through active methods of teaching

The data indicate that the elements of European teaching models perceived as easiest to adapt to Albanian higher education are primarily related to the practical and applied dimension of learning. Integration of theory with practice, supported by 117 students, emerges as the top priority. This perception suggests that students view this element as the most feasible, as it can be implemented through professional practices, case studies, and collaboration with institutions.

Next, student-centered learning (85 students) is considered another adaptable component, reflecting a tendency toward increasing students' active role and personalizing the learning process. Likewise, the use of technology in teaching (77 students) is regarded as relatively easy to integrate. At lower levels of support are project-based learning (53 students) and, especially, formative assessment (27 students), which may indicate that these elements require further adaptation and modification.



Graphic 7: The adaption of the European models in Albania

5. Discussion

This study has its primary goal of analysing the challenges related to implementing contemporary teaching methods in teaching education and testing the hypothesis that the use of these methods significantly increases student engagement. Data collected from 197 Bachelor's and Master's students provide a clear and statistically significant overview, confirming the proposed hypothesis and addressing the research questions.

The majority of students 92% from whom 41% strongly agree and 51% agree, reported that the use of active methods by professors enhances their motivation to participate in class. Only a few of them, 8% remained neutral, and the absence of disagreement indicates a broad consensus. These findings are similar to Jean Piaget's constructivist theory and Lev Vygotsky's socio-

constructivist approach, both of which emphasize the active and social construction of knowledge. The traditional teaching model no longer sufficiently stimulates today's students; engaging students through discussions and practical work is not merely a preference within the learning process but an essential prerequisite for maintaining attention and increasing the desire to learn.

Regarding students' knowledge of these methods, the results show a conceptual maturity among teacher education students. The fact that 71% of participants perceive active methods as a comprehensive approach demonstrates that students view these methods as a holistic philosophy of learning. This finding is directly related to Alexander Astin's student involvement theory, which enforces the statement that the greater the student's active engagement in the learning process, the higher the level of learning and personal development achieved.

One of the most optimistic findings of this study relates to the frequency of active teaching methods, with 73% of students reporting that instructors use these methods “often” or “always.” Classroom discussion and group work predominate, aligning with David Kolb's experiential learning model, where interaction and reflection are key elements of the learning process. More complex methods, such as problem-based learning (PBL), educational games, or personalized learning, are used much less frequently (20–39%). This indicates that while instructors are open to interaction, the transition to methodologies requiring substantial restructuring of the lesson (such as PBL or educational games) is still in its early stages.

Students report that the greatest benefits of these methods lie in the development of communication (72.4%) and collaboration skills (65.3%). The development of competencies such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking aligns with the European frameworks of key competencies for lifelong learning promoted by the European Commission, which emphasize social, civic, and critical skills as priorities in contemporary education. The dominance of discussions and group work are clearly stated in the results. On the contrary, finding that digital skills development (23%) ranks lowest among students, is a concerning finding, particularly in a digital era, and remains an ongoing challenge.

When examining the obstacles, the study weans the notion that the problem lies solely in “instructors' willingness.” The results clearly indicate that the main barriers are inadequate infrastructure (29%), which prevents group work and mobility within traditional classrooms. Overloaded curricula (23%) and large class sizes (14%) create time pressures. Obviously, resistance to change (11%) and lack of teacher training (8%) are secondary factors. This suggests that both instructors and students are willing to embrace change, but physical

and curricular conditions limit them. These findings are consistent with the principles of the Bologna Process, which promotes student-centered teaching and the enhancement of quality through systemic transformations.

Students identify the integration of theory with practice as the element most easily transferable from European teaching models to the Albanian context. This reflects students' desire for pragmatism and alignment with labor market needs. Conversely, the difficulty in implementing formative assessment indicates that the system remains strongly oriented toward summative evaluation. In conclusion, the results not only confirm the study's hypothesis but also situate current practice in Albanian higher education within a theoretical and European framework. They show that the orientation toward active teaching methods aligns with contemporary developments in education, yet it requires more structured support for full and sustainable implementation.

6. Conclusions

The study strongly confirms the hypothesis that the implementation of contemporary teaching methods directly increases student engagement. Most of the students reported better motivation and willingness to participate when instructors employ active methods, making this approach essential for higher education.

Teaching education students demonstrate a clear understanding of active methods, recognizing them not only as isolated techniques but as a complex combination of collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

The use of active methods in classrooms is high, reporting frequent application; however, the range of methods remains limited. Predominant are verbal and dialogue-based methods, such as classroom discussions and group work.

More complex methods requiring additional resources or technology-such as problem-based learning, educational games, or digital skills development-remain underutilized.

The primary barriers to modernizing teaching are not instructor or student resistance, but infrastructural conditions and curriculum overload. The lack of modular spaces and the high number of students per class make the transition from traditional lectures to practical activities challenging.

Although active methods strongly enhance social competencies (communication, collaboration), they are insufficiently leveraged to develop digital competencies, leaving a gap in the preparation of future teachers for digital schools.

7. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the key actors in the teaching and learning process:

For Higher Education Institutions:

It is necessary to adapt lecture halls to support student-centered teaching, and to streamline curricula by reducing excessive theoretical load to allow sufficient time for active methods such as projects and case studies. Where possible, large student groups should be divided into smaller groups to facilitate real interaction and individualized monitoring.

For Academic Staff:

Instructors are encouraged to go beyond simple classroom discussion. They should more frequently integrate methods such as problem-based learning (PBL) and role-playing simulations. The use of active methods should be combined with digital tools (online platforms, digital quizzes, interactive presentations) to enhance students’ digital competencies, which were found to be low in this study. Continuous formative assessment during class activities should be emphasized, rather than relying only on exams.

For Teaching Education Students:

Students should actively seek and propose their own projects or case studies related to real practice, taking advantage of instructors’ willingness to use contemporary methods. They should use practicum hours to apply active methods learned in theory, focusing on the theory-practice connection, which was identified as a key element in the study. Investing in contemporary teaching methods is essential for the high-quality preparation of future teachers and for aligning Albanian higher education with European standards.

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Assessment Practices in Inclusive Education Through a Comparative Thematic Analysis Across Three Urban Contexts

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Abstract: Assessment in inclusive education is a complex professional process shaped by pedagogical, psychological, and institutional dynamics. This study illustrates how a comparative qualitative methodological approach can enhance understanding of assessment practices for students with special educational needs across different educational settings. The focus is placed on methodological contribution, highlighting how contextualized qualitative inquiry supports deeper insights into professional practice. The study employs a qualitative design based on semi-structured interviews with support teachers, school psychologists, and social workers in three cities in Albania: Tirana, Durrës, and Elbasan. Data were examined through comparative thematic analysis, a methodological approach that enabled the systematic identification of shared patterns and context-specific variations in assessment practices. Findings indicate that assessment is predominantly narrative and observation-based. However, the comparative method revealed substantial variation in

how assessment is interpreted and enacted across different institutional contexts. Professional judgment in Individualized Education Plan (IEP), organizational dynamics in multidisciplinary assessment, institutional and contextual influences on assessment emerged as key factors shaping assessment practices, results that would be difficult to identify through a single-context. Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of comparative thematic analysis as a contemporary research approach that offers a more integrated framework for examining complex educational practices. This approach contributes to methodological innovation and supports the development of more coherent, practice-informed directions in educational research.

Keywords: *Inclusive education, Comparative thematic analysis, Educational assessment*

1. Introduction

Inclusive education is now widely recognized as a central goal of educational reform. At its core lies a simple but fundamental principle: all children, regardless of ability, have the right to learn and participate in mainstream schools on an equal basis. International frameworks such as the Salamanca Statement, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and subsequent International policy agendas have strengthened this commitment, encouraging countries to educate children with special educational needs (SEN) within inclusive settings (e.g. Ainscow et al., 2019; Hunt, 2011). Yet, while policy discourse often presents inclusion as a shared objective, its practical implementation differs considerably across contexts (Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2022). These differences are particularly evident in how assessment practices are understood, organized, and carried out within schools (Emam et al., 2026). For example, Emam and colleagues (2026) found that teacher attitudes were more strongly associated with the development of an inclusive school climate than teacher knowledge, highlighting the relevance of professional learning and whole-school improvement efforts in advancing inclusive practice. Recent, comparative research shows that inclusive education cannot be treated as a uniform model applied in the same way everywhere (e.g. Rosyidi, 2023; Tah et al., 2024). Cross-national analyses, such as those conducted by Dell’Anna et al. (2025), highlight how national variations in policy frameworks, data systems, and professional norms influence the processes through which students with SEN are identified, evaluated, and provided with support. Similarly, Rana et al. (2026) highlight that even when educational systems are guided by similar inclusive principles,

institutional environments shape how support structures operate in practice. Organizational arrangements, resource allocation, and levels of professional autonomy, all play a decisive role in determining how inclusion unfolds. Complementing these findings, a scoping review by Echsel et al. (2025) investigated inclusive education from an occupational perspective, including the views of children, classroom staff, parents, and other stakeholders. This review found that despite extensive research on inclusive practice, the dynamic and changeable nature of learning situations is often overlooked, yet it is critical for transforming shared occupational situations into truly inclusive experiences. Together, these studies point to the value of both comparative and context-sensitive perspectives in uncovering shared principles and the ways inclusion is adapted in practice.

Qualitative research further emphasizes that inclusion must be understood within local ecology in which children learn, as the interactions between students, teachers, and the institutional environment shape inclusive experiences (Djekourmane et al., 2025). In resource-constrained contexts, inclusive practices are significantly shaped by teacher expertise, the availability of material resources, and the broader school culture (Sepadi, 2025). A growing body of evidence suggests that inclusive education is not simply the result of formal policy decisions, rather, it is co-constructed through everyday professional judgment and shaped by organizational and contextual conditions. Conceptual framework by Hornby and Kauffman (2021) reinforce this view, that inclusion is best understood as a dynamic and contextually negotiated process shaped by structural, cultural, and policy environments, rather than a fixed educational doctrine.

In Albania, inclusive education has gained increasing policy attention in recent years, yet persistent challenges remain in its practical implementation for learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Emerging evidence indicates that assessment practices for students with SEND are largely narrative and observation-based, often embedded with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process (Mançi, 2025). However, Haxhihyseni and Roseni (2025) highlight inconsistencies in how assessment is interpreted and applied across schools, raising critical questions about the influence of professional judgement, organizational structures, and local educational conditions. Recent research further underscores systemic barriers to effective inclusion. Mançi (2025) identified structural and pedagogical obstacles, including insufficient teacher training, limited access to specialized support professionals, inadequate infrastructure, and attitudinal resistance among educators and parents, while also noting opportunities for progress through legislative reforms, learner-centered curricula, and collaborative initiatives. Focusing on early childhood, Duka and colleagues (2023)

emphasized the need for support teachers, reduced student-teacher ratios, and targeted professional development to support individualized instruction. Collectively, these studies provide empirical evidence of gaps in policy implementation, professional preparedness, and resource allocation, while highlighting practical strategies to strengthen inclusive education in Albanian schools. Despite this growing body of research, limited systematic comparison of assessment practices across different urban contexts in Albania remain, leaving a significant gap in understanding how local educational ecosystems shape professional practice and student outcomes. Addressing this gap requires a methodological approach capable of identifying common themes while also capturing contextual variation. Comparative thematic analysis provides such a framework, allowing for the systematic exploration of shared patterns along locally specific differences. By examining practices in Tirana, Durrës, and Elbasan, the present study moves beyond single-site descriptions. Through this comparative lens, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of inclusive education in Albania, while also engaging with broader international discussions that stress the importance of context-sensitive, evidence-based approaches. In doing so, the research responds to growing demands for comparative work that not only examines what inclusive education looks like in policy documents, but also investigates how it is interpreted, and enacted in everyday school practice.

2. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in comparative thematic analysis to explore assessment practices for students with SEN across three urban contexts in Albania: Tirana, Durrës, and Elbasan (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2015). The comparative approach was selected to systematically identify both shared patterns and context-specific variations in assessment practices, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how professional judgment, organizational structures, and local conditions influence inclusive educational assessment. The use of a comparative design enhances analysis by moving beyond single-site interpretations, enabling meaningful cross-contextual insights and highlighting differences and similarities across institutional environments (Braun et al., 2015; Novell et al., 2017).

2.1 Participants

Participants were educational professionals actively engaged in inclusive school settings within the three cities. In Durrës, 21 professionals participated, in Elbasan, 15 support teachers, 7 school psychologists, and 9 school social

workers participated. In Tirana, 5 support teachers were involved in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in assessing and supporting students with SEN, ensuring that the perspectives captured were grounded in relevant professional experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.2 Data collection and data analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and complemented by focus group discussions. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed verbatim to facilitate a rich analysis of participants' professional perspectives. Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, consent was taken for their voluntary participation, and confidentiality of their responses was protected throughout the study. Data were stored securely, and only the research team had access to raw transcripts. Data analysis was conducted using comparative thematic analysis, following the six-step procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and adapted for multi-site comparison (Braun et al., 2015). Initially, transcripts were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns within each city, ensuring that the coding reflected participants' language and understandings of assessment processes. In the first step, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes, making preliminary annotations and identifying central topics. In the second step, initial codes were generated to reduce data complexity and capture meaningful units of information. Step three involved identifying potential themes, which were then reviewed in step four to explore interconnections, overlaps, and divergences between themes. Step five focused on defining and labeling themes to ensure they accurately represented the data in relation to the research questions. Finally, in step six, themes were synthesized across the three cities, highlighting context-specific variations and shared patterns in assessment practices. This approach allowed for the identification of overarching analytical categories aligned with the study's central goals of professional judgment, organizational structures, and local conditions. The comparative phase of the analysis was critical in revealing both commonalities and divergences in assessment practices. This methodological approach supported comparative understanding of inclusive assessment practices across multiple urban contexts.

3. Results

This study explored the practices and challenges associated with implementing IEPs for SEN students across three Albanian cities: Tirana,

Durrës, and Elbasan. Analysis of interviews and focus groups generated three themes: professional judgment in IEP, organizational dynamics in multidisciplinary assessment, and institutional and contextual influences on assessment practices. Each theme included subthemes that reflected similarities and differences across cities.

3.1 Professional judgment in IEP

Participants emphasized the relevance of professional judgment in IEP and particularly in regard to assessment practices, decision-making and goal settings.

In relation to assessment practice, professionals reported using a combination of functional assessment tools, checklists, structured observations, and interviews. However, access to appropriate assessment instruments varied considerably. In Tirana, psychologists reported using standardized tools adapted to students' age and diagnoses, which supported the development of precise IEP objectives, as one teacher explained: “We use checklists and functional assessments to identify the child's strengths and needs”. In contrast, professionals in Durrës relied more heavily on locally developed checklists and informal observation. In Elbasan, both teachers and psychologists highlighted significant challenges, noting that many available tools were designed for younger children and were not appropriate particularly for high school students. One participant stated: “The checklist doesn't match the age of high school students. It's frustrating because it doesn't capture their real needs”.

Regarding decision-making and goal setting, participants across cities described IEP development as a collaborative process involving multidisciplinary teams. In Tirana, psychologists and social workers played an active role in shaping goals and monitoring progress. Durrës demonstrated moderate levels of collaboration but faced resource constraints that limited individualized attention. In Elbasan, although collaboration was formally established, parental reluctance sometimes delayed or limited interventions. One psychologist noted: “We try to involve parents in IEP planning, but sometimes they prefer the child not be separated from the classroom, which limits individualized intervention within the mainstream school”. These findings suggest that while collaborative structure exist, their effectiveness depends on both professional capacity and parental engagement.

3.2 Organizational dynamics in multidisciplinary assessment

Following discussions on professional judgment in IEP, all participants across cities highlighted the relevance of organizational structures and dynamics in supporting IEP implementation. All three cities reported that multidisciplinary

teams- composed of psychologists, social workers, support teachers, and parents- played a central role. Within this theme, two subthemes emerged: multidisciplinary teams and the role of support teachers. Team composition and functioning varied across locations. In Tirana, participants reported on clear role distribution and more consistent monitoring of IEPs. In Durrës, participants reported that multidisciplinary teams operated with fewer professionals per student, reducing opportunities for individualized follow-up. In Elbasan, participants reported structural challenges, particularly due to psychologists covering multiple schools. As one psychologist explained: “I manage 1 to 3 schools and up to eight children per IEP. It is hard to follow each student individually”.

With regard to role of support teachers, in Tirana teachers reported close collaboration with psychologists and support staff. In contrast, support teachers in Elbasan frequently assumed additional responsibilities, including lesson adaptation and preparation of individualized materials, often without institutional support. A support teacher stated: “I spend hours preparing worksheets and games for my students because the school doesn’t provide resources”. This indicates a heavier individual burden on these teachers in resource-limited settings.

3.3 Institutional and contextual influences on assessment practices

Contextual conditions at the municipal level significantly shaped the implementation of IEPs across the three cities, and subthemes that emerged were resource availability, parental engagement, and protocolized assessments. In Tirana, schools benefited from dedicated development rooms and resource classes equipped with appropriate materials and technology, supporting more consistent individualized interventions. In contrast, Durrës schools often faced limited physical space and materials, requiring improvisation to meet students’ needs. Similar to Durrës, Elbasan presented a constrained environment, with support teachers describing small, improvised work areas and a lack of essential tools, which directly affected the quality and consistency of IEP delivery. Parental involvement further influenced these outcomes. While parents in Tirana were generally supportive and cooperative, in Elbasan some parents expressed reluctance toward psychological interventions, limiting the effectiveness of planned strategies. Participants across all locations also emphasized the need for formal protocols for assessment and clearer national guidance tailored to diverse age groups and diagnoses. As one support teacher in Durrës noted: “We need tools that fit both the child’s age and diagnosis. Otherwise, it’s impossible to measure progress accurately”. Collectively, these factors highlight contextual differences: Tirana demonstrated more infrastructure whereas Durrës and

Elbasan faced greater challenges, illustrating how local conditions can either facilitate or constrain effective IEP implementation.

4. Discussion

The present study set out to examine how assessment practices for students with SEN are interpreted and enacted across three Albanian cities – Tirana, Durrës, and Elbasan – through a comparative thematic lens. The findings demonstrate that inclusive assessment in these contexts is not a neutral or only a technical process. Rather, it is a socially situated practice shaped by professional judgment, institutional arrangements, and contextual conditions at the municipal level. In line with recent qualitative research on inclusive education (Rodríguez Valerio et al., 2025; Woodcock, 2023), the results confirm that assessment is embedded within interpretive frameworks and enacted through everyday professional decisions rather than solely through formal procedures. Across all three cities, professional judgment emerged as the central organizing principle of assessment and IEP implementation. Psychologists, support teachers, and social workers consistently described relying on observation, collaborative discussion and experiential knowledge, particularly when formal and standardized tools were limited or unavailable. This support evidence that inclusive education practices are mediated by practitioners’ interpretive repertoires and situated decision-making (Emam et al., 2026; Hornby & Kauffman, 2021; Sepadi et al., 2025; Woodcock et al., 2023). In Tirana, relatively greater access to structured instruments facilitated clearer documentation and more formalized goal-setting processes. In contrast, professionals in Elbasan and Durrës relied more on informal assessment strategies due to high caseloads and restricted access to standardized, age-appropriate, and sensitive diagnostic tools. Importantly, professional judgment in this study functioned as both a strength and a vulnerability. It represented a strength because practitioners demonstrated adaptability, and commitment to students’ needs, even in constrained environments. At the same time, the absence of systematic assessment infrastructure placed disproportionate responsibility on individual professionals. When institutional support systems are with limited resources, the burden of ensuring quality shifts to individual practitioners, creating structural vulnerability (e.g. Samwel et al., 2025). The present findings reflect this dynamic. Professional judgement and expertise compensate for limited resources, yet cannot fully substitute for standardized procedures in assessment.

With regard to organizational structures, all three cities reported multidisciplinary teams and IEP procedures aligned with national regulations.

However, the comparative analysis revealed that the mere existence of these structures did not guarantee operational effectiveness. In Tirana, when roles were clearly defined and staff turnover was low, interdisciplinary collaboration was more consistent. In Elbasan, professionals frequently served multiple schools, limiting follow-up continuity and individualized monitoring. Durrës reflected a mixed pattern of implementation, where formal teams existed, but communication and coordination did not occur consistently. These findings are supported by emerging evidence that policy frameworks alone are insufficient to ensure effective inclusive practice (Ainscow et al., 2019; Espanol et al., 2025; Hernandez-Torrano et al., 2022; Hunt, 2011). Rather, collaboration quality, workload distribution, and administrative coherence determine whether formal structures translate into meaningful support. The present study reinforces this claim by demonstrating that identical regulatory frameworks can yield divergent outcomes depending on staff capacity, organization of work and institutional and contextual influences.

The comparative thematic approach was relevant in revealing that differences in implementation were not isolated but shaped also by contextual factors. Tirana schools had better access to resource rooms, structured spaces, and instructional materials, supporting more individualized and systematic assessment practices. Durrës and Elbasan faced several constraints, and sometimes professionals contributed financially to obtain materials. These differences reflect how infrastructural inequities affect inclusive education practices (Samwel et al., 2025). Limited resources in some settings shifted assessment practices toward narrative and observation methods rather than structured monitoring. Additionally, parental attitudes toward assessment affected intervention processes, particularly in Elbasan, underscoring that assessment practices are embedded with broader institutional and socio-cultural contexts.

A central contribution of this study lies in its methodological design, which allowed for identification of cross-city commonalities and context-specific divergences in implementation of IEP practices. The implications of these findings are both systemic and practical. Strengthening inclusive assessment in Albania requires a balanced approach that combines standardization with contextual flexibility. The development of age-appropriate assessment tools adaptable to diverse school contexts would reduce overreliance on informal methods while maintain professional autonomy. Equally important is the equal distribution of psychologists and support teachers across cities to address workload disparities. Investment in infrastructure, particularly in smaller urban centers, should ensure minimum standards for resource rooms and materials. Finally, sustained professional development focused on interdisciplinary collaboration and assessment methodologies would enhance

coherence across different contexts. Importantly, professional judgment should be supported by systems and resources instead of being relied on to fill gaps caused by structural inequities.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that assessment practices for students with SEN in Tirana, Durrës, and Elbasan are shaped by professional expertise, institutional organization, and contextual conditions. Although national regulations provide a common framework, implementation differs depending on context. Professional judgment plays a central role in implementing IEP, but it requires structural support rather than functioning as a substitute for limited resources and systemic gaps. The findings deepen understanding of how inclusive assessment is practiced across different urban contexts in Albania. They also demonstrate that policy effectiveness cannot be evaluated only through compliance but must consider the realities in which practitioners operate. However, the study is limited to three urban contexts and relies on qualitative data, which limits broader generalization. Future studies should include rural and peripheral settings and integrate observational and student outcome data for a more comprehensive analysis. In conclusion, inclusive assessment in Albania is a context-sensitive, relational practice that reflects broader structural capacities and socio-cultural dynamics. Ensuring its quality requires coordinated ongoing reform, equitable resource distribution, and sustained professional support. Only through such combined efforts can inclusive assessment move toward a more stable and needs-based implementation.

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LATILL Corpus and the Development of Reading Comprehension in German: Methodological Proposals for Teachers

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the development of reading comprehension in German as a foreign language at the A2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, situated within the context of innovation and digital technologies in education.

The core of the paper is the presentation of a specific teaching unit based on authentic texts from the LATILL corpus (Level-Adequate Texts in Language Learning), which represents an innovative digital platform for the selection, analysis and didactic adaptation of linguistically appropriate texts for foreign language instruction.

The theoretical framework draws on the results of recent national and international research projects focusing on reading literacy and the development of reading comprehension in both first and foreign languages. Reading is conceptualized as a complex cognitive, linguistic, and psychological process that requires systematic support through the targeted development of reading strategies. On this basis, the paper presents teaching units working with informational texts at the A2 level, structured into clearly defined didactic phases ranging from the activation of prior knowledge to application and transfer tasks.

The paper highlights the potential of digital corpus-based tools in bridging research and pedagogical practice and emphasizes that the presented didacticized texts and tasks are not normative in nature.

Rather, they are designed as open methodological proposals intended to inspire teachers to flexibly and creatively use texts from the LATILL corpus when developing reading comprehension in GFL context.

Keywords: *LATILL, reading comprehension, German as a foreign language, text didacticization*

1.Introduction

Reading comprehension is a central component of foreign language acquisition and a key factor in developing communicative competence. In German as a foreign language (GFL), reading is a complex cognitive, linguistic, and strategic process in which learners construct meaning by integrating prior knowledge, vocabulary, and reading strategies (Hockicková et al., 2020). Despite the availability of authentic materials, a persistent challenge in foreign language education is selecting texts that are linguistically appropriate, motivating, and aligned with learners' proficiency levels, particularly at the A2 level. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on didactically adapted reading texts derived from the LATILL corpus (Level-Adequate Texts in Language Learning), an innovative digital platform for selecting, analyzing, and adapting texts for foreign language instruction. The research problem is the lack of systematic, level-appropriate, and pedagogically structured reading materials for A2 learners of GFL that also support the development of reading strategies. The study's objectives are to present methodological proposals for teachers using LATILL texts, to demonstrate structured teaching units with clearly defined didactic phases – from activation of prior knowledge to application and transfer – and to highlight how corpus-based, digitally supported materials can bridge research and classroom practice. The didactically adapted texts are intended as proposals for teachers, offering flexible, strategy-oriented approaches to foster reading comprehension. By providing structured activities, vocabulary support, and tasks aligned with the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the materials aim to help teachers implement engaging and competence-oriented reading instruction in GFL classrooms.

2. The Digital Online-Platform LATILL

The development of the digital platform *Level-Adequate Texts in Language Learning* (LATILL) must be situated within a broader research context focused on strengthening reading comprehension in foreign language education. Between 2018 and 2025, several Slovak research and educational projects systematically investigated predictors of reading comprehension, developed intervention programs, and empirically tested instructional materials in school practice. These projects examined cognitive, linguistic, psychological and metacognitive processes involved in reading and provided evidence-based strategies for improving reading comprehension. Building on these findings, attention gradually shifted from the identification of predictors

and the design of strategy-based interventions toward optimizing the selection and didactic preparation of reading texts.

In this context, the Austrian Erasmus+ project *Level Adequate Texts in Language Learning* (LATILL) (2022-2025) introduced a complementary and innovative perspective. While the Slovak projects primarily focused on the above mentioned processes and predictors of reading comprehension, LATILL addressed a central practical challenge in foreign language teaching: the systematic selection of linguistically appropriate, motivating, and level-adequate texts. Traditional textbooks often include texts that do not fully correspond to learners' actual proficiency levels, whereas authentic materials from real-life contexts are frequently too complex, particularly for learners at levels A1 to B1. In contrast to earlier approaches, LATILL defined the learners' language proficiency level as the dominant criterion for text selection and aimed to support teachers through a digital, research-based solution.

The principal objective of the project was the development of an open, web-based educational platform that integrates language didactics, computational linguistic analysis, and machine learning technologies (Kienberger, 2024; Kienberger et al., 2023). The platform enables teachers of German as a foreign language (GFL) to search for, analyze, and classify German-language texts according to thematic criteria, linguistic complexity, and the proficiency levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). At its core is an automated tool that assigns texts to CEFR levels A1-C2 on the basis of a specifically developed reference corpus. Teachers can either select texts available within the platform or upload their own materials for analysis. This automated classification provides objective feedback on linguistic complexity and facilitates informed, evidence-based decisions regarding text suitability (Vázquez-Ingelmo et al., 2023).

Beyond level classification, the platform supports the didactic preparation and organization of materials for classroom use. It offers supplementary resources such as reading strategy posters, task formats, and methodological guidelines that promote differentiated instruction and the systematic development of reading comprehension strategies. An innovative feature of LATILL is the integration of AI-supported functions, including automatic text summarization, machine translation, and image generation, which allow teachers to adapt materials efficiently to learners' linguistic and thematic needs. In addition, the platform provides openly accessible educational resources, ensuring sustainability and continued usability beyond the project duration (Koropatnitska, 2025).

Overall, LATILL represents a significant contribution to the digital transformation and quality assurance of reading instruction in the GFL context. By combining pedagogical expertise with corpus-based linguistic

analysis and technological innovation, the platform offers a transparent and systematic approach to text selection. It bridges the gap between simplified textbook texts and overly complex authentic materials and enables teachers to align reading materials more precisely with learners' proficiency levels and interests. Emerging from a broader research tradition focused on reading comprehension, LATILL provides a sustainable, research-informed model for enhancing the selection and didactic use of level-adequate texts in foreign language education.

3. Criteria for Text Selection in Foreign Language Reading Instruction

The selection of appropriate texts represents a decisive factor in the development of reading competence in foreign language education, as it directly influences learners' comprehension processes, strategy use, motivation, and long-term attitudes toward reading. Within the framework of the LATILL project, particular emphasis was placed on identifying systematic criteria that determine the suitability of reading materials for different learner groups. The analysis of the LATILL corpus, complemented by user feedback, demonstrated that thematic relevance and linguistic level constitute the most influential factors in text selection, as they directly affect comprehensibility and pedagogical value. At the same time, the evaluation revealed certain limitations, including restricted genre diversity and a tendency toward stereotypical formats. These findings highlight the necessity of conceptualizing text selection as a multidimensional process that integrates learner-related, text-related, and didactic considerations.

Learner-related criteria play a fundamental role in determining text suitability. Learners approach texts with diverse linguistic competences, cognitive capacities, experiences, and interests. Consequently, the text selection must be differentiated and aligned with instructional objectives. Age provides an initial orientation, as texts should correspond to learners' linguistic, cognitive, and emotional development. Younger learners generally benefit from shorter, clearly structured texts with accessible vocabulary and explicit coherence markers, whereas older learners are more capable of engaging with abstract, argumentative, or stylistically complex content. However, chronological age alone is insufficient; reading maturity, prior knowledge, and strategic competence must also be taken into account. Equally significant are interest and personal relevance. Texts connected to learners' everyday experiences or socially meaningful topics enhance engagement and foster deeper cognitive processing. When learners perceive a text as relevant and attainable, their motivation increases, which in turn positively affects comprehension and

persistence. Genre diversity further contributes to balanced competence development. Literary, journalistic, and informational texts demand different reading approaches and promote complementary skills; a diversified corpus prevents monotony and supports flexible strategy application. Individual preferences, including possible gender-related tendencies should be acknowledged without reinforcing stereotypes. The overarching objective is to ensure inclusivity and to create opportunities for all learners to identify with reading materials (Garbe, 2007; Summers, 2013).

In addition to learner-related aspects, text-specific criteria must be systematically considered. One important dimension concerns the medium. While printed texts have traditionally dominated educational contexts, digital texts have become increasingly prevalent in contemporary communication (Willingham, 2017). Although genre conventions, stylistic features, and communicative functions remain fundamentally comparable across media, digital formats introduce distinct processing conditions. Hypertextual structures, multimodal elements, and interactive features require readers to navigate non-linear pathways, integrate visual and verbal information, and critically evaluate sources. The distinction between print and digital texts therefore lies less in intrinsic textual characteristics than in the cognitive demands associated with their use. Effective foreign language instruction should integrate both formats in order to reflect authentic communication practices and to foster digital reading competence alongside traditional literacy skills (Coiro, 2003; Leu et al., 2009/2011).

A central principle of text selection is linguistic appropriateness. Texts that substantially exceed learners' proficiency levels may hinder comprehension and reduce motivation, whereas overly simplified materials can restrict linguistic development and cognitive challenge. Consequently, effective selection requires a balanced alignment between accessibility and productive difficulty, taking into account learners' current proficiency and targeted learning outcomes. Closely related to linguistic level is the intended reading type (Szabó, 2024). In foreign language pedagogy, intensive and extensive reading represent complementary instructional approaches. Intensive reading focuses on detailed comprehension and linguistic analysis, typically employing shorter and more demanding texts that facilitate close examination of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse structures. Extensive reading, in contrast, emphasizes global understanding, fluency development, and reading for general meaning through longer, engaging texts. Aligning text selection with the intended reading purpose ensures coherence between pedagogical objectives and classroom practice and enables the systematic development of both analytical and fluency-oriented competences (Nation, 2009; Lutjeharms, 1998; Grabe, 2009).

Finally, the effectiveness of text selection is closely interconnected with strategy-based instruction. Reading competence develops most sustainably when learners are guided to approach texts purposefully and reflectively (Čapek, 2015). A widely established framework distinguishes between pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading strategies. Pre-reading strategies activate prior knowledge and clarify expectations; while-reading strategies support comprehension monitoring and the identification of key information; post-reading strategies consolidate understanding and promote critical reflection. When these strategies are coherently integrated and adapted to learners' proficiency levels, they foster strategic awareness and learner autonomy (Rosenbrock & Nix, 2020).

In summary, text selection in foreign language reading instruction constitutes a complex pedagogical decision-making process that must integrate learner characteristics, linguistic level, genre diversity, medium, reading purpose, and strategy instruction. Only through the coordinated consideration of these interrelated dimensions can reading comprehension become a meaningful, motivating, and sustainable component of foreign language education.

4. Didactically Adapted Reading Texts from the LATILL Corpus

The practical component of the present teaching material provides a curated selection of didactically adapted reading texts specifically designed for use in German as a foreign language (GFL) context. These materials aim to promote reading comprehension while simultaneously supporting broader linguistic development.

The texts were selected from the LATILL corpus and subsequently adapted for instructional use at level A2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Four texts were chosen and methodically processed to ensure linguistic accessibility, thematic relevance, and methodological flexibility. The adaptation process sought to demonstrate how learners with limited prior knowledge can gradually approach authentic linguistic structures without experiencing cognitive overload. Particular emphasis was placed on addressing the specific challenges faced by GFL learners. Vocabulary development, textual transparency, contextualized linguistic support, and carefully structured task formats constitute central elements of the materials. Each adapted reading text is accompanied by targeted activities that promote comprehension and encourage both oral and written production.

Moreover, the materials incorporate opportunities for intercultural learning and for transferring textual context into learners' everyday contexts. Such transfer is especially significant in GFL instruction, where language learning

is closely connected to integration into real communicative environments. Through these materials, teachers are provided with concrete methodological impulses for working with texts derived from authentic communicative situations while also gaining insight into pedagogical potential of corpus-based resources in language teaching practice.

1. Structure of the Didactically Adapted Reading Texts

The internal organization of the didactically adapted reading texts closely follows the typical phases of classroom instruction, serving both as learning materials and as a framework for the lesson. This structured progression gradually introduces learners to the text, ensures comprehension, and facilitates the active application of acquired knowledge. The process begins with an introductory and motivational phase, which arouses learners' interest and activates prior knowledge through images, guiding questions, or associative tasks. Next, the presentation phase allows learners to encounter the text for the first time, focusing on global comprehension by identifying the topic, text type, and central ideas without concentrating initially on linguistic details. In the semantic elaboration phase, comprehension is deepened by clarifying key meanings and exploring unknown lexical items or essential information in context, connecting linguistic analysis with strategy use. This is followed by the practice phase, in which activities consolidate understanding and linguistic processing, enabling learners to actively apply newly acquired vocabulary and structures while strengthening both receptive and productive skills. Finally, the application and transfer phase encourages learners to use textual content and linguistic structures productively in their own texts, dialogues, or creative assignments, promoting sustainable and competence-oriented learning.

2. Guidelines for the Use of Didactically Adapted Reading Texts

Each adapted reading text is accompanied by detailed methodological guidelines for the teachers (One methodological guideline is listed below, Table 1). These guidelines are presented in tabular form and include descriptions of all activities, the targeted reading strategies, thematic focus, text type, required materials, specific learning objectives, recommended social forms, and precise instructional procedures. Suggested time allocations are provided, but remain flexible and may be adjusted according to the needs of the learner group. Alternative activities are included for selected tasks, allowing teachers to verify comprehension or deepen textual engagement depending on available time. Consequently, the materials can be individually adapted to diverse classroom contexts.

Following the methodological guidelines, teachers are provided with photocopiable materials, including the appendices to the presented topics, the adapted reading texts and corresponding worksheets intended for learners. We do not list the appendices, the texts and the worksheets in this paper in terms of scope. These parts can be found by the author of the paper. It is recommended that the texts and worksheets should be distributed after the introductory activities in order to maintain the continuity of the lesson. For organizational clarity, the reading texts themselves are not embedded within the methodological guidelines; teachers are therefore advised to keep a separate copy for instructional reference. Through this comprehensive structure – combining adapted texts, strategy-oriented tasks, and detailed methodological support – the materials aim to facilitate effective, reflective, and learner-centered instruction in foreign language classrooms.

Table 1. Methodological guideline for an educational unit focused on fostering reading comprehension

METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES	
NUMBER OF THE READING TEXT	1
READING STRATEGY	For targeted information extraction, students first read the true/false statements, highlight the key words, and then locate them in the text. Through this strategic approach, they deliberately focus their attention on relevant passages and identify central content, characters, objects, and their relationships. This process involves the explicit identification of specific information in the text, thereby enhancing both text comprehension and cognitive processes such as attention, concentration, and memory. The role of the employed psychological reading strategies is particularly important in working with the text. Students connect thematically new content with already known knowledge, thereby creating a contextual framework that enables deeper understanding of the text.
DURATION	45 minutes
TOPIC OF THE TEXT	vacation
TITLE OF THE TEXT	In Berlin
TYPE OF THE TEXT	informational text
MATERIALS	text, worksheet, appendix – list of city names
INTRODUCTORY AND MOTIVATIONAL PHASE	
Name of the activity:	Clap hands with city names
Learning objectives:	to activate prior knowledge to increase concentration to evoke experiences to collect personal experiences
Social form:	teacher-led instruction, whole-class discussion
Materials:	list of city names
Duration:	10 minutes

Instructions:	The teacher asks the learners which German-speaking cities they know and whether they have already visited any of them. After a brief discussion, the teacher smoothly transitions to the next activity. He/she has a list of various city names available (Appendix for Topic No. 1): Berlin (DE), Zürich (CH), Florenz (I), Pressburg (SK), Venedig (I), Breslau (PL), Wien (A), Mischkolz (HU), Rotterdam (NL), Nürnberg (DE), Kopenhagen (DK), Linz (A), Stockholm (SE), Krakau (PL), Hamburg (DE), Salzburg (A), Prag (CZ), Warschau (PL), Kaschau (SK), Ingolstadt (DE). The learners stand up, and the teacher presents the city names one by one. The learners' task is to read aloud the names of the German-speaking cities. Names of cities that are not in German-speaking countries are not spoken, but replaced by clapping. The first learner reads the first city name aloud, the learner on their right reads the second, and so on. If a learner makes a mistake, he/she sits down, and the next learner continues reading the city names. The group applauds the learners who remain standing. <i>Stehen Sie bitte auf. Ihre Aufgabe ist es, dass Sie nur die Namen der deutschsprachigen Städte laut lesen. Der erste Schüler/die erste Schülerin liest den ersten Stadtnamen, sein/ihr Nachbar rechts den zweiten Namen, usw. Die Städtenamen, die nicht aus deutschsprachigen Ländern kommen, dürfen nicht gelesen werden. Sie sollen diese Städtenamen durch Händeklatschen ersetzen. Wenn Sie einen Fehler machen, sollen Sie sich setzen und der folgende Schüler/die folgende Schülerin fährt mit dem Lesen von Städtenamen fort.</i> Solutions: Names of cities in German-speaking countries: Berlin, Zürich, Wien, Nürnberg, Linz, Hamburg, Salzburg, Ingolstadt.
PRESENTATION PHASE	
Name of the activity:	Decide whether the statements are true or false
Learning objectives:	to practice global text comprehension to enhance concentration
Social form:	individual work, whole-class discussion
Materials:	text, worksheet
Duration:	10 minutes
Instructions:	The teacher asks the learners to read the text „In Berlin“ (text for topic No. 1) and the statements on the worksheet (No. 1, task No. 1) for the first time to get an initial impression of the content. During the second reading, the learners decide which statement on the worksheet are correct (R – correct) and which are incorrect (F – false). At the same time, they underline the sections of the text that support the correct statements. Finally, the solutions are discussed together in class. <i>Lesen Sie bitte den Text „In Berlin“ und die Aussagen auf dem Arbeitsblatt (Nr. 1, Aufgabe Nr. 1) zum ersten Mal, um einen ersten Eindruck über den Textinhalt zu bekommen. Beim dem zweiten Lesen entscheiden Sie sich, ob die Aussagen auf dem Arbeitsblatt richtig (R) oder falsch (F) sind. Gleichzeitig unterstreichen Sie die Textstellen, in denen sich die richtigen Aussagen befinden. Schließlich besprechen Sie Ihre Lösungen im Plenum.</i> Solutions: 1F, 2R, 3R, 4R, 5R, 6F, 7F <u>Correct statements</u> (what the learners should underline): 2nd statement – das Land ist sonst gut vernetzt. 3rd statement – die Menschen helfen sehr gern. Und sie geben nicht so schnell auf – auch wenn man nicht die gleiche Sprache spricht. 4th statement – die Menschen sind aber sehr neugierig. Sie wollen mehr wissen über meine Heimat, über Religion und Traditionen.

	5th statement – ich habe eine Wohnung gesucht und deshalb bei einer alten Frau angerufen. <u>Incorrect statements</u> (what the learners should correct based on the text): 1st statement – es gibt keine öffentlichen und freien Netze in Deutschland (Berlin). 6th statement – die Gastgeberin (die Frau) konnte kein Englisch und hat das Telefon aufgelegt. 7th statement – die Erzählerin hat leider keine Wohnung bekommen.																						
SEMANTIC ELABORATION PHASE																							
Name of the activity:	To infer unknown words in context																						
Learning objectives:	to identify new expressions in the reading text to explain unfamiliar words and key information to understand new vocabulary contextually to comprehend content at the word and sentence level to derive and consolidate meanings from the text																						
Social form:	individual work, whole-class discussion																						
Materials:	text, worksheet																						
Duration:	5 minutes																						
Instructions:	The teacher asks the learners to read the text „<i>In Berlin</i>“ once more and mark any unknown words or expressions. The learners should try to infer the meanings from the context of the text. They are also allowed to use Anglicisms. <i>Lesen Sie den Text „In Berlin“ noch einmal leise durch. Markieren Sie die Wörter oder Ausdrücke, die Sie nicht kennen oder nicht ganz verstehen. Versuchen Sie zuerst, die Bedeutungen aus dem Zusammenhang des Textes in der zweiten Spalte zu erschließen. Dabei dürfen Sie auch Anglizismen verwenden.</i> The teacher collects the marked words on the board, and together the meanings are clarified using synonyms in a plenary discussion. The learners write the meanings or synonyms of the new words on their worksheet (No. 1, task No. 2). <i>Schreiben Sie die Bedeutungen, bzw. die Synonyme der neuen Wörter in die dritte Spalte auf Ihrem Arbeitsblatt (Nr. 1, Aufgabe Nr. 2) auf.</i> Possible solutions: <table> <tr> <td><u>unknown words:</u></td><td><u>synonyms:</u></td></tr> <tr> <td>die Internetverbindung</td><td>WLAN-Verbindung,</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>der Internetzugang</td></tr> <tr> <td>öffentlich</td><td>den Benutzern</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>zugänglich</td></tr> <tr> <td>das Netz</td><td>das Internet</td></tr> <tr> <td>die Route</td><td>die Richtung, der Weg</td></tr> <tr> <td>die Heimat</td><td>die Herkunft</td></tr> <tr> <td>auflegen</td><td>den Anruf beenden</td></tr> <tr> <td>kriegen</td><td>bekommen, erhalten</td></tr> <tr> <td>der Schleier</td><td>das Kopftuch</td></tr> </table>	<u>unknown words:</u>	<u>synonyms:</u>	die Internetverbindung	WLAN-Verbindung,		der Internetzugang	öffentlich	den Benutzern		zugänglich	das Netz	das Internet	die Route	die Richtung, der Weg	die Heimat	die Herkunft	auflegen	den Anruf beenden	kriegen	bekommen, erhalten	der Schleier	das Kopftuch
<u>unknown words:</u>	<u>synonyms:</u>																						
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die Heimat	die Herkunft																						
auflegen	den Anruf beenden																						
kriegen	bekommen, erhalten																						
der Schleier	das Kopftuch																						

PRACTICE PHASE	
Name of the activity:	Fill in information
Learning objectives:	to consolidate and deepen learned material to automate skills to apply knowledge in new contexts
Social form:	individual work, whole-class discussion
Materials:	text, worksheet
Duration:	7 minutes
Instructions:	The learners work independently to complete the provided cloze text with the newly learned words on the worksheet (No. 1, Task No. 3).

	Arbeiten Sie bitte selbstständig und ergänzen Sie den Lückentext mit den neu gelernten Wörtern auf dem Arbeitsblatt (Nr. 1, Aufgabe Nr. 3). Afterward, solutions are discussed together in the whole-class setting. The teacher asks the learners to read their answers aloud. Lesen Sie bitte Ihre Antworten vor. Solutions: 1. öffentlich, 2. die Internetverbindung, 3. Netz, 4. Schleier, 5. der/meiner Heimat, 6. kriegen, 7. Route

APPLICATION AND TRANSFER PHASE	
Name of the activity:	Planning my dream trip
Learning objectives:	authentic use of newly learned language structures in real communication to consolidate and expand language competence to foster creativity to apply learned content in personal contexts
Social form:	pair work
Materials:	worksheet
Duration:	13 minutes
Instructions:	The learners write a proposal for, for example, a two-day trip to a German-speaking city or a Slovak city (worksheet for topic No. 1, task No. 4). They respond to the questions provided. <i>Arbeiten Sie zu zweit. Stellen Sie sich vor, dass Sie z. B. einen zweitägigen Ausflug in eine beliebige Stadt im deutschsprachigen Raum/in der Slowakei planen sollen. Schreiben Sie auf das Arbeitsblatt (Nr. 1, Aufgabe Nr. 4) ca. 10 Sätze und äußern Sie sich zu den folgenden Fragen:</i> <i>In welche Stadt möchten Sie gerne fahren?</i> <i>Mit wem möchten Sie den Ausflug verbringen?</i> <i>An welchem Tag und wann möchten Sie abfahren?</i> <i>Um wie viel Uhr und wo werden Sie sich treffen?</i> <i>Welches Verkehrsmittel wollen Sie benutzen?</i> <i>Wo werden Sie untergebracht?</i> <i>Wie werden Sie die zwei Tage verbringen?</i> <i>Welche Sehenswürdigkeiten möchten Sie besuchen?</i> <i>Wann kehren Sie zurück?</i> Finally, the learners present their proposals in the plenary. <i>Präsentieren Sie bitte Ihre Vorschläge im Plenum.</i> Suggestions fort text production: Travel companions – Freund, Freundin, Eltern, Bruder, Schwester Means of transport – Auto, Bus, Zug Accommodation – Hotel, Apartment, Jugendherberge/Studentenwohnheim Sightseeing in Vienna – das Schloss Schönbrunn, der Stephansdom, die Hofburg (Sissi-Museum), Wiener Prater, das Schloss Belvedere, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Naturhistorisches Museum, die Karlskirche, Museum für moderne Kunst: Albertina Sightseeing in Bratislava – Bratislavaer Burg, die Kathedrale St. Martin, Altes Rathaus, das Primatialpalais, die Donaupromenade am Eurovea, das Palais Grassalkovich, das Denkmal Slavin, die Burg Devin, UFO, der Michaelertor Verbs – spazieren durch das historische Zentrum der Stadt, Einkäufe machen, Sehenswürdigkeiten besichtigen, Denkmäler anschauen, Kirchen/Museen besuchen, Fotos machen, Architektur bewundern, Souvenirs kaufen, in Geschäfte gehen, Kaffee trinken, essen gehen, den Weg suchen, an einer Führung teilnehmen
SOURCES	https://latill.eu/discover

ADDITIONALLY USED MATERIALS	None
ATTACHMENTS	text for topic No. 1, worksheet for topic No. 1, appendix (list of city names) for topic No. 1

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

In conclusion, reading comprehension in foreign language education is a complex and multidimensional process that extends far beyond the decoding of written language. As demonstrated in this paper, effective reading instruction requires the systematic integration of linguistic, cognitive, strategic, and motivational dimensions. Within the context of German as a foreign language (GFL), reading serves not only as a means of accessing information and expanding vocabulary, but also as a foundation for the development of communicative competence and autonomous language use. The contribution of the LATILL project lies in its systematic and research-based approach to text selection and didactic preparation. By defining learners' proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a central criterion and by integrating corpus-based linguistic analysis with digital technologies, the platform addresses a persistent challenge in foreign language teaching: the discrepancy between oversimplified textbook texts and overly complex authentic materials. Through automated level classification, thematic filtering, and AI-supported tools, LATILL enables teachers to make transparent, evidence-based decisions and to adapt materials efficiently to diverse learner needs. The criteria for text selection outlined in this study highlight that appropriate reading materials must be aligned with learners' linguistic competence, cognitive development, interests, and reading purposes. At the same time, genre diversity, medium (print and digital), and strategy-based instruction play a decisive role in fostering sustainable reading competence. Reading comprehension develops most effectively when learners are guided through structured phases – introductory and motivational phase, presentation phase, semantic elaboration phase, practice phase, application and transfer phase – that systematically activate prior knowledge, support comprehension monitoring, and promote reflection and transfer. The didactically adapted reading texts presented from the LATILL corpus exemplify how authentic materials can be modified without losing their communicative value. Through carefully scaffolded tasks, vocabulary support, and strategy-oriented activities, learners are gradually introduced to authentic linguistic structures while avoiding cognitive overload. The accompanying methodological guidelines further ensure that instruction remains transparent, flexible, and learner-centered. Overall, the integration of corpus-based resources, digital

innovation, and pedagogical expertise represents a sustainable model for enhancing reading instruction in GFL context. By combining systematic text selection with structured didactic adaptation and strategy training, the approach presented in this paper contributes to the development of informed, motivated, and strategically competent readers. In this way, reading comprehension becomes not only a receptive skill, but a central pillar of foreign language learning and meaningful participation in authentic communicative environments.

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Policies and Practices for Teachers’ Professional Development in Albania

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Abstract: Teachers’ professional development is widely recognised as a key mechanism for improving teaching quality and strengthening education systems. International research highlights that effective professional development is continuous, practice-oriented, and closely connected to teachers’ classroom realities. This article presents findings from an empirical study conducted in five public upper secondary schools in Tirana, Albania, examining how teachers’ professional development is supported and how these initiatives are perceived by teachers. The study involved a sample of 100 teachers and employed a predominantly quantitative research design, complemented by two open-ended items providing contextual clarification.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire measuring participation in professional development activities, perceptions of national policy measures, and perceived impact on teaching practice. Reliability analysis demonstrated good internal consistency of the instrument (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.84$). The findings indicate that participation in professional development activities is relatively high, particularly in mandatory certification and curriculum-related training. However, teachers frequently perceive these initiatives as fragmented and overly focused on formal requirements. While professional development is reported to enhance teachers’ knowledge, confidence, and awareness of new pedagogical approaches, its perceived impact on sustained classroom practice remains moderate. Teachers also emphasised limited access to school-based professional learning opportunities and insufficient pedagogical follow-up.

The article discusses these findings in relation to international literature on effective teacher professional development and outlines implications for education policy and school leadership in Albania. The study contributes empirical evidence from a national context that remains underrepresented in international research and offers insights relevant to policymakers, school leaders, and researchers concerned with strengthening teacher professional learning systems.

Keywords: *teacher professional development, education policy, upper secondary education, Albania, empirical research*

1. Introduction

Teacher professional development (TPD) has become a core concern of education systems seeking to enhance teaching quality and student learning outcomes. International research highlights that continuous, relevant, and context-sensitive professional learning is essential for enabling teachers to respond to curricular reforms, diverse student needs, and evolving pedagogical expectations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; OECD, 2019).

In Albania, teacher professional development has been formally embedded within national education policy frameworks through certification requirements, career advancement structures, and mandatory training schemes. Despite these reforms, concerns remain regarding the coherence, relevance, and practical impact of professional development opportunities. Empirical evidence capturing teachers’ perspectives at the school level remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining teachers’ experiences and perceptions of professional development support in upper secondary education.

2. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how professional development for teachers is supported in Albanian upper secondary schools and how teachers perceive the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What forms of professional development have teachers participated in during recent years?
2. Which national policies and initiatives are perceived by teachers as supporting their professional development?
3. How do teachers evaluate the impact of professional development activities on their teaching practice?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Conceptualising Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development (TPD) is commonly defined as a continuous process through which teachers enhance their professional

knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout their careers (Day, 1999). Contemporary literature emphasises that effective TPD extends beyond one-off training events and should be embedded in teachers’ daily practice, fostering reflection, collaboration, and sustained learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Research has increasingly shifted from viewing professional development as transmission of knowledge towards models that prioritise active learning, teacher agency, and contextual relevance

3.2 Characteristics of Effective Professional Development

A substantial body of international research identifies key characteristics associated with effective professional development. These include coherence with curriculum and assessment reforms, a focus on subject-specific pedagogy, opportunities for collaboration, and sufficient duration to allow meaningful change in practice (Desimone, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Professional learning communities and school-based learning structures have been shown to enhance teachers’ instructional practices by promoting shared inquiry and collective responsibility (Stoll et al., 2006).

3.3 Professional Development and Education Policy

From a policy perspective, professional development is increasingly linked to teacher evaluation, accountability, and career progression systems. International organisations and comparative studies highlight that when professional development is primarily driven by compliance and certification requirements, its impact on teaching practice tends to be limited (OECD, 2019). Conversely, systems that align evaluation with formative feedback and individual development plans are more likely to support meaningful professional growth (Schleicher, 2018).

3.4 Teachers’ Perceptions of Professional Development

Teachers’ perceptions play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of professional development initiatives. Studies suggest that when teachers perceive professional learning as relevant, supportive, and responsive to their needs, they are more likely to implement new practices in the classroom (Avalos, 2011). Conversely, professional development perceived as externally imposed or administratively driven often leads to superficial engagement and limited pedagogical change.

3.5 Research Gap and Contribution of the Study

While international literature on teacher professional development is extensive, empirical research from South-Eastern European contexts remains relatively limited. In the Albanian context, existing studies tend to focus on

policy frameworks rather than teachers lived experiences. This study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence from upper secondary schools and by examining how national professional development policies are experienced at the school level.

4. Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire composed primarily of closed-ended Likert-scale items, complemented by two open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide additional comments and clarifications regarding their professional development experiences.

The quantitative design was selected to systematically measure teachers’ perceptions, participation patterns, and reported impacts of professional development through standardised indicators. This approach enables the identification of trends, frequencies, and relationships among variables within a defined time frame. The inclusion of two open-ended questions served a supportive function, offering limited contextual insights to complement the quantitative findings, without constituting a separate qualitative strand of analysis.

4.1 Population and Sample

The study targeted teachers employed in five public upper secondary schools in Tirana.

A total of 112 questionnaires were distributed, and 100 fully completed questionnaires were retained for analysis, yielding a response rate of 89.3%, which is considered satisfactory for voluntary survey-based research in educational settings (Bryman, 2021).

4.2 Sample Profile

The demographic composition of participants reflects common structural characteristics of the Albanian teaching workforce:

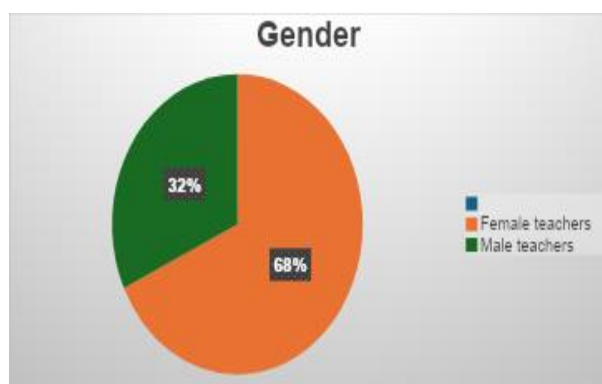
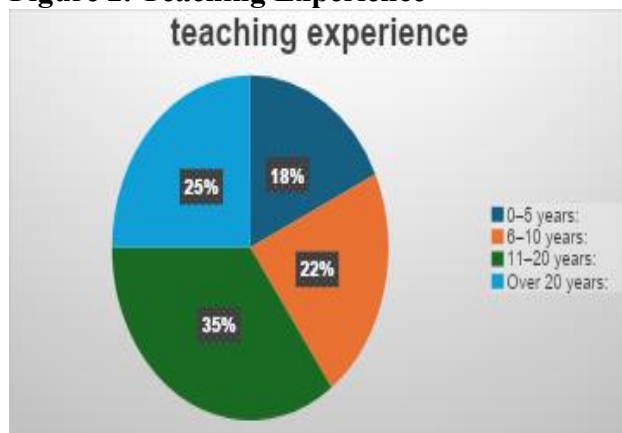


Figure 1. Gender

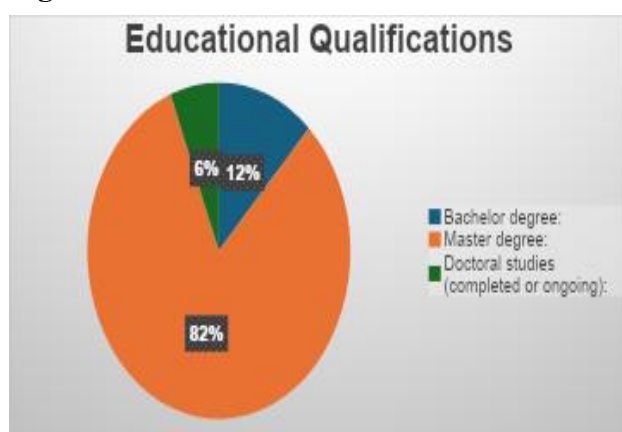
Female teachers represented 68% of the sample ($n = 68$), while male teachers accounted for 32% ($n = 32$), reflecting national trends of higher female representation in secondary education teaching professions.

Figure 2. Teaching Experience



In terms of teaching experience, 18 % of participants had less than 10 years of experience, 35% had between 10 and 20 years, and 25% had more than 20 years of experience. This relatively balanced distribution allowed the study to capture perspectives across different career stages.

Figure 3. Educational Qualifications



Regarding educational qualifications, 82% of teachers held a Master's degree, 12% held a Bachelor's degree, and 6% reported additional postgraduate qualifications. The high proportion of postgraduate qualifications reflects recent reforms in teacher education standards in Albania.

4.3 Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected using a four-section structured questionnaire covering demographic information, participation in professional development (over the previous two academic years), perceptions of national policies, and perceived professional impact measured through five Likert-scale items (1–5). Two open-ended questions captured additional reflections on strengths and limitations. The instrument was pilot tested with 12 teachers and revised for clarity. It was distributed in paper and online formats (Google Forms), and participation was voluntary and anonymous.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used

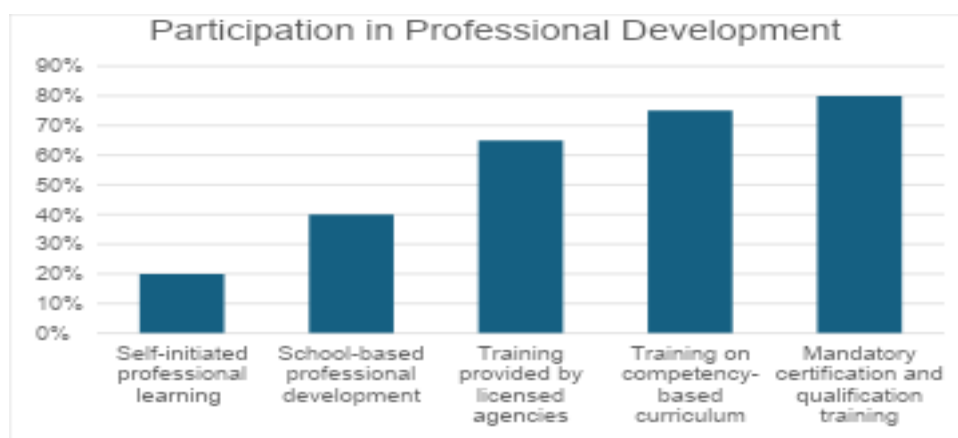
to summarise participation patterns, policy perceptions, and perceived impact. Internal consistency of the impact scale was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha ($\alpha = 0.84$), indicating good reliability (Taber, 2018). Open-ended responses were grouped into recurring categories to support and contextualise the quantitative findings; they were not analysed as a separate qualitative dataset.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Participation in Professional Development

Table 1. Teachers reported participation in multiple forms of professional development.

Descriptive statistics indicate that teachers reported participation in multiple forms of professional development during the previous two academic years



The highest participation rates were observed in mandatory certification programmes and curriculum-related training activities, followed by agency-led seminars and school-based initiatives. Although participation levels appear relatively high, responses to the two open-ended questions suggest that approximately two-thirds of respondents perceive professional development primarily as a formal requirement linked to career progression criteria rather than as a self-directed professional learning opportunity.

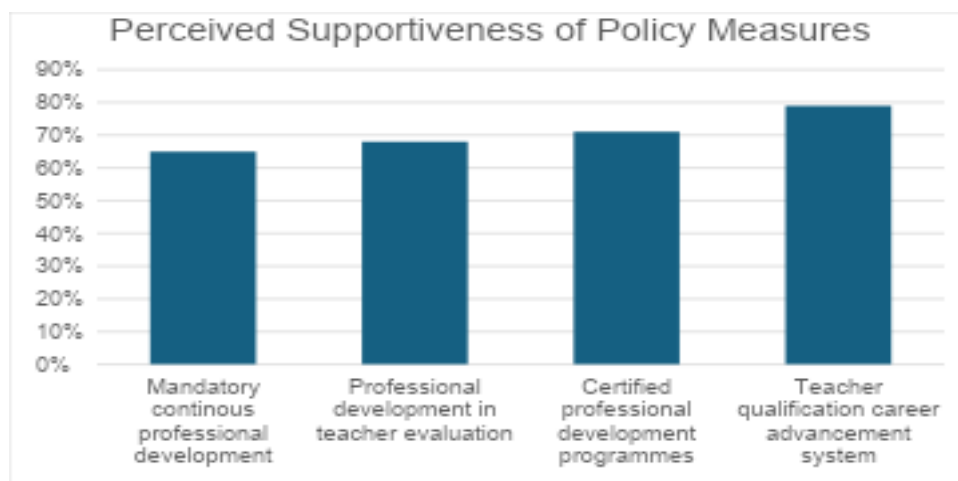
Several respondents also indicated limited flexibility in selecting training topics aligned with classroom needs. Professional development programmes were frequently described as standardised and insufficiently responsive to subject-specific pedagogical challenges. These findings align with European evidence indicating that accountability-driven professional development systems may prioritise compliance over intrinsic professional learning motivations (OECD, 2020; European Commission, 2021).

5.2 Perceptions of National Policy Measures

Teachers identified several policy mechanisms supporting professional development.

Table 2. Perceived Supportiveness of Policy Measures

Teachers were asked to evaluate the extent to which national policy mechanisms support their professional growth.



Overall, responses indicate moderately positive perceptions of the regulatory framework. The teacher qualification and career advancement system received the highest level of perceived support (79%), followed by certified professional development programmes (71%). Professional development linked to teacher evaluation procedures was rated as supportive by 68% of participants, while mandatory continuous professional development requirements were viewed positively by 65%.

However, open-ended responses provide additional contextual nuance. Approximately 58% of teachers described professional development obligations as largely administrative in character, emphasising certification and documentation rather than sustained pedagogical development. These perceptions are consistent with comparative research suggesting that compliance-oriented systems may have limited instructional impact unless accompanied by mentoring, collaboration, and follow-up support mechanisms (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

5.3 Perceived Impact on Teaching Practice

Teachers evaluated the impact of professional development on key aspects of their work.

Table 3. Perceived Impact of Professional Development Teachers evaluated the impact of professional development on key aspects of their professional work using a five-point Likert scale



The results indicate that professional development is perceived as contributing positively to theoretical knowledge acquisition and professional confidence. Mean scores for these dimensions were higher than those related to classroom implementation and long-term instructional improvement.

Lower ratings regarding sustained classroom transformation suggest challenges in transferring training content into everyday instructional practice. Nearly half of respondents (46%) identified structural constraints—such as limited time for collaborative planning, heavy curriculum demands, and insufficient mentoring support—as barriers to effective implementation.

These findings are consistent with existing research demonstrating that professional development is most effective when it is continuous, collaborative, practice-oriented, and embedded within teachers’ daily instructional contexts (Desimone & Garet, 2019).

5.4. Discussion

The results indicate that teacher professional development in Albania is supported by a structured national policy framework, yet its practical implementation reveals important limitations.

First, while participation rates are high, professional development is frequently perceived as compliance driven. The predominance of mandatory and certification-oriented activities may contribute to administrative engagement rather than deep pedagogical transformation.

Second, although teachers report gains in theoretical knowledge and professional confidence, the reported impact on sustained classroom practice remains moderate. This discrepancy highlights a gap between participation and meaningful instructional change.

Third, structural constraints within schools—particularly limited collaborative time and insufficient follow-up support—appear to reduce the long-term effectiveness of training initiatives. International research consistently emphasises that professional learning is more impactful when embedded within school-based collaboration, mentoring structures, and ongoing reflective practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2018).

Overall, the results indicate that strengthening the coherence between national policy frameworks and school-level professional learning environments may enhance the practical impact of professional development.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

This study provides empirical evidence on teachers’ professional development within Albanian upper secondary education. The findings indicate that teachers’ participation in professional development activities is generally high, particularly in mandatory certification programmes and curriculum-related training. However, these activities are often perceived as fragmented and primarily oriented toward fulfilling formal requirements rather than supporting continuous and coherent professional growth. Although professional development is associated with improvements in teachers’ knowledge, professional confidence, and awareness of innovative pedagogical approaches, its impact on sustained changes in classroom practice appears moderate. In addition, teachers reported limited access to school-based learning opportunities and insufficient follow-up support after training.

The findings suggest that greater alignment between teacher evaluation systems and professional learning, alongside stronger pedagogical support within schools, could enhance the effectiveness and long-term impact of professional development initiatives. Strengthening these dimensions may contribute to improving teaching quality and, ultimately, educational outcomes.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The sample was restricted to five schools in a single urban context, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The data were based on self-reports and may therefore be affected by social desirability bias. Furthermore, the study focused exclusively on teachers’ perceptions and did not include classroom observations or student achievement data, which would have provided additional perspectives on the actual impact of professional development.

Overall, by offering context-specific evidence from a national setting that remains underrepresented in international research, this study contributes to the broader literature on teacher professional learning and provides insights relevant to policymakers, school leaders, and researchers interested in strengthening professional development systems.

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Harnessing Technology for Learning: Student Experiences and Competencies in Higher Education

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Abstract: Digital technologies are transforming higher education, creating new opportunities and challenges for teaching and learning. This study examines the integration of innovation and digital tools at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Elbasan “Aleksandër Xhuvani”, focusing on students’ engagement with digital platforms and artificial intelligence. It explores their competencies, preferences, and perceptions of technology-enhanced and blended learning approaches.

The research considers how technology supports academic work, collaboration, research productivity, and access to information, while also addressing challenges such as unequal access to devices, varying levels of digital literacy, and potential overreliance on AI tools. Findings reveal that while over 90% of students own smartphones and laptops, advanced digital competencies remain underdeveloped, with significant gaps in critical evaluation of online information and ethical AI use. By situating these issues within broader discussions of educational innovation and digital transformation, the study provides evidence-based recommendations for designing inclusive, pedagogically balanced learning environments that strengthen critical thinking, creativity, long-term professional competencies, and sustainable digital practices through targeted curriculum integration and faculty development.

Keywords: *Artificial intelligence, Blended learning, Digital technologies, educational innovation, Higher education, Student engagement.*

1.Introduction

The proliferation of digital technologies has transformed the landscape of higher education, offering new avenues for learning, teaching, and research. The integration of these technologies can enhance student engagement, provide access to diverse resources, and support the development of 21st-

century competencies, including digital literacy, collaboration, and critical thinking (Selwyn, 2016; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). In parallel, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) presents both opportunities and challenges, as it can support personalized learning and efficiency but may also reduce initiative and creative thinking if misused (Luckin et al., 2016).

In Albania, higher education institutions are increasingly adopting digital tools and platforms to complement traditional classroom instruction. However, the effectiveness of technology integration depends not only on institutional infrastructure but also on students' prior experience, access to devices, and digital competencies (Kirkwood & Price, 2014). This study focuses on the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Elbasan “Aleksandër Xhuvani,” examining students' experiences with technology, their self-reported competencies, and perceptions of AI's role in learning.

As Albanian higher education undergoes digital transformation alongside European Union integration processes, understanding student perspectives is essential for informing evidence-based policy and ensuring that technological adoption enhances rather than hinders learning outcomes. This research contributes to the limited body of empirical literature on technology-enhanced learning in the Albanian context, providing foundational insights for institutional decision-making and curriculum development.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What digital tools and devices do students use for academic and non-academic purposes, and how do they allocate time across these activities?
2. How do students perceive the usefulness of technology in learning, teaching, and motivation?
3. What are the perceived challenges, barriers, and training needs related to digital learning?
4. How do students perceive the role of artificial intelligence in education, including its potential benefits and risks?
5. What institutional support mechanisms do students perceive as necessary for effective technology-enhanced learning?

By exploring these questions, the study aims to provide insights into effective strategies for technology-enhanced learning and inform institutional practices for supporting student success in a digitally mediated educational environment.

2. Literature Review

Higher education stands at a crossroads where digital transformation is reshaping every dimension of teaching and learning. Technology-enhanced

learning offers students unprecedented access to resources, flexibility beyond temporal constraints, and new modes of engagement. Yet beneath this promise lies a complex terrain of uneven competencies and persistent challenges that demand critical examination (Selwyn, 2016; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

The appeal of blended learning models has grown particularly strong. Research documents how hybrid approaches can transform passive reception into active participation, with meta-analyses demonstrating that well-implemented blended learning outperforms purely traditional instruction in promoting active learning and collaborative problem-solving (Graham, 2013; Means et al., 2013; Bernard et al., 2014). Digital tools enable interactive content that adapts to individual learning paces, while collaborative platforms extend discussion beyond classroom walls and mobile technologies have dissolved classroom boundaries entirely (Kirkwood & Price, 2014; Laurillard, 2012; Traxler, 2018).

What does it mean to be digitally competent? The European Digital Competence Framework conceptualizes digital competence as encompassing information literacy, communication across platforms, content creation, ethical awareness, and problem-solving (Redecker, 2017; Vuorikari et al., 2022). Research confirms that students' digital competence significantly influences their academic performance and engagement with digital resources (Hatlevik & Christophersen, 2013). However, a troubling disconnect has emerged between the rhetoric of digital nativity and reality. Digital skills vary dramatically across student populations, shaped by socioeconomic background and access to resources (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014; Helsper & Eynon, 2013). Critical scholarship has challenged the "digital natives" discourse, demonstrating that familiarity with smartphones does not translate into sophisticated academic digital literacy (Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic served as both accelerator and revelation, moving blended learning from innovation to necessity overnight (Bond et al., 2021; Hodges et al., 2020). Well-designed blended courses integrate the strengths of face-to-face interaction with online flexibility, yet effective implementation requires careful instructional design and sustained institutional support (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004; Graham, 2019; Boelens, De Wever, & Voet, 2017). The pandemic also exposed deep inequities, as students with unreliable internet or limited access found themselves further disadvantaged, underscoring that technology alone cannot create equitable learning environments (Czerniewicz et al., 2020; OECD, 2021).

While extensive international research informs understanding of technology-enhanced learning, the Albanian context presents unique characteristics that warrant specific attention. As a post-socialist transition country pursuing

European Union integration, Albanian higher education has undergone significant reforms since the 1990s, including increasing emphasis on digitalization (Tamo & Karaj, 2018). However, empirical research on technology adoption in Albanian universities remains limited. Regional studies from the Western Balkans reveal common challenges including infrastructure deficits, varying digital readiness among faculty, and the need for policy alignment with European digital education frameworks (European Training Foundation, 2022; Gashi & Kërnya, 2020).

Artificial intelligence has arrived with transformative force, with adaptive learning systems personalizing instruction and learning analytics enabling early intervention (Holmes, Bialik, & Fadel, 2019; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). AI holds genuine promise for responsive education, offering data-informed insights into student progress (Luckin et al., 2016; Baker & Inventado, 2014). Yet AI demands critical scrutiny. Scholars warn that excessive AI reliance may undermine student autonomy and critical thinking, while raising concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, and surveillance (Selwyn, 2019; Williamson & Eynon, 2020; Prinsloo & Slade, 2017; UNESCO, 2023). Students themselves recognize AI's benefits while expressing concern about becoming passive learners and eroding academic integrity (Kasneci et al., 2023; Cotton, Cotton, & Shipway, 2023).

The barriers to effective technology integration are structural, cultural, and human. Persistent infrastructure limitations, educators' pedagogical beliefs, and students' self-efficacy and motivation all shape engagement with technology-enhanced environments (Selwyn, 2016; OECD, 2021; Tondeur et al., 2017; Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2002).

This study is informed by constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning, which conceptualize knowledge construction as a mediated, collaborative, and contextually embedded process (Vygotsky, 1978; Laurillard, 2012). Within this framework, digital technologies function as cognitive mediators that shape epistemic practices and interactional patterns. Additionally, connectivism provides a lens for understanding learning in networked digital environments, while self-determination theory illuminates motivational dimensions of technology engagement (Siemens, 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

3. Methodology

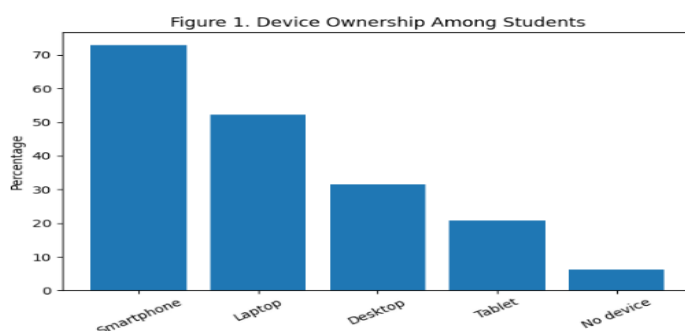
This study employed a mixed-methods research design to explore students' experiences, competencies, and perceptions regarding digital technologies and artificial intelligence in higher education. By integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research captured both measurable patterns of

technology use and students’ subjective interpretations of their learning experiences, ensuring methodological triangulation and analytical depth.

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Elbasan “Aleksandër Xhuvani”, with 174 undergraduate and graduate students from teacher education and educational sciences programs. Participants represented different study levels: Bachelor (53.4%), Professional Diploma (24.7%), Master of Science (15.5%), and Master Professional (6.4%). Recruitment occurred through institutional mailing lists and classroom announcements. Ethical standards were strictly followed, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The survey consisted of 19 questions addressing demographics, device ownership, time spent online, digital competencies, perceptions of technology and AI, and training needs. Qualitative data were collected through open-ended questions, allowing students to elaborate on their experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and ethical concerns related to digital learning and AI integration.

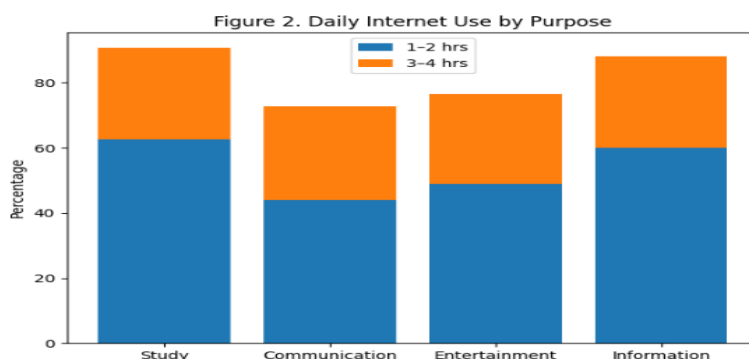
Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) to identify patterns of technology use and attitudes toward AI. Graphical representations were generated to support interpretation. Qualitative responses were examined through thematic content analysis, involving systematic coding and identification of recurring themes related to engagement, learning quality, technological barriers, and overreliance on automated tools. By integrating statistical findings with thematic insights, the study ensured methodological rigor and provided a multidimensional understanding of how digital technologies and artificial intelligence shape contemporary higher education. The design supports evidence-based implications for educational policy, curriculum development, and digitally inclusive teaching strategies.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting findings. First, the single-institution sample limits generalizability to other Albanian universities or regional contexts. Second, self-reported competencies may not accurately reflect actual skills, as students might overestimate or underestimate their abilities. Third, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point in time, precluding analysis of developmental trajectories or causal relationships. Fourth, potential self-selection bias may mean that students with stronger interest in technology were more likely to participate. Finally, while the sample of 174 students is adequate for descriptive analysis, it may not capture the full diversity of experiences across all programs and years of study. Future research should address these limitations through multi-site sampling, performance-based competency assessments, and longitudinal designs.

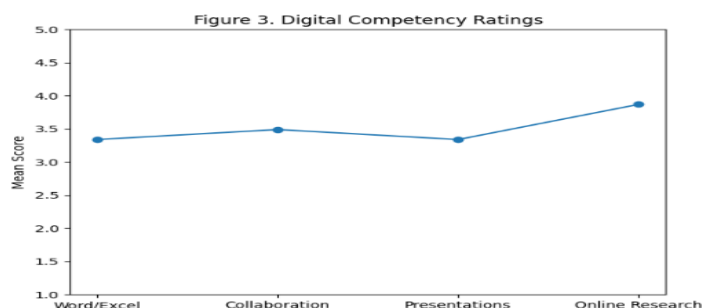


4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive account of students' engagement with digital technologies, their competencies, perceptions, and learning preferences within higher education. By integrating quantitative results with interpretive analysis, the section contextualizes students' technological practices within broader pedagogical, cognitive, and institutional frameworks. The inclusion of eight figures facilitates visual interpretation and enhances analytical clarity. Students' access to digital devices constitutes a foundational dimension of technology-enhanced learning. As illustrated in Figure 1, smartphones and laptops represent the dominant technological tools used for academic purposes, with ownership rates exceeding 90% among respondents. Specifically, 96% of students reported owning smartphones, 92% owned laptops, while only 34% owned tablets and 28% owned desktop computers. These findings align with prior research emphasizing the central role of portable digital devices in facilitating ubiquitous learning and student autonomy (Crompton & Burke, 2018; Selwyn, 2016). However, the comparatively lower ownership of tablets and desktop computers suggests a shift toward lightweight, multifunctional technologies that support multitasking, communication, and immediate access to learning resources.

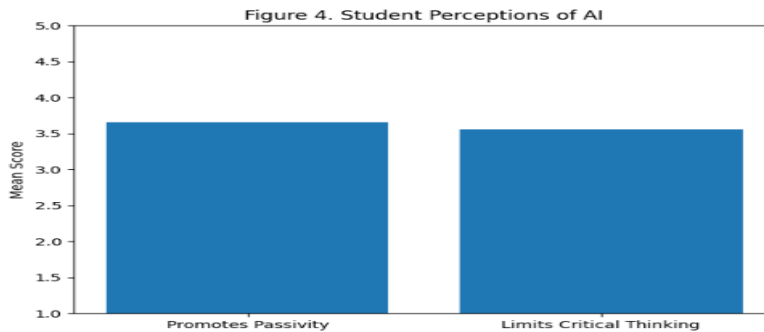


Patterns of internet usage further confirm the deep entrenchment of digital connectivity in students’ academic lives. Figure 2 demonstrates that the majority of respondents engage with online environments daily for academic tasks, including research, assignment preparation, collaborative learning, and access to learning management systems. On average, students reported spending 4.2 hours daily on academic online activities and 3.8 hours on social communication and entertainment. At the same time, social communication and entertainment constitute significant components of students’ digital engagement. This convergence of academic and informal online practices reflects the hybrid nature of contemporary learning, where cognitive, social, and affective dimensions intersect (Ito et al., 2019). The integration of formal and informal digital spaces enhances engagement and motivation but also necessitates the development of critical digital literacy skills to manage distraction, information overload, and online credibility.



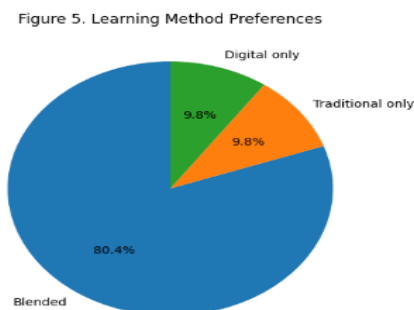
Students’ self-assessed digital competencies reveal a differentiated skills profile. As presented in Figure 3, respondents exhibit strong proficiency in basic operational skills such as document creation, online communication, and platform navigation. In contrast, advanced competencies, including digital content production, data analysis, critical evaluation of online information, and ethical AI use, are reported at significantly lower levels. Notably, Master’s students reported significantly higher advanced competencies than Bachelor’s students ($t = 3.42$, $p < .01$), suggesting that digital skills develop through academic experience. However, no significant differences emerged by gender or program type. This discrepancy mirrors international findings that distinguish between surface-level technological fluency and deeper digital literacy (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Redecker, 2017).

The results underscore the need for pedagogical strategies that cultivate higher-order cognitive skills, emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, and ethical reasoning within technology-rich learning environments.



Perceptions of artificial intelligence reveal a complex attitudinal landscape. Figure 4 indicates that while a substantial majority of students acknowledge the efficiency (78%), personalization (71%), and productivity benefits (76%) of AI-based tools, a similarly significant proportion express concern regarding the potential erosion of independent thinking (68%), creativity (64%), and academic integrity (72%). This ambivalence reflects broader international debates concerning algorithmic mediation in education (Holmes et al., 2019; Luckin et al., 2016). Students’ concerns suggest an emerging awareness of the epistemological risks associated with overreliance on automated systems, particularly in relation to writing, research, and problem-solving activities. These findings reinforce the necessity of embedding AI literacy and ethical training within higher education curricula, ensuring that students develop critical capacities for responsible and reflective engagement with intelligent technologies.

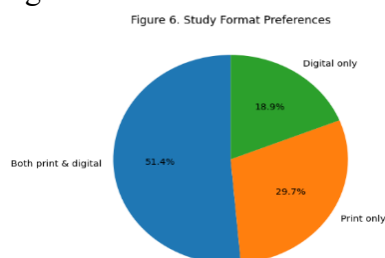
Learning preferences further illuminate students’ pedagogical orientations. As depicted in Figure 5, the overwhelming majority of respondents favor blended learning models that integrate face-to-face instruction with digital resources and interactive platforms. This preference supports pedagogical research demonstrating that blended learning environments enhance engagement, flexibility, and learning outcomes by combining the relational strengths of



classroom interaction with the accessibility of digital instruction (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Graham, 2019). The marginal preference for exclusively traditional or fully online learning formats suggests that students value pedagogical hybridity rather than technological substitution, emphasizing the complementary roles of digital and conventional instructional approaches.

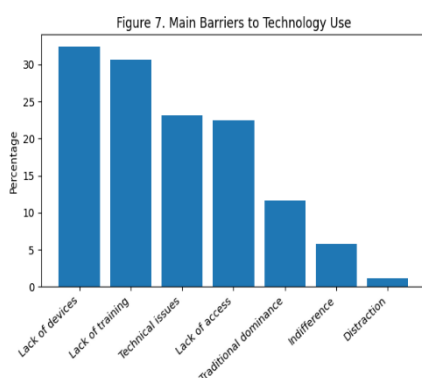
Instructional format preferences further reveal students’ inclination toward multimedia-supported and interactive teaching strategies. Figure 6 shows that video lectures, digital presentations, learning management systems, and collaborative platforms are perceived as particularly effective for comprehension and engagement.

These results align with multimedia learning theory, which emphasizes the cognitive benefits of combining verbal and visual information (Mayer, 2020).



Moreover, interactive digital tools promote participatory learning, facilitating peer collaboration, dialogic engagement, and formative feedback, which are critical components of student-centered pedagogy.

Despite generally positive perceptions, students identify several barriers that constrain effective technology integration. As illustrated in Figure 7, infrastructural limitations, unstable internet connectivity, limited access to advanced devices, and insufficient training represent significant challenges. These obstacles echo broader concerns in the literature regarding persistent digital inequalities and institutional readiness for technological innovation (OECD, 2021; Van Dijk, 2020).

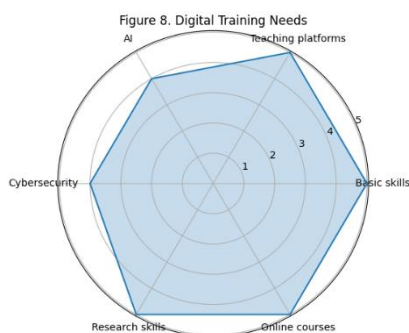


Importantly, these barriers disproportionately affect students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, potentially exacerbating existing educational inequalities. Addressing these structural constraints requires sustained institutional investment, policy reform, and targeted support mechanisms.

Finally, students express a strong demand for structured digital training and institutional support. Figure 8 highlights the pronounced need for instruction in digital research methods, multimedia content creation, data literacy, and ethical AI use. This demand reflects students’ recognition of the evolving competencies required for academic success and employability in digitally mediated labor markets (European Commission, 2020).

The findings suggest that universities must systematically embed digital competence development within curricula, moving beyond optional workshops toward fully integrated pedagogical frameworks.

Collectively, the results reveal that while students exhibit high levels of technological engagement and openness toward innovation, critical gaps persist in relation to advanced digital competencies, ethical awareness, and infrastructural equity. These findings reinforce the view that technological integration in higher education must be guided by pedagogical intentionality rather than technological determinism. Digital tools and artificial intelligence can enhance learning outcomes only when embedded within coherent instructional designs that foreground critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility.



From a theoretical perspective, the findings resonate with constructivist and socio-cultural models of learning, which conceptualize knowledge construction as a mediated, collaborative, and contextually embedded process (Laurillard, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978). Digital technologies function as cognitive mediators that shape epistemic practices, interactional

patterns, and meaning-making processes. However, their pedagogical effectiveness depends on learners' ability to critically engage with technological tools, highlighting the importance of reflective and metacognitive instructional strategies.

In institutional terms, the results underscore the strategic imperative of aligning digital innovation initiatives with inclusive educational policies, professional development programs, and sustainable infrastructural investment. Universities must prioritize equitable access, comprehensive training, and ethical guidance to ensure that technological transformation supports intellectual growth rather than instrumental efficiency alone. By fostering digitally competent academic communities, higher education institutions can cultivate learning environments that promote creativity, critical inquiry, and responsible innovation.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has examined students' experiences, competencies, and perceptions regarding the integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence in higher education, with particular reference to the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Elbasan "Aleksandër Xhuvani". The findings demonstrate that digital tools have become deeply embedded in students' academic practices, reshaping how knowledge is accessed, constructed, and

communicated. High levels of daily technology use, strong engagement with online learning platforms, and a clear preference for blended instructional models reflect the growing centrality of technology-enhanced learning environments in contemporary higher education.

At the same time, the results reveal significant challenges that continue to shape students' digital learning experiences. While basic operational skills are well developed, advanced digital competencies—such as critical evaluation, ethical use of artificial intelligence, and creative digital production—remain uneven. These gaps highlight the need for systematic pedagogical strategies that go beyond instrumental technology use, emphasizing reflective engagement, critical digital literacy, and responsible innovation. Furthermore, infrastructural limitations and unequal access to technological resources persist as barriers to equitable participation, underscoring the importance of institutional investment and inclusive policy frameworks.

The ambivalent perceptions of artificial intelligence observed among students further emphasize the complexity of technological transformation in education. While AI-based tools are widely recognized for their potential to enhance efficiency, personalization, and academic productivity, concerns regarding academic integrity, cognitive dependency, and the erosion of creativity underscore the necessity of ethical guidance and pedagogical mediation. Universities must therefore foster AI literacy that empowers students to critically engage with intelligent systems while preserving intellectual autonomy and academic rigor.

Pedagogically, the strong preference for blended learning models suggests that the future of higher education lies in integrative instructional designs that combine the relational strengths of face-to-face teaching with the flexibility and interactivity of digital platforms. Such hybrid approaches offer significant opportunities to enhance student engagement, promote active learning, and support diverse learning needs. However, the effective realization of these benefits requires sustained professional development for educators, curricular innovation, and strategic alignment between technological infrastructure and pedagogical objectives.

Based on the study findings, institutions should embed digital competence development across curricula, emphasizing advanced skills such as critical information evaluation and ethical AI use, while prioritizing pedagogical integration of technology in faculty development. Clear institutional AI policies, developed collaboratively with students and staff, are essential to balance innovation with academic integrity. Addressing infrastructural inequities through device lending programs and flexible digital learning designs is necessary to ensure inclusivity. Student feedback should guide technology adoption, and curricula should integrate digital content creation

and AI literacy as core graduate competencies. At the policy level, alignment with European digital competence frameworks, sustained research funding, and quality assurance mechanisms are vital to support meaningful and equitable digital transformation in higher education.

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Professional Development of Teachers in the Context of Digitalized Education

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Abstract: The rapid digitalization of the education process has brought significant changes to teaching and learning practices, requiring teachers to demonstrate a high level of professionalism. In contemporary education systems, teachers play a crucial role not only through their professional knowledge but also through their perceptions, attitudes, and effective use of digital technologies to support the teaching and learning process. This study examines teacher professionalism within an educational context that is increasingly shaped by digitalization. It highlights the importance of digital competence as a key component of teacher professionalism, drawing on recent international research in this field. Learning lifelong is emphasized as an essential strategy for addressing the challenges and opportunities created by the integration of digital technologies in education.

The study adopts a conceptual research methodology based on a review of existing empirical and theoretical literature related to digitalization and teacher professional development. The findings suggest that effective professional development in digitalized educational environments should be viewed as a continuous and personalized process that integrates formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Professional development programs that incorporate collaborative learning, reflection, and practical application are found to have a positive impact on teachers’ attitudes, learning outcomes, and instructional practices related to the integration of information and communication technologies (ICT). Furthermore, the literature indicates that institutional support, adequate digital infrastructure, and alignment with national and international digital competence frameworks are critical factors for the successful implementation of professional development initiatives.

Keywords: *Digitalization, Professionalism, Teachers, Competence, Innovation*

1. Introduction

The rapid digitalization of the learning environment has emerged as one of the most influential phenomena shaping contemporary educational settings. The accelerated advancement of information technologies and the proliferation of new learning platforms have profoundly transformed not only the structure of the learning environment but also the role of teachers, who are increasingly expected to respond to evolving pedagogical demands. In this context, professional development has assumed a pivotal role as a mechanism for supporting and guiding educators in their efforts to navigate and adapt to the challenges of digital transformation. By fostering the acquisition of new competencies and pedagogical strategies, professional development enables teachers to remain effective and resilient in the face of ongoing technological change. Traditional training methodologies that have historically served as the foundation for teacher education are increasingly regarded as insufficient within the modern context, which is defined by the complex and dynamic demands of digitalized education systems. Contemporary research instead advocates for a model of continuous professional development grounded in the principles of lifelong learning. This approach emphasizes the ongoing acquisition of skills and knowledge, enabling educators to remain responsive to technological and pedagogical change. At the same time, digitalized education introduces new challenges related to accessibility, equity, and quality, underscoring the need for professional development frameworks that not only enhance teachers' digital competencies but also address broader systemic concerns. Teachers in digitalized education require not only technical proficiency but also the capacity for critical thinking in the application of digital technologies within pedagogical contexts. Accordingly, professional development in the digital age extends beyond the acquisition of technical skills to encompass pedagogical innovation, collaboration, and the cultivation of professional identity. The present study responds to the growing need, particularly within academia, for a comprehensive approach to teacher professional development in the digital era. Through an examination of relevant academic literature, the study seeks to identify the most prominent dimensions of professional growth, as evidenced by its findings. It is anticipated that the results will contribute meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on strategies for supporting educators and strengthening the academic community in the face of digital transformation

Literature Review

Digitalization has emerged as a defining characteristic of contemporary education, profoundly influencing teacher professional development. In line with this transformation, particularly within higher education institutions, scholars such as (Matveeva, Akatova, Shcherbakov, & Filinova) emphasize the necessity of substantially enhancing teachers' digital competencies from a pedagogical perspective. This enhancement is not merely technical but connected to the broader evolution of educational practices. Teacher professional development must therefore advance in tandem with technological innovation, ensuring that educators are equipped to engage effectively with modern digital pedagogical methodologies and knowledge frameworks. Such competencies extend beyond technical proficiency, encompassing critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and adaptability within digital education. Consequently, the cultivation of comprehensive digital competence is indispensable for educators seeking to navigate and contribute meaningfully to the digitalized landscape of contemporary higher education.

(Tregubova, Shibankova, & Kats, 2020) conceptualizes the digitalization of education as a new paradigm that reshapes both the modes of professional knowledge acquisition and the culture of professional communication. The findings of this research highlight the supportive role of digital forms of professional development in shaping individualized trajectories of knowledge acquisition and facilitating differentiated instruction. At the same time, the study identifies challenges, particularly the reduction of direct interpersonal contact, alongside the simultaneous intensification of teachers' professional responsibilities. These results underscore the necessity of striking a balance between digital and traditional approaches to teacher education to ensure the sustainable growth of educators within the digital era. Such equilibrium is essential for fostering resilience and adaptability in professional practice while maintaining the human dimension of educational development.

(Tregubova, Shibankova, & Kats, 2020), in her theoretical exploration of teacher professional development under the conditions of digitalization, emphasizes the significance of conceptual design and highlights lifelong learning, benchmarking, and cognitive style as critical dimensions of professional growth. The study demonstrates that professional development in the digital context represents a synthesis of institutional support and motivational factors, both of which are essential for fostering adaptability and innovation among educators. This dual emphasis is considered vital for sustaining the quality of teaching in increasingly dynamic educational environments.

Recent international evidence further reinforces the importance of structured digital professional development. Drawing on ICILS data, research on digitalization illustrates a positive correlation between teachers’ engagement in professional development related to digitalization and ICT integration in classrooms, their favorable attitudes toward technology, and the cultivation of students’ digital skills. These findings confirm insights from diverse national contexts, underscoring that successful digital integration is fundamentally driven by continuous, well-supported professional development. Such sustained engagement ensures that educators remain competent, innovative, and responsive to the evolving demands of digital education.

3. Methods

The present study adopted a qualitative research paradigm, employing systematic document analysis as its primary methodological approach. This paradigm was selected to enable an in-depth examination of the existing academic literature relevant to the study’s focus, namely teacher professional development within digitalized educational contexts. Such an approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical and empirical contributions in the field, thereby providing a solid foundation for analyzing the evolving role of professional development in response to digital transformation. Finally, the selected sources were examined through thematic analysis, focusing on recurring themes such as digital competence, lifelong learning, personalization, collaboration, and institutional support. The extracted data primarily consisted of the central arguments advanced by the sources, the methodologies employed, and the outcomes achieved in relation to digital development. This analytical process enables the researcher to synthesize and interpret existing theories and practices without the need to generate new empirical data, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in the field.

Digital Professional Growth

The rapid digitalization of education has significantly impacted teaching and learning worldwide, redefining both teacher development and the construction of pedagogical practice in the twenty-first century. Teacher development is no longer perceived as an isolated or periodic process but rather as an organic and continuous endeavor that connects educators to broader transformations in technology and society. This reconceptualization underscores the need for professional development frameworks that are dynamic, responsive, and aligned with the evolving demands of digitalized education systems.

In digitalized educational settings, there is an imperative need for teachers to continuously develop their skills to address emerging learning opportunities and evolving pedagogical requirements. Perhaps the most significant transformation brought about by digitalization is the shift toward lifelong professional learning. Contemporary research highlights that professional knowledge can no longer be considered complete upon graduation; rather, it must be cultivated through ongoing engagement with professional development. Continuous professional development has thus become a key strategic element, enabling teachers to effectively navigate and adapt to technology-rich learning environments. As (Annemann, Menge, & Ge, 2025) emphasizes, sustained professional learning is essential for equipping educators with the competencies required to thrive in the digital age.

Figure 1. Professional development opportunities supporting teachers’ digital competencies, including technical assistance, accessible technologies, digital instructional materials, and open educational resources (UNESCO, 2018)



The rapid pace of digitalization has led to significant knowledge obsolescence, requiring educators to continuously update their competencies. Digital competence has thus emerged as a vital dimension of professional development in the new digital era. Teachers are expected not only to acquire appropriate technical ICT skills but also to develop pedagogical, ethical, and critical capacities. This multidimensional approach ensures that educators can effectively integrate technology into teaching while maintaining reflective and responsible practices in digital education.

Teachers are expected, among other competencies, to demonstrate the ability to select appropriate digital tools, apply them meaningfully, and critically evaluate their potential impact on learning outcomes. Research findings

suggest that teacher effectiveness is more reliably assured through an application-oriented approach rather than a purely technical education (Matveeva, Akatova, Shcherbakov, & Filinova). Such an approach entails the cultivation of self-confidence, innovation, and the capacity to experiment with new pedagogical strategies. By engaging in these practices, educators can foster adaptive and reflective teaching methods that align with the demands of digitalized education.

Another important dimension of digital professional development is personalization. Personalization in this context is facilitated by using diverse digital tools that enable educators to select professional development resources tailored to their prior experience, subject specialization, and individual interests. By allowing teachers to engage with content that is most relevant to their professional trajectories, personalization fosters greater motivation, autonomy, and effectiveness in the continuous development of digital competencies.

Figure 2. Cyclical models of professional development illustrating continuous learning through mentoring, consultation, practice, reflection, and improvement within digitalized educational contexts (Avalos, 2011)



Personalization has been emphasized as a crucial factor in ensuring highly effective professional development within digitalized education systems. As noted by (Antonov & Ivanova, 2021) personalization enables educators to engage with professional development resources that are tailored to their specific needs, thereby supporting both hard and soft skill acquisition. On the one hand, personalization fosters the development of hard skills, such as the creation of digital content and the effective use of technological tools. On the other hand, it also strengthens soft skills, including collaboration,

communication, and reflective practice. This dual focus highlights the importance of personalized approaches in cultivating well-rounded digital competencies among educators.

Collaboration represents another significant dimension of professional growth in digitalized educational environments. Digital media facilitates the creation of professional learning communities that extend beyond the boundaries of individual schools, enabling teachers to share practices, exchange experiences, and collectively enhance their pedagogical approaches. Within collaborative digital environments, educators are afforded opportunities to innovate, co-create instructional strategies, and mitigate the risk of professional isolation often associated with online teaching. Such collaboration not only strengthens professional identity but also fosters resilience and adaptability in navigating the challenges of digital education.

According to (Tregubova, Shibankova, & Kats, 2020) collaborative models of professional growth support teachers in cultivating adaptability and encourage them to assume diverse roles in their professional development, including those of facilitators and co-creators of knowledge. Institutional support remains a critical factor in ensuring the success of digital professional development, as it provides the necessary resources, structures, and guidance for educators to thrive in digitally enhanced learning environments.

Comparative studies on teacher professional development in digitalized education consistently highlight several enabling factors. Research shows that infrastructure accessibility, regulated time allocation, and national or international collaboration networks are crucial in promoting teachers' active involvement in digital professional development. These elements not only provide the structural support necessary for participation but also foster a sense of belonging to broader professional communities. Importantly, such conditions have been found to positively influence teachers' attitudes toward ICT integration in classroom practice, making them more receptive to adopting digital tools and pedagogies. Together, these factors contribute to a more supportive environment for teachers, reinforcing the idea that professional development in the digital age is not only about individual effort but also about systemic and institutional backing.

In the absence of institutional support, digitalization is more likely to result in increased workload and heightened stress levels among teachers. Effective digital professional development is therefore closely linked to the broader dimensions of educational quality and equity. Teachers equipped with strong digital competencies are better positioned to create inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse student needs. Moreover, such competencies enhance teachers' capacity to respond effectively to crises and emergencies, ensuring continuity of learning in challenging circumstances.

This underscores the strategic importance of institutional backing in fostering equitable and resilient digital education systems.

Consequently, (Antonov & Ivanova, 2021) underscores the importance of teacher professional development as a cornerstone for achieving inclusive and equitable quality education, as well as for advancing and sustaining lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is equally essential to recognize the broader contribution of these processes to overarching social and educational goals, since effective professional development not only strengthens individual teacher competencies but also enhances the collective capacity of education systems to respond to societal change and digital transformation.

Research methodology

In this regard, the research methodology employed in the present study is qualitative literature analysis. Broadly, this approach involves systematic review and interpretation of scholarly studies related to teacher professional development within digitalized educational contexts. The analysis encompasses conceptual contributions, empirical findings, and policy-oriented studies, thereby offering a comprehensive perspective on the subject. By integrating diverse strands of literature, the study seeks to construct a wide-ranging understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with digital professional development.

The methodology adopted in this study is structured around three major steps. First, the selection of relevant literature was conducted to ensure the inclusion of sources directly addressing teacher professional development in digitalized education. Second, the chosen texts were subjected to systematic reading and codification, allowing for the identification of key arguments, methodological approaches, and outcomes. Third, the data was categorized into thematic clusters, enabling the recognition of recurring patterns and concepts. This methodological approach facilitates the development of a well-articulated perspective on the integration processes associated with digital professional development. Furthermore, it supports theory-building by employing comparative analysis across diverse studies, thereby strengthening the conceptual foundation of the research.

4. Results

The analysis of the reviewed literature reveals several consistent findings regarding teacher professional development in digitalized educational contexts. One of the most prominent insights concerns the recognition of professional development as a constant necessity rather than a voluntary or occasional process. Studies consistently demonstrate that digitalization

accelerates transformations in teaching practices, thereby making continuous learning indispensable for educators. In this sense, professional development is not merely an option but a structural requirement for teachers to remain effective and responsive within rapidly evolving digital learning environments.

Another major finding that emerged from the analysis is the centrality of digital competence in the construction of professional development frameworks. Scholarly literature emphasizes that digital professional development extends beyond the acquisition of technical ICT skills to encompass the critical evaluation of digital tools, as well as ethical considerations in their use. Moreover, professional development schemes that integrate digital competence contribute to building teachers' confidence, empowering them to adopt innovative practices in the classroom. In this way, digital competence functions not only as a technical skillset but also as a catalyst for pedagogical transformation and professional empowerment.

Personalization is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in the success of professional development programs. Research highlights the advantages and effectiveness of approaches that grant teachers autonomy to select learning pathways aligned with their individual needs and aspirations. Personalized professional development not only supports differentiated skill acquisition—ranging from technical digital competencies to pedagogical innovation—but also fosters intrinsic motivation for self-directed learning. By empowering educators to take ownership of their professional growth, personalization contributes to sustained engagement and long-term effectiveness in digitalized education contexts.

Collaboration has also emerged as a significant outcome of digital professional development initiatives. Digital platforms facilitate the creation of professional learning communities that extend beyond the boundaries of individual institutions. Within these communities, teachers engage in collaborative knowledge sharing, dialogue, and joint problem-solving activities. Such interactions not only foster innovation but also mitigate the risk of professional isolation, particularly in web-based, online, or blended learning environments. By enabling sustained collaboration, digital professional development strengthens collective expertise and enhances the overall resilience of teaching practices in the digital era.

Finally, particular emphasis is placed on the findings related to institutional support for teachers, as this factor significantly influences the outcomes of professional development. Teachers who have access to adequate digital infrastructure, receive guidance from educational management teams, and align their practices with national or international competence frameworks are better positioned to reflect on and advance their professional growth.

Conversely, in the absence of such institutional support, digitalization risks exacerbating workload and stress rather than fostering professional development. These findings highlight the necessity of adopting a holistic and continuous approach to teacher development, ensuring that professional growth is sustained and responsive to the demands of digitalized education.

5. Findings

Through an analysis of the reviewed literature, several major consequences concerning teacher professional development in a digitalized field of education have emerged. To begin with, a need for perpetual professional development is underscored in a major group for effective teaching in a technologically enhanced context.

An increasing number of teachers have become reliant on continuous professional development to successfully navigate accelerated technological change. The literature further emphasizes the need for teacher development in digital skills, which requires the integration of both technological and pedagogical competencies. This integration is crucial not only for the effective evaluation and application of digital tools but also for addressing ethical considerations and harnessing the creative potential offered by ICT. In this way, digital professional development equips educators with the capacity to innovate while maintaining reflective and responsible practices in their teaching.

Third, personalization contributes significantly to the effectiveness of professional development activities. Programs and initiatives that grant teachers the autonomy to select learning pathways tailored to their professional needs and aspirations have consistently demonstrated higher levels of participation and engagement. Moreover, teachers' reliance on access to digital infrastructure is evident in their increased involvement when professional development activities are aligned with national competence frameworks. These findings underscore the importance of integrating personalization with institutional and systemic support, thereby maximizing the impact and sustainability of digital professional development.

6. Discussion

These findings reinforce the relevance and foundational role of teacher professional development in ensuring the effective and efficient integration of technology within education systems. The results highlight the central importance of ongoing professional development as a means of equipping teachers to respond adaptively to the dynamic processes of digitalization. Continuous engagement in professional learning thus emerges as a structural necessity, enabling educators to sustain pedagogical innovation while maintaining resilience in the face of rapid technological change.

The emphasis on teacher digital competence development evident in the findings reinforces international imperatives that recognize teacher agency as central to effective and efficient teaching and learning in technology-based and technology-enhanced settings. These results also highlight the critical interplay between teacher motivation and institutional support, demonstrating that professional development outcomes are most successful when embedded within systemic processes and policy frameworks. Consequently, teacher development cannot be understood in isolation from broader institutional structures; rather, it must be situated within holistic strategies that integrate individual ad agency with organizational and policy-level support.

7. Conclusion

The findings derived from this study confirm the role of teacher professional development as a fundamental requirement in guiding the evolution of the educational environment toward a digitalized model. Professional development emerges as a cornerstone for ensuring both the quality and sustainability of educational processes, equipping teachers with the competencies necessary to adapt to technological transformation while maintaining inclusive and equitable practices. In this way, continuous investment in teacher development is positioned not merely as supportive, but as essential to the long-term resilience and effectiveness of digitalized education systems.

As digitization continues to play a vital role in the evolution of teaching and learning models, the role of the educator is increasingly expected to expand in scope and professionalism. The results derived from the reviewed literature make clear that professional development has become a strategic necessity rather than a supplementary activity. In this context, teacher professional development functions as a critical mechanism for equipping educators with the competencies required to navigate digital transformation, ensuring that they remain adaptive, innovative, and aligned with the demands of contemporary education systems.

One of the key findings of this investigation is that effective teacher professional development in digitalized education must be understood as a continuous and long-term process that incorporates the principles of lifelong learning. Short-term or fragmented initiatives aimed at teacher training have proven insufficient in addressing the rapid pace of technological change, which evolves within increasingly compressed timeframes. Consequently, sustained and structured professional development emerges as a strategic necessity, ensuring that educators remain adaptive, innovative, and capable of integrating digital tools meaningfully into teaching and learning practices.

Moreover, teacher professional development that integrates formal, non-formal, and informal learning opportunities appears to enhance teachers' capacity to adapt to change and to engage with innovative teaching practices. By drawing on diverse forms of learning, educators are better equipped to cope with the demands of digital transformation and to cultivate flexible, creative approaches to pedagogy. This multidimensional perspective on professional development underscores the importance of lifelong learning pathways that extend beyond structured training programs, thereby fostering resilience and sustaining professional growth.

The findings also emphasize that digital competence is a multidimensional construct, encompassing technological, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions. A teacher who develops comprehensive professional capabilities can apply technological tools in ways that facilitate inclusive curricula while simultaneously engaging in critical reflection on their educational potential. In this sense, digital competence extends beyond technical proficiency, functioning as a framework for responsible innovation and the meaningful integration of ICT into teaching and learning processes.

Models that emphasize personalized and collaborative forms of professional development demonstrate a markedly higher potential for fostering teacher engagement and intrinsic motivation. By enabling educators to pursue individualized learning pathways while simultaneously participating in professional learning communities, such models cultivate both autonomy and collective growth. This dual emphasis not only strengthens teachers' commitment to continuous learning but also enhances the sustainability of professional development through shared knowledge, peer support, and collaborative innovation.

Without adequate institutional and systemic support, digitalization risks overburdening educators rather than empowering them professionally. Therefore, the findings point to the urgent need for holistic, sustainable, and far-reaching professional development strategies that place teachers at the core of the digital transformation of education. Empowering educators through continuous professional development is not simply desirable but essential for shaping a resilient and future-oriented education system. In this way, teacher development becomes a cornerstone for building a better tomorrow, ensuring that digitalization enhances rather than undermines professional growth and pedagogical innovation.

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Early digital education and technological skills development: element IT as a model for sustainable social and educational innovation

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Abstract: The rapid integration of digital technologies into everyday life has highlighted the urgent need for early digital education and the development of technological skills. The Element IT project in Albania represents an innovative initiative aimed at introducing digital literacy and coding skills in approximately 400 primary schools, equipping young students with essential competencies for the digital era. This study examines Element IT as a model for sustainable educational innovation, with the aim of analyzing its role in promoting early digital competences, exploring its pedagogical and infrastructural components, and assessing its relevance for the future development of digital education in Albania. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data from teacher questionnaires with qualitative analysis of curricular documents and digital platform data. The findings indicate that Element IT has a positive impact on students’ digital literacy, coding skills, and computational thinking, while also increasing student motivation and engagement. Teachers reported strong alignment between the project activities and the national ICT curriculum, as well as effective use of digital infrastructure and formative assessment tools. Beyond academic skill development, the project contributes to reducing the digital divide and promoting equitable access to digital learning opportunities. The study concludes that Element IT represents a promising and scalable model for early digital education, offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to implement similar initiatives in other contexts.

Keywords: *Digital competence; primary education; coding; computational thinking; Element IT*

1. Introduction

These days, children, sometimes referred to as digital natives or members of Generation Z and Generation Alpha, have grown up in a technology-driven world with digital tools woven into their daily lives. For that reason, for these generations, more consistent online activity and the consumption of digital resources to find information is a normal part of life, not a behavior that needs to be frowned upon. On the contrary, the teachers whose professional formation takes place before the digital age still tend to adopt certain instructional strategies, but these are very different from the learning strategies commonly adopted by the children today. However, within the past few years we have realised the urgent necessity to reconsider teacher education and professional development considering technology, online education and the content for multimedia teaching and learning. This need became even more acute during the COVID-19 pandemic that caused a widespread use of digital tools in educational environments. Education and technology are inextricably linked, but it is still often observed that the integration of digital technologies will often remain behind the existing approach to real-world classroom engagement. However, we are expected to become more mindful as a teacher of changing learning environments, responding to new and evolving trends in the classroom, and utilizing digital tools to both enhance the quality of instruction. For the first time in 2020, teachers began seeing that technology in education has pedagogical possibilities and is worth cultivating. Stauffer (2022) insists that skills that are necessary for the twenty-first century are critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration as well as digital competence. From this point of view it is important to remember that universities are training graduates whose work will continue between 2030 and 2060. In teacher education programs, future teachers will be responsible for educating pupils who are expected to be active members of society between 2045 and 2075. This means that teacher preparation should focus on the application, assessment, and customization of various pedagogical strategies and instructional structures. And that training should align with recent educational trends, making educators ready to use such innovative strategies in everyday classrooms. In Albania, the necessity of educational modernization and of reducing the digital divide has triggered the introduction of national and donor-funded projects to strengthen digital education. In this regard, the Albanian-American Development Foundation (AADF) and national education institutions led the Element IT project, which comprises an organised intervention to provide ICT and coding education to the elementary school

level. Although digital competencies are increasingly indispensable, such systematic teaching and learning of ICT methods in the primary school often does not offer a thoroughgoing coverage among the students of the traditional teaching system. Such a gap could affect their preparedness to use digital technologies at school later in their life. In this regard, the current research, based on the Project, investigates Element IT as an innovational educational intervention; through analyzing its objectives, implementation, and perceived contribution to training in digital competencies for primary school students. In particular, the study intends to: • explore the contribution of Element IT to early digital literacy and coding skills; • explore its pedagogical and infrastructural components; • evaluate its importance for the future development of digital education in Albania. This study addresses the theme of the conference *Shaping the Future: Education & Innovation in a Digital Society* by exploring how education at an early age via formal educational initiatives related to ICT and coding can enhance innovation, inclusiveness, and sustainable learning reform along various educational trajectories. It could just as well be the Element IT project provides practical approaches where future-ready learners can grow and flourish in a rapidly changing digital society.

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Reading independently, literacy can be conceptualized as being a key competency for understanding that links all subjects. Casey et al. highlight this point: Current concepts of literacy are increasingly determined by technology, with rapidly emerging digital tools radically shifting approaches to reading and writing in multimedia settings (Casey et al., 2009). This, in turn, changes the idea of literacy from focusing on text skills to being more multimodal in the realm of communication. Studies have demonstrated that early digital technologies significantly influence young children’s literacy development. When children notice the literacy habits of adults who rely heavily on digital tools, they try to model those behaviors while reading and writing on digital devices or through the Internet (Beschoner & Hutchison, 2013). These are formative interactions that shape how children view, create and engage with information from an early age. Digital literacy was developed to address the need for education in computer literacy, one strand that is in line with a growing trend in education for computer science. At the outset, most of the educational goals were mainly about the education of students’ information culture, a critical dimension of the approach that was algorithmic and logical thinking (Ibashova & Pervin, 2013). Computer literacy in that era defined a range of activities ranging from basic informatics knowledge

through to basic computing skills. These core competences have developed over the years into broader conceptualizations of digital literacy including critical thinking, problem solving and communicating in digital spaces. The cultivation of such digital competences is increasingly a core aim of modern systems of education, at the primary level of education, where foundational cognitive and learning competences are developed. Digital competence is the confident, critical and responsible application of digital technologies for learning, communication, content creation, safety, and problem solving (European Commission, 2017). This early exposure to these competences is critical for students’ long-term academic achievement, social inclusion, and adaptation to technological progress, especially in a digital society. The European Commission's Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) offers a detailed theoretical framework for the question of digital competence, comprising five interrelated spheres: (1) information and data literacy, (2) communication and collaboration, (3) digital content creation, (4) safety, and

(5) problem solving (European Commission, 2017). We can gradually build a balanced set of skills into primary education, moving away from basic technology to skills like critical thinking, creativity and so forth. Digital learning environments fit into both perspectives of learning, where students are able to work on learning in the moment and with the support of a teacher (or mentor). One important notion associated with developing digital competence is ‘computational thinking’, which involves the ‘ability to break down a complex problem into components, understand general patterns, and produce algorithmic solutions’ (Wing, 2006). Evidence suggests that these elements, such as logic, creativity and problem-solving that are universal (OECD, 2021), are facilitated when children engage with coding in early childhood programs. Skills like these are necessary building blocks for lifelong learning in the age of technology. Thus, within this context, the Element IT intervention undertaken by AADF is a remarkable example of how international guidelines on the implementation of digital education in a national primary education scheme can be translated and achieved. This project is designed to provide students in the early grades with the skills to code and use ICT through a formal curriculum, digital infrastructure and targeted teacher training. In doing so, Element IT introduces core values of the DigComp framework and principles of constructivist learning, into general-use classroom settings. Element IT serves as a case study for how early development of digital skills can be fostered, with an integrated approach, covering pedagogy, technology and capacity building. Because it targets primary schools, the project tackles an important phase at which perspectives on learning and technology develop. Element IT also helps to

mitigate the digital divide by providing access to digital tools and learning opportunities within the formal education system for students of varying socio-economic positions. Thus, studying Element IT as a case study sheds useful light on the successes and challenges of digital education at the junior primary level. This project is an example of how theory-driven ways of learning and education can materialize in operational interventions that support innovation and future education in a digital society.

3. Methodology

This research is qualitative and mixed-methods research is used. The quantitative aspect serves to process quantitative data gathered from a series of questionnaires written by teachers involved in Element IT project and from performance data collected on the CodeMonkey platform. The first part relates to teachers perceptions about their experience and reflection regarding implementing digital tools and teaching practices. This mixed-methods methodology lends itself to a better understanding of the impact of the project through the combination of measurable outcomes with contextual and experiential data. The study is conducted as a descriptive case study and the case study focuses on the Element IT project as they implemented a national digital education initiative in Albanian primary schools. The case study details the progression the project had from the inception of a pilot with 100 schools to the expansion of about 400 schools. Such a design allows for in-depth exploration of the role digital infrastructure, curriculum alignment and digital platforms play in students' digital competences, based on real-world educational contexts. The study sample involves the primary school teachers carrying out the implementation of the Element IT project. A survey was completed by 120 teachers. These teachers were recruited from the schools involved in either the early (100 schools) and an expansion (400 schools) phase of the project. The schools with the initiative had one interactive smartboard and sixteen laptops in the different schools. The second category is students who work in pairs and each student has an individual digital account on CodeMonkey. While students are not directly surveyed, their learning is tracked using the platform's digital data. Methodological triangulation was achieved by collecting data with the inclusion of multiple instruments. Teacher Questionnaire: It is a structured format in which both closed-ended (Likert scale) and open-ended questions were given to the teachers. Data on infrastructure adequacy, teaching and learning practices, student engagement, development of digital competence, and assessment process were collected by the questionnaire. Digital platform data - Student performance data were obtained by using CodeMonkey platform (the

students’ progress, completed levels, and errors will automatically be entered and visualized in the teacher dashboard). These data were integrated as indicators of students’ level of learning development and for formative assessments. Document analysis – Official teaching plans of Grade 1-2 and national ICT curriculum documents were examined to ensure that the Element IT project activities were in alignment to the prescribed learning outcomes. Quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaire items and statistics generated through the platform were descriptively analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data collected from open-ended questionnaire respondents and document analysis were evaluated using thematic content analysis, enabling the identification of relevant, recurring themes in areas of digital competence development, computational thinking, student engagement, and practice in instruction. A combination of quantitative and qualitative findings allowed for an overall understanding of the Element IT project as the case study.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

The research aims are clear and the findings are presented here in direct relation to the research objectives, using relevant data obtained via teacher questionnaires and platform-based evidence from the Element IT project. On the first objective, which was the analysis of the role of Element IT in developing early digital literacy and coding skills, the results showed a very positive impact. Overall among teachers, 88% reported that basic digital skills improved by students participating in the project, while 85% observed students gained confidence in their use of digital tools. And 82% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that coding tasks promoted the development of computational thinking skills like logical reasoning and problem- solving. This finding indicates that early exposure to structured coding activities promotes foundational digital competence in their students.

Table 1. Role of Element IT in promoting early digital literacy and coding skills

Statement	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Students improved basic digital skills	3	9	51	37
Increased confidence using digital tools	2	11	48	39
Coding supports computational	4	14	46	36

thinking				
Independent problem- solving in coding	6	15	44	35

Regarding the second goal, which examined the pedagogical and infrastructural side of the project, the results indicate that a strong integration of technology and good teaching practices are essential. Most of teachers (84%) agreed with the idea of using interactive smartboards for more effective lesson performance, and some 68% claimed that the number of laptops was adequate for classroom work. 88% of all teachers also found it helpful to group them in pairs to promote both collaboration and peer learning in the class. In pedagogy, 88% of participants agreed the CodeMonkey platform improved student motivation, and 81% indicated that the students were able to work independently from their personal accounts.

Table 2. Pedagogical and infrastructural components

Statement	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Smartboard enhances lesson effectiveness	6	10	48	36
Laptop availability is sufficient	14	18	44	24
Pair work improves collaboration	4	8	47	41
CodeMonkey increases motivation	3	9	46	42
Students work independently	4	15	49	32

Regarding the second goal, which examined the pedagogical and infrastructural side of the project, the results indicate that a strong integration of technology and good teaching practices are essential. Most of teachers (84%) agreed with the idea of using interactive smartboards for more effective lesson performance, and some 68% claimed that the number of laptops was adequate for classroom work. 88% of all teachers also found it helpful to group them in pairs to promote both collaboration and peer learning in the class. In pedagogy, 88% of participants agreed the CodeMonkey platform improved student motivation, and 81% indicated that the students were able to work independently from their personal accounts.

Table 3. Assessment and monitoring through CodeMonkey

Statement	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
Dashboard supports progress monitoring	2	8	50	40
Clear evidence for assessment	4	10	47	39
Data used to adapt teaching	7	18	45	30

The findings provided by the teacher questionnaires' quantitative analysis largely resonate with previous research that underscores the crucial role of early digital competence development. The large percentages of teachers reporting enhancement in students' digital literacy and computational thinking reflect a similar feature in European Commission's DigComp framework by which problem-solving and digital content creation are core competencies (European Commission, 2017). Additionally, these findings confirm Wing's (2006) point, that computational thinking should be introduced at an early age because it is necessary for cognitive skills that are transferable into other cognitive areas. The highest level of teacher agreement of improvement in student motivation (88%) points to constructivist learning theories, emphasizing active engagement, experiential learning and learning through practice (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978), and this study is therefore a solid argument for teaching this concept in the classroom from a pedagogical standpoint. Game-based learning environments like CodeMonkey also allow students to experiment and fail, building knowledge incrementally, an approach aligned with OECD (2021) recommendations for student-centered and interactive digital educational methods. Practically the results also show that just infrastructure isn't enough so there needs to be good pedagogical integration. Most teachers rated these digital tools with high values, although just 68% for laptops, demonstrating that they still need investment, and more investment needs to be made. These findings emphasize the need for infrastructure investments to be linked with classroom practices, teacher education and instructional structure to optimise its educational benefits through digital technology. At policy level, the level of overlap between the Element IT project and the national ICT curriculum (over 80% concordance) indicates that the project could be used as a standard project in other digital learning projects in Albania. Element IT is contributing to policy objectives around equity, inclusion, and long-term digital transformation in

education by integrating digital competence development in the formal education system. Overall, our findings suggest that Element IT represents a desirable and extensible model for adapting digital competence development to primary education, with clear consequences for educational policy formulation and practice in Albania.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study explored the Element IT project as a case study on developing digital competences at an early age in primary education in Albania. The results show that Element IT makes a significant contribution to early digital literacy, coding ability, and computational thinking among primary school students. The high level of teacher agreement on the improvements in students' digital skills, motivation, and problem-solving skills reflects positively on its educational impact. The pedagogical and infrastructural aspects of the project are also emphasized by this analysis. These interactive smartboards, laptops, structured coding tasks, and the use of the CodeMonkey platform allow students to learn by doing, and for formative assessment with immediate feedback from the teacher. These elements help to achieve an effective development of digital competence in the national ICT curriculum for Grades 1-4. In general, the research contributes to extant literature in terms of empirical evidence from the Albanian context for the effectiveness of early digital education interventions. Considering Element IT as an educational intervention at scale, the analysis can contribute to the development of educational practice and policy, specifically to integrating digital competencies in primary school teaching. However, this study is not without limitations. First, the study relies largely on teacher-reported information collected through questionnaires that may be sensitive to the teachers' subjective perceptions and response bias. Second, the study does not provide a direct evaluation of students' learning outcomes or longitudinal data to help assess the long-term effects of the Element IT project on developing digital competencies. Further, as the study is a descriptive case study of a single educational project, data is situated at the individual and not representative of other educational contexts. The different patterns of school infrastructure, teacher digital readiness, and conditions for implementing digital in practice could change the outcomes evident. To overcome these disadvantages, future studies might draw on a variety of data sources (e.g., classroom observation, student performance evaluations, and interviews with a range of stakeholders) to support their findings. Longitudinal analysis of the continuing effect of early digital education programs would also be informative. Moreover, the adoption of comparative studies on analogous digital education initiatives in

different national contexts might help identify the best practices for early digital competence development.

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Upgrading digital competences of pre-primary teachers through innovative education

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Abstract: The authors in their contribution present an example of good practice aimed at upgrading pre-primary teachers' digital competences through their innovative education. At first methodological principles of a course created for the target group of teachers working in kindergartens, aim of which is to increase their digital literacy, are described. Subsequently there is described how the learning achievements of the teachers - participants of the course, were observed and assessed based on relevant self-assessment tools and how practical outputs of them were presented. The discussion is focused on the interpretation of the observed changes in the level of the course participants' digital skills and their significance in terms of the suitability of the innovative education in pre-primary education. The research study is designed as a descriptive-analytical demonstration of good practice, the aim of which is to highlight the possibilities of developing teachers' digital competences through innovative education and their subsequent application in kindergarten pedagogical practice. The educational process within the course

was based on connection of the theoretical foundations, practical demonstrations, independent study and practical tasks carried out in a real educational environment. What was emphasized was active participation of teachers, pedagogical verification of acquired knowledge and reflection on their own pedagogical activities.

Keywords: *digital technologies, e-learning courses, pre-primary education, digital skills of kindergarten teachers*

1.Introduction

The era which we are living currently can be called a digital era, as digital technologies are radically transforming all aspects of our everyday life as well as operation of each sector of our society, including education. Digital technologies the further the more influence teaching and learning processes and are becoming an integral part of operating educational institutions at all levels of education. Pre-primary education in kindergartens is no exception among that. Moreover, integration of kindergartens into the educational process is currently considered one of the key prerequisites for quality education in the 21st century. Although the essence of the digitalization of education is rather about its transformation into an integral part of that digitalized world or society, than about developing digital skills, appropriate level of digital skills (or digital literacy) of either teachers or students and the youth, or in general all citizens, is a compulsory prerequisite of the above transformation. The need for systematic and professionally anchored development of teachers' digital competences is reflected in the European perspective through the *Digital Competence Framework for Educators - DigCompEdu* (Redecker, 2017). In the context of pre-primary education, this approach is extremely important, as the integration of digital technologies must respect the developmental specifics of preschool aged children, the didactic principles of pre-primary education and the goals of upbringing and education in kindergartens. In this sense, digital technologies do not represent a replacement for traditional forms of learning, but their meaningful complement for supporting development of children's cognitive, communicative and creative abilities.

In 2020 the Ministry of Education (in that time Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, nowadays Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic) had announced a curricular reform of the regional school system (i.e. of primary and lower secondary schools, which in Slovakia are integrated in so-called basic education, or basic schools, as their first and second levels with grades 1 – 5

and 6 - 9), which already from 2021 has been successfully in progress (MŠ, 2018). This reform has become a component part of the National Program for the Development of Education. The new National Program, named *The Educated Slovakia 2035 Strategy*, defines for the next decade a framework for transformation of the whole system of education, i.e. not only of the regional school system, but from pre-primary education through primary, secondary and higher education, even up to lifelong education. Its primary goal is to anchor, cultivate and accelerate the processes that were started by the curricular reforms in 2021-2025 (MŠ, 2020).

To respond to the European Commission school policy recommendations included in the document *Digital Competence Framework for Educators – DigCompEdu* (Redecker, 2017) and to support Slovak government's intentions stated in the document *The Educated Slovakia 2035 Strategy* (MŠ, 2020), the Ministry of Education initiated a national project *Digital Transformation of Education and Schools (DiTEdu)* which should serve as an implementation tool enabling the transfer of the conceptual starting points of national and European strategic documents, including the DigCompEdu framework, into concrete pedagogical practice of Slovakia. The DiTEdu project creates space for practically oriented professional development of teachers and supports also the systematic improvement of digital competences of teachers in the kindergarten environment (DiTEdu, 2023). To enhance systematic development of digital competences exactly of the pre-primary teachers, as part of the DiTEdu project, an innovative education program focused on developing digital competences of kindergarten teachers was designed and implemented. It is a kind of tailor-made program, as it reflects the specifics of pre-primary education. Hereinafter the theoretical background and methodology of the above course, as well as learning achievements and experiences resulted from its completing are described.

2. Theoretical Background of the Course

Pre-primary education is aimed at systematically supporting the child's developmental prerequisites in the areas of cognitive, social, emotional and volitional development, which form the basis of the child's school competence. The development of these competences should take place through experiential learning, play, direct experience and the child's active participation in educational activities (Pupíková et al., 2025). Digital technologies in the pre-primary education environment serve mainly as a support for the teacher's pedagogical activity, not as a tool for direct teaching of school skills. They allow improving the preparation of educational activities, creating stimulating didactic materials, documenting the learning

process and reflecting on pedagogical activities, thereby expanding the possibilities of specifically supporting the development of a child's abilities in accordance with the principles of pre-primary education. Pupíková et al. (2025) point out the need to connect theoretical foundations with practical suggestions for activities that can be used in pedagogical practice. Digital technologies can support this process by enabling teachers to create, modify, and individualize educational materials in accordance with children's developmental needs. They also create opportunities for recording observations, planning educational activities, and ongoing pedagogical reflection, which is essential for supporting the achievement of school competence. In foreign research focused on pre-primary education, digital technologies are increasingly included as part of the professional environment of a kindergarten teacher, which supports the quality of the educational process. Some studies emphasize that the pedagogical value of digital technologies in pre-primary education is conditioned by the way they are integrated into pedagogical planning, reflection and documentation of learning, with the teacher's pedagogical decision-making playing a decisive role (Otterborn, Schönborn & Hultén, 2019; Lindeman, Svensson & Enochsson, 2021). Research shows that digital technologies can significantly support the professional activities of kindergarten teachers, especially in the areas of creating and adapting teaching materials, individualizing educational activities such as storytelling, and systematically recording children's progress (Rahiem, 2021; Al-Abdullatif, 2022). Such use of digital tools allows teachers to respond to children's individual developmental needs in a targeted manner and create a stimulating educational environment in line with the principles of inclusive pre-primary education (Berezovska et.al., 2025). Studies highlight the need for appropriate integration of digital technologies and systematic professional development of teachers, focused on the practical use of digital tools in pedagogical practice. Without targeted support and training, the use of digital technologies often remains limited to administrative or technical tasks, without significant pedagogical benefits (Luo, Berson & Berson 2021; Alelaimat, Ihmeideh & Alkhawaldeh, 2020). Research also warns that inappropriate or pedagogically ungrounded use of digital technologies can lead to limiting children's active movement, reducing social interaction and reinforcing passive forms of learning that are not in line with the developmental needs of preschool children. The risk is particularly high when digital technologies are used without a clear pedagogical purpose, which can replace natural forms of learning based on play, exploration and direct experience (Kasmiati, 2025). The key factor is the kindergarten teacher, his pedagogical decision-making, the ability to regulate the time, content and form of using digital tools and to reflect on their contribution to the educational

process. Without adequate training, the formalized use of digital technologies may occur, which does not bring the expected pedagogical effect (Nikolopoulou & Gialamas, 2015; Undheim, 2022).

It follows from the above that the use of digital technologies in pre-primary education requires systematic professional development of kindergarten teachers, focused not only on the development of technical skills, but above all on the pedagogically reflected and safe use of digital tools in accordance with the specifics of pre-primary education. Innovative education oriented towards practical tasks, the creation of digital didactic materials, the documentation of pedagogical activity and the reflection of the educational process creates space for minimizing risks and supporting the meaningful use of digital technologies in the kindergarten environment. These theoretical foundations represented a framework for the empirical analysis of the development of digital competencies of kindergarten teachers presented in the following part of the paper.

3. Methodological Background of the Course

As it has been already stated to enhance systematic development of digital competences of the target groups of pre-primary teachers an innovative education program for them was designed and implemented. The given program was created on the platform of the Moodle education environment in form of an electronic course. The course has been offered to kindergarten teachers as a possibility to undergo it as an innovative education carried out within the national project *Digital Transformation of Education and Schools* (NIVAM, 2023). The course was carried out in a combined online format that combined synchronous and asynchronous educational activities. The basic organizational framework of the course was the Moodle educational environment which served to make study materials available, assign tasks, and communicate with participants. The training also included regular synchronous online meetings conducted through virtual rooms in the *Jitsi* system, which enabled direct interaction between the lecturer and the training participants. During the online meetings, the functions and capabilities of selected digital tools usable in kindergarten pedagogical practice were systematically explained to the participants, such as tools for creating visual didactic materials, worksheets, and interactive educational outputs. Specifically, content of the course was focused on the work with following three selected software tools which are commonly used in kindergarten learning environment:

- *Canva*, SW tool offering its users a platform for creation of different visual contents (like photo and video editing, or logo and collage

making). In case of the given course, it is a digital means enabling teachers to create various working sheets.

The digital tool Canva was used primarily to support teacher training, which enabled more flexible planning and made educational activities more attractive.

- *Book Creator*, SW web-based offering users to create, publish and read interactive digital books, supports multimedia, allowing users to embed text, images, videos, audio, and drawings. In case of the given course, it is a digital means enabling teachers to involve children also in various educational activities through story creation or multimedia design. When creating their own books, teachers and children can either generate their own content (by typing, drawing, or uploading self-made videos, audio files, and images), or they can curate online multimedia resources from the Internet.

Use of the digital tool Book Creator was carried out through simple interactive e-books creation.

- *E-questionnaires* – creation of own questionnaires for education purposes by means of the SW tools *Google Forms* and *EduPage*.

For the purposes of the course its participants created electronic questionnaires focused on various areas of pedagogical practice, such as obtaining feedback from parents, assessing satisfaction with school activities, planning trips and events, or pedagogical reflection on implemented educational activities. In some cases, electronic questionnaires were also designed as a tool for verifying children's knowledge in cooperation with parents, with questions formulated appropriately to the age of the children and supplemented with visual or multimedia elements.

The emphasis was on the pedagogically meaningful use of digital tools, not on their technical mastery, and the presented examples were based on specific educational situations in pre-primary education. Synchronous online meetings were followed by asynchronous educational activities implemented remotely. The participants were tasked with independently verifying the functionality of the presented digital tools and applying them in the pedagogical practice of kindergartens. Practical tasks included mainly the creation of digital worksheets for preschool children, the preparation of visual educational materials and the implementation of educational activities, in which children, together with teachers, created simple interactive e-books and digital outputs from educational activities (Figure 1). Pedagogical verification of the acquired knowledge took place directly in the kindergarten environment and was focused on assessing the pedagogical adequacy of the digital tools used, their compliance with the goals of pre-primary education and respect for the developmental needs of children. The outputs from the practical tasks were

documented and reflected on by the participants through the Moodle learning environment, where they served as a basis for feedback from the lecturer and for further analysis of the development of teachers' digital competences. This innovative education concept allowed participants to connect theoretical knowledge with experiences from pedagogical practice and supported the development of digital competences of kindergarten teachers through active learning, pedagogical experimentation and reflection on their own activities.

4. Methodology of the Investigation of the Teachers' Digital Competences Level

A part of the carried e-course has been a research study aim of which has been highlighting the possibilities of developing teachers' digital competences through innovative education and their subsequent application in kindergarten pedagogical practice. The key element of the study has been a descriptive-analytical demonstration of good practice resulted from the completed course of the innovative education program by the teachers. The educational process of the course was based on the connection of theoretical foundations, practical demonstrations, independent study and practical tasks carried out in a real educational environment. What was emphasized was active participation of teachers, pedagogical verification of acquired knowledge and reflection on their own pedagogical activities.

Hereinafter results of the first run of the course are presented. The target group of the presented partial research study was a group of 50 participants of the first run of the given innovative education course.

The aim of the empirical analysis has been to point out changes in the level of digital competences of the course participants based on a comparison of input and output indicators, and through analyses of practical outputs from pedagogical verification in the kindergarten environment.

The stated goal could only be achieved if the levels of teachers' digital competences were assessed before the relevant innovative education or at the very beginning of the course. This means that the course participants completed the same self-assessment of their digital competences twice, at the very beginning of the course and then after its completion.

As a tool of the teachers' self-assessment a questionnaire was used, the same for both the input as well as the output assessments. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, from which each part was focused on teachers' competences to use another of the three software tools (listed hereinafter) which were specified as a subject of the course. Alternative options, i.e. the scale points for self-assessment of the individual levels of the digital

competences working with the relevant software tools are included in the descriptions of the graphs presented in Figures 1 - 3.

As is above mentioned, a component part of the course was verification of the knowledge and skills acquired during the course by its participants of the course, and functionality of this knowledge and skills. This verification was done in the kindergarten environment where the participants through microteaching forms presented their output materials. These presentations and feed-back which the participants got to them from their colleagues (but also from the children who were a part of the performed microteaching examples) were beneficial for the teachers to be able to objectively assess the current level of their digital competences (so that their final (output) self-assessment was not based solely on their subjective feelings regarding the extent of the contribution of the completed innovation education to the development of their digital competences).

5. Results - Analysis of the Development of the Course Participants' Digital Competences

The input self-assessment of the digital competences of the target group of the first 50 course participants pointed out different levels of experience of the participants with the use of digital technologies in their pedagogical practice. Most participants declared basic skills in the use of digital tools, while they reported limited experience with the creation of their own digital didactic materials and with the pedagogically targeted use of digital tools in educational activities carried in the kindergartens.

As problematic areas were identified mainly the following ones (see in Figures 1 – 3):

- creation of visually attractive worksheets in Canva,
- systematic documentation of educational activities using electronic questionnaires, and
- the use of digital tools to support children's active participation using the Book Creator application.

In general, digital tools were used by the participants rather sporadically in the initial phase of education.

Among the 50 teachers who had started to attend the first round of the offered innovative education, only 39 completed the course. The output self-assessment of the teachers, who had completed the course, indicated a significant positive shift in area of their digital competences in relation to all three kinds of the software tools which were subject of the given innovative education (see comparison of the graphs presented in Figures 1 – 3).

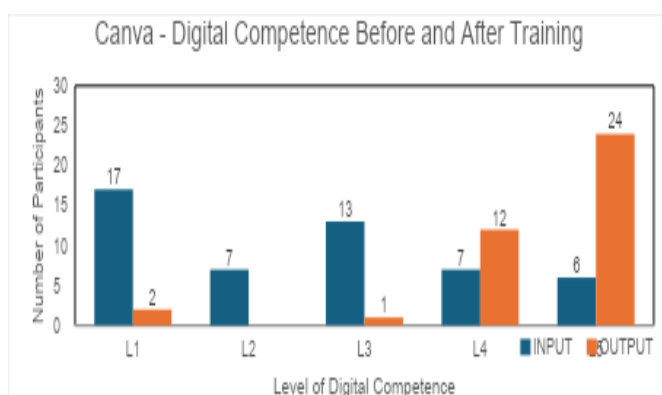


Figure 1: Comparison of the course participants’ digital competence to use the SW tool *Canva* before and after the course completion (Source: own research).

Figure legend: Levels of digital competences to work with the given

SW tool: L1 - I do not know what options it offers; L2 - I know what options it offers but I cannot use them; L3 - I can use the options offered at beginner level; L4 - I can use the options offered at intermediate level; L5 - I can use the options offered at advanced level.

The input data shows that before the start of the innovative education program a significant part of the participants were not familiar with the possibilities which the SW tool *Canva* offers to its users or were unable to use them practically. The highest number of assessments was recorded at level 1 of the given scale (I do not know what options it offers) and level 3 (I can use the options offered at beginner level), with only a smaller part of the teachers declaring either the intermediate or advanced levels of the relevant competences. After completing the innovative education, there was a significant change in the distribution of the recorded self-assessments (levels of the self-assessments). Almost all participants self-assessed level of their competences to work with the *Canva* tool as intermediate or advanced, while majority of them stated the level 5 – competences level to independently create worksheets without using pre-prepared templates (Figure 1).

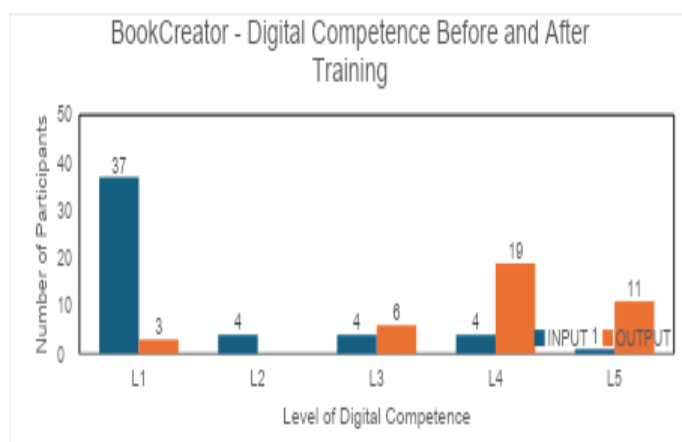


Figure 2: Comparison of the course participants’ digital competence to use the SW tool *Book Creator* before and after the course completion (Source: own research).

Figure legend (levels of digital competences

to work with the given SW tool see at Figure 1)

In case of the SW tool *Book Creator*, input data indicated a very low level of previous experience of the participants with it. Vast majority of teachers reported complete ignorance of the tool, with only isolated cases declaring a beginner or intermediate level of their competences to work with it. After completing the innovative education program, there was a significant increase in the numbers of the self-assessments stated intermediate and advanced levels of the relevant competences (Figure 2).



Figure 3:

Comparison of the course participants' digital competence to create electronic questionnaires

Figure legend:

Levels of digital competence to create electronic questionnaires:

1 - I know about possibilities of their creating but I have no experience with their creation

2 - I can create a questionnaire with simple items of the same kind

3 - I can create a questionnaire also with items of different kinds

Analysis of the input self-assessments regarding teachers' competences to create electronic questionnaires showed that most of the participants of the given course had only theoretical awareness on the possibilities of the electronic questionnaire creation before their participation at the course, but they had not any practical experience. The recorded self-assessments stated mainly the lowest levels of these competences, what indicated also a limited use of digital tools by teachers for obtaining some feedback and pedagogical reflection. However, the output data documented a significant shift towards higher levels of the relevant competences (Figure 3).

An important part of the verification of the functionality of the upgraded digital competences of the kindergarten teachers gained in frame of their participation at the given course of the innovative program was evaluation of assigned practical tasks of the course participants. These outcomes of the course participants were created as an integral part of their pedagogical practice in the kindergartens they have been employed in (presentation applicability and functionality of the created outcomes, examples of the use of

digital technologies in accordance with the specifics of pre-primary education).

6. Conclusions Resulting from the Presented Example of Good Practice

The presented research study should be perceived as an example of good practice, from which one can take over some knowledge, ideas, patterns, inspiration, about how to support kindergarten teachers in their effort to keep up with current challenges of digitalization of education, including the education at pre-primary level. Specifically, it presents an example of good practice how digital competences of pre-primary teachers through innovative education can be upgraded. As very important features of the tailor-made course to achieve the stated purpose, the following should be highlighted:

- Comparison of the input and output teachers' self-assessments of their digital competences proved that the used form of a combined online format that combined synchronous and asynchronous educational activities is suitable for ensuring innovative education of kindergarten teachers. The same can be stated in relation to the used e-course.
- Comparison of the input and output teachers' self-assessments regarding the level of their digital competences (knowledge and skills) clearly points to a significant positive impact of the completed innovative education program on the development of the digital competences of kindergarten teachers. The most significant shift was recorded in areas that were directly linked to practical tasks implemented in pedagogical practice, what confirms the importance of pedagogical verification and active learning of teachers. The results also indicate that the combination of synchronous online meetings, distance learning and practical application in the kindergarten environment represents an effective model of teacher professional development focused on the pedagogically meaningful use of digital technologies in pre-primary education.
- A very important feature of the course design was assigning practical tasks connected with the specifics of the educational environment of the kindergartens (e.g. creation of digital worksheets, simple interactive e-books, digital visual materials, electronic questionnaires as tools for communication with children's parents). Experiences of the lector of the course, as well as the recorded results, proved that this has been a way in which appropriate efficiency of the innovative education was ensured.

- The outputs from the practical tasks were documented and reflected on by the participants through the Moodle learning environment, where they served as a basis for feedback from the lecturer and for further analysis of the development of teachers' digital competences. This innovative education concept allowed participants to connect theoretical knowledge with experiences from pedagogical practice and supported the development of digital competences of kindergarten teachers through active learning, pedagogical experimentation and reflection on their own activities.
- Besides the above these presentations were very beneficiary both in terms of mutual inspiration of participants (regarding the development of didactic materials with a specific focus on the kindergarten environment) and in terms of mutual comparison of the level of one's own digital competences with the level of the others. In addition, they also contributed to mutual consultations on areas that some participants were better at and some were less good at.
- Although involvement of children in creation of some of the assigned practical tasks dominantly support development of children's digital competences, on the secondary level these common activities were significantly beneficiary for development of teachers' critical approaches to evaluation of functionality of the carried education activities within the kindergarten environment.

As the main general conclusion resulted from the above can be stated that comparison of input and output indicators proves positive impact of innovative education on the development of digital competences of kindergarten teachers. The most significant shift was recorded in areas that were directly linked to practical tasks implemented in pedagogical practice, which confirms the importance of pedagogical verification and active learning of teachers. The results also indicate that the combination of synchronous online meetings, distance learning and practical application in the kindergarten environment represents an effective model of teacher professional development focused on the pedagogically meaningful use of digital technologies in pre-primary education.

Besides the above as a main specific conclusion can be stated that after the completion of the innovative education the teachers declared a higher level of confidence in working with the digital tools, a better understanding of their pedagogical use and an increased ability to integrate digital technologies into the planning and implementation of educational activities. A significant shift was recorded especially in area of creating digital teaching materials, such as worksheets, visual educational aids and simple interactive outputs. The participants of the education stated that digital tools allowed them to respond

more flexibly to the individual needs of children and to enrich educational activities with visual and multimedia elements.

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Teacher Well-Being in the Digital Era. Practical Strategies for Primary School Teachers

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Abstract: The rapid digital transformation of education has changed not only teaching methods but also the daily experiences of primary school teachers. While digital tools provide valuable support for teaching and communication, they often increase workload, time pressure, and emotional demands on teachers. This paper focuses on teacher well-being in the digital era, drawing attention to challenges commonly observed in everyday primary school practice. The paper is based on professional experience and qualitative observations from primary classrooms. It explores key factors affecting teacher well-being, including constant digital availability, adaptation to new technologies, and the blurred boundaries between professional and personal life. At the same time, it highlights how digital tools can positively support teachers when they are used in a balanced and purposeful way.

The discussion emphasizes practical and realistic strategies that support teacher well-being, such as peer collaboration, selective use of digital tools, clear communication routines, and supportive school leadership. These strategies are presented as accessible approaches that can be applied in real classroom contexts without adding additional pressure on teachers.

By focusing on the perspective of primary school teachers, this paper contributes to current discussions on education and digital innovation. It aims to support teachers by promoting well-being as a key condition for effective teaching and long-term professional sustainability in a digital society.

Keywords: *teacher well-being, primary education, digital era, digital tools, professional sustainability*

1. Introduction

The integration of digital technologies in primary education in Albania has changed significantly over the past decade, reshaping teaching practices, communication methods, and professional expectations for teachers. In

primary schools, where teachers play a central role not only in academic instruction but also in students’ emotional and social development, these changes have brought both new opportunities and new pressures. Digital technologies have expanded access to resources, made collaboration easier, and enabled innovative teaching approaches; however, they have also increased the pace of work and the complexity of teachers’ professional roles (OECD, 2020).

The global shift toward digital education is not merely a technical update but a pedagogical revolution. According to the European Commission (2022), digital education is a key priority for building resilient education systems. However, for primary school teachers, this transition often happens under pressure. Unlike secondary education, where students are more independent, primary education requires teachers to act as mediators between the digital tool and the young learner. This mediation adds a layer of 'cognitive load' to the teacher’s work. In Albania, this process is further complicated by the speed of the rollout. While the “Smart Labs” initiative represents a major leap forward, the human element—specifically the teacher's readiness and emotional state—is sometimes overshadowed by the focus on hardware and connectivity.

Teacher well-being is a key factor that affects teaching quality, classroom climate, and student outcomes. Research shows that teachers who experience higher levels of well-being are more engaged, more resilient to stress, and more effective in supporting student learning (Day & Gu, 2010; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). On the other hand, prolonged stress, digital overload, and unclear boundaries between work and personal life can negatively affect motivation, job satisfaction, and long-term professional sustainability. These challenges are especially important for primary school teachers, who often manage multiple responsibilities at the same time, including lesson planning, communication with parents, and administrative tasks (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016).

The digital transformation of schools has highlighted the need to rethink how teacher well-being is understood and supported in everyday practice. Rather than seeing well-being as only an individual responsibility, recent approaches emphasize the importance of school culture, supportive leadership, and realistic expectations regarding the use of digital tools (OECD, 2020). In this context, practical strategies that can be applied in real school settings are especially valuable.

Through this paper, I aim to explore teacher well-being in the digital era from the perspective of primary school practice. The focus is on identifying the everyday challenges teachers face and presenting practical strategies that can help maintain balance, professional satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness.

By connecting professional experience with current discussions on digital education, this paper seeks to contribute to a more sustainable and human-centered approach to educational innovation.

2. Literature Review

Research on education in Albania shows that the digitization of schools has become a policy priority in recent years, especially within the frameworks of the National Strategy for Education 2021–2026 and the Digital Agenda for Albania 2022–2026. These policies emphasize the introduction of digital competencies from early grades, the revision of information and communication technology (ICT) curricula, and the implementation of digital platforms and tools across primary and secondary education. However, despite these efforts, digital infrastructure in many schools remains limited, and many teachers still report low confidence in their digital skills. For example, a national survey found that a significant share of teachers assessed their own digital competence as beginner or elementary, indicating an ongoing need for professional development in this area. Moreover, Albania has one of the lowest rates of computers per student in the Western Balkans region, making it challenging to fully integrate technology into everyday teaching. (OECD, 2024)

To support digital education, Albania has launched the Albania Digital Education Project, a major initiative funded by a €27 million loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank. This project aims to equip more than 600 schools with ‘smart labs’—dedicated spaces with ICT equipment and internet connectivity—and to improve internet access for hundreds of thousands of students. A key component of the project is capacity-building programmes for educators, designed to strengthen teachers’ skills in using digital technologies effectively in their teaching practice. The initiative also focuses on reaching students in rural and remote areas who historically have had fewer opportunities for digital learning. (UNESCO, 2021)

In addition to this project, the Ministry of Education and Sports has developed a Digital Education Action Plan 2025–2030, which proposes further investments in digital infrastructure and teacher training. According to news reports, the plan includes creating hundreds of Smart Labs in primary and secondary schools, providing laptops to teachers, expanding high-speed internet, and offering structured ICT and digital pedagogy training to thousands of teachers. The plan also envisions integrating artificial intelligence into teacher training and updating curricula to better prepare students for future technologies. (RTSH, 2025)

International organizations such as UNESCO are also involved in supporting digital education in Albania. For example, programs for integrating Media and Information Literacy (MIL) into teacher training and classroom practice have reached hundreds of teacher trainers, helping them to coach their peers on using digital tools effectively, safely, and ethically. These efforts aim not only to build technical skills but also to strengthen peer collaboration and reflective practice among educators. (UNESCO, 2025)

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain. The digital gap between urban and rural schools continues, and the level of digital infrastructure and equipment varies significantly across regions. Additionally, ongoing professional development for teachers is still a priority, as research shows that without continuous support and structured training, teachers may struggle to integrate digital tools into their teaching in meaningful ways. Scholars and policy analysts emphasize that both infrastructure investment and teacher capacity building must go hand in hand to ensure that digital education reforms truly enhance teaching and learning. (OECD, 2024; UNESCO, 2025)

2.1 The concept of technostress and teacher well-being

Beyond infrastructure and policy, recent research has focused on the psychological impact of technology on educators, often described as "technostress." This term refers to the struggle of individuals to adapt to new technologies in a healthy way. For primary school teachers, technostress is not just about learning how to use a smartboard; it is about the constant pressure to be innovative and the anxiety of technical failures during a lesson.

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2016), when teachers feel that the demands of digital tools exceed their abilities or the time they have available, it leads to emotional exhaustion. In the Albanian context, where many teachers are "digital immigrants" (older generations learning technology later in life), this pressure is even more significant. The transition from traditional chalkboards to digital platforms requires a high level of "digital self-efficacy," which is the belief in one's ability to use technology effectively. Without this confidence, teachers are more likely to experience burnout.

2.2. Digitalization and the blurred boundaries of work-life balance

One of the most challenging aspects of the digital era for primary school teachers is the "always-on" culture. Digital tools like WhatsApp, Viber, and email have made communication with parents and school leadership easier, but they have also blurred the lines between professional and personal life.

Primary school teachers in Albania often manage multiple communication channels. This constant availability means that "work" no longer ends when

the school bell rings. Research suggests that the inability to "disconnect" after hours is a major predictor of stress. When teachers spend their evenings answering parental inquiries or preparing digital slides for the next day, their recovery time is diminished. This lack of boundaries affects their long-term professional sustainability and personal well-being, making it essential to develop strategies that protect the teacher's private time in a digitalized world.

2.3 Digital literacy and pedagogical change

The transition to digital education is not just about using computers; it is about developing a new kind of pedagogical literacy. Recent studies emphasize that teachers must be able to evaluate which digital tools truly enhance learning and which ones just add unnecessary complexity. In the Albanian primary education context, this means moving away from simply showing videos toward more interactive and student-centered uses of technology. However, this change requires significant emotional labor from teachers. Adapting to these new roles requires continuous professional development that addresses both technical skills and the emotional resilience needed to lead a digital classroom."

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This paper is based on a descriptive study that examines how digital technology affects primary school teachers in Albania. The goal is to understand the relationship between the use of digital tools and the stress teachers experience in their daily work. The study combines questionnaire data and classroom observations in order to provide a clearer and more balanced picture of the situation.

3.2 Participants

A total of 59 primary school teachers took part in this research. Most of them are very experienced; about 39% have over 11 years of work, and 33.9% have been in education for over 20 years. Their ages are mostly between 40 and 59. This shows that the data comes from teachers who know the system well and have personally experienced the digital transition in schools.

3.3 Research instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was created by the author for the specific needs of this research. It included 12 questions related to workload, stress connected to digital tools, work-life balance, and institutional support.

The questions were based on common themes found in research about teacher stress and digital demands. The aim was not to measure stress in a clinical sense, but to understand how teachers experience digital tools in their daily work. The questionnaire used agreement-based response options. Although it was not a standardized or previously validated instrument, it was carefully reviewed before distribution to ensure clarity and relevance. This should be considered when interpreting the results.

3.4 Data analysis

I analyzed the data based on the main themes that came out of the teachers' responses.

I compared the percentages from the questionnaire with what I saw during the classroom observations to reach realistic conclusions.

3.5 Ethical considerations

During the work, I made sure that all teachers agreed to participate and understood the purpose of the study. The names of the teachers and schools remain anonymous to protect their privacy.

4. Results / Findings

4.1 Teacher profile and digital access

The survey results show that the participating teachers are mostly experienced professionals. As noted in the methodology, the majority fall within the 40–59 age range, bringing years of traditional teaching experience to the digital era. Regarding infrastructure, almost all teachers (96.6%) reported having access to devices like projectors and smartboards. However, as seen in Table 1, the frequency of use varies.

Table 1. *Frequency of Digital Tool Use among Teachers*

FREQUENCY OF USE	% OF TEACHERS
OFTEN	50.8%
SOMETIMES	37.3%
RARELY	10.2%
ALWAYS	1.7%

While usage is high, internet connectivity remains a challenge. Only 55.9% of teachers reported having functional internet, which often forces them to prepare materials at home and bring them to school on USB drives. This

infrastructure gap is the first hidden factor that adds to a teacher's daily workload.

4.2 Purpose and training

Teachers use technology primarily as a visual aid to make lessons more interesting. Table 2 shows that illustrating lessons with videos and images is the most common activity.

Table 2. *Primary Purpose of Using Digital Tools*

Purpose	% of Teachers
Illustrating lessons (figures, videos, examples)	84.7%
Exercises / practical activities	39%
Motivation / student engagement	23.7%
Explaining scientific content	18.6%
Assessment (tests, quizzes, assignments)	10.2%

In my observations, I saw that students are much more engaged when these tools are used. However, the low percentage for assessment (10.2%) suggests that teachers might need more specific training. Although 64.4% have attended training, the focus seems to be on basic usage rather than advanced pedagogical integration.

4.3 Impact on well-being and workload

The most critical part of this study concerns the emotional and professional impact of these tools. Table 3 breaks down how teachers perceive their workload and the support they receive.

Table 3. *Teachers' Perceptions of Workload, Stress, and Support*

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Partially agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Digital tools increase my workload	6.8%	18.6%	30.5%	5.1%	39%
I use digital tools outside official hours	3.4%	20.3%	15.3%	11.9%	49.2%
Digital tools increase my stress	13.6%	13.6%	27.1%	13.6%	32.2%

My school provides sufficient technical and professional support	1.7%	42.4%	28.8%	15.3%	11.9%

The data shows a clear trend: digitalization often crosses the boundary into personal time. Nearly half of the teachers (49.2%) fully agree that they work on digital content after hours. During my classroom observations, I noticed that while technology makes the 45 minutes of class more dynamic, it often costs the teacher several hours of preparation at home. This leads to "digital fatigue."

Furthermore, 15.3% agree and 11.9% strongly agree that they receive sufficient support, a large proportion (42.4%) remain neutral. This suggests that institutional support may exist formally, but it is not experienced as consistently effective. This gap indicates that while schools provide the machines, they do not always provide the technical or emotional backup needed when things go wrong. For technology to be a success, school leadership must focus on creating a culture where digital tools are used to save time, not to take away from a teacher's rest.

4.4 The digital divide and institutional support

Another finding that emerged from the observations and the survey is the 'digital divide' between different school environments. While 96.6% of teachers have access to some devices, the quality of this access is inconsistent. During my classroom observations, I noted that technical glitches—such as slow loading times or projector malfunctions—often lead to a loss of classroom control and increased teacher anxiety. This highlights the gap between 'having' technology and 'using' it effectively. As seen in Table 3, the fact that only 11.9% of teachers fully agree that they have sufficient support suggests that technical issues are often left for the teacher to solve alone. This 'technical isolation' is a significant but often ignored factor in teacher burnout. Addressing this requires more than just training; it requires on-site technical assistance and a school culture that acknowledges the time-consuming nature of digital troubleshooting.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study shows that while digital tools are widely available in Albanian primary schools, they bring both opportunities and significant challenges for

teacher well-being. The findings indicate that technology has increased the daily workload, primarily because many teachers feel pressured to prepare digital materials outside of their official working hours. While these tools make lessons more engaging for students, the lack of consistent internet and technical support often leads to "digital fatigue" and higher stress levels among educators.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the results, the following strategies are recommended to support teachers:

School Leadership Support: Schools should move beyond just providing hardware and focus on creating a supportive culture that values teacher well-being.

The Right to Disconnect: There is a clear need for boundaries regarding digital communication to prevent work from spilling into personal time.

Pedagogical Training: Future training should focus less on basic technical skills and more on how to use technology efficiently to save time rather than add to the workload.

Peer Collaboration: Encouraging teachers to share digital resources can reduce the individual burden of lesson preparation.

5.2.1 Institutional and individual action plans

To effectively implement these recommendations, a dual approach is necessary. At the institutional level, school boards should establish 'Digital Wellness' protocols. These protocols could include designated 'offline hours' where no official communication is expected, and providing on-site IT assistants to reduce the 'troubleshooting' burden on teachers. Individually, teachers can benefit from peer-mentorship programs. Instead of every teacher spending hours creating digital materials from scratch, schools should encourage the creation of shared digital libraries. This collaborative effort not only saves time but also strengthens professional bonds and reduces the feeling of 'technical isolation' observed during this study.

5.3 Limitations of the study

This research provides a snapshot of the current situation but has some limitations. The sample size of 59 teachers is relatively small and focused on specific primary schools, so the results may not represent every school in Albania. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from questionnaires and a limited number of observations. Future research could include a larger, more diverse group of teachers and explore how different school leadership styles specifically impact digital stress.

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Global Diplomacy and Technological Innovation in Education from a Historical and Contemporary Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines the intersection of global diplomacy and technological innovation in the context of education, offering a comparative historical and contemporary analysis. Historically, education has served as a powerful instrument of global diplomacy, enabling cultural exchange, the dissemination of knowledge, and the creation of mechanisms for international cooperation, particularly through scholarships and educational diplomacy programs before and after World War II. Currently, technological transformations have profoundly impacted both the education sector and the world of diplomacy. The use of technology, particularly online learning platforms and digital applications, has made education accessible across national borders. Such technological advances have fostered broader academic cooperation globally and transformed educational diplomacy into a key tool for addressing international challenges such as inequality, conflict, and global development.

The paper argues that technological innovation has not only transformed educational practices but has also redefined the role of education in diplomacy, fostering shared learning spaces and promoting global citizenship.

Through a comparative assessment of historical evolution and current trends, the study highlights the importance of integrating technology into diplomatic education policies, emphasizing that this integration is essential for building sustainable and cooperative societies in the 21st century.

Keywords: *global, diplomacy, technology, innovation, educational, international*

1.Introduction

Despite increased scholarly interest in technology within education and global governance, literature often treats educational innovation and diplomacy as separate domains. Studies of educational technology tend to focus primarily on pedagogical effectiveness through digital interventions, whereas research on global diplomacy often overlooks the ways in which technology is transforming the international implementation of educational cooperation and policy frameworks. This separation highlights a critical gap in understanding how technological innovation has not only transformed educational practices but also reshaped the role of education within diplomatic agendas, which are increasingly tasked with addressing global challenges such as inequality, conflict, and development. However, in recent decades, there have been some remarkable technological changes that have made a substantive impact on both the education world and the world of diplomacy as well. The increased use of educational applications and online platforms has dramatically expanded the global reach of education.

This has also expanded the use of transnational learning spaces, through which students, teachers, and educational institutions can reach out across geographical and political boundaries. However, the widespread use of technology has also raised significant challenges regarding access and equity in the use of technology, thus leading to the intertwining of innovation within education technology with other dynamics such as education and sustainable development.

Despite the increased interest in technology within the educational sector and global governance, a significant gap within the current literature depicts technology, innovation, education, and global diplomacy as concepts that belong to two distinct spaces. While the relationship between technology and education seems to be covered by studying the educational potential of technology, the application of technology within global diplomacy overlooks the transformative impact of technological innovation on education, especially within the context of global challenges like inequality, conflict, and development. In this background of the absence of a comprehensive study regarding the interaction between global diplomacy and technological innovations in the field of education, the current study seeks to examine the intersection of global diplomacy and technological innovations within the field of education. Through this aim, the current study analyzes the impact of technological innovations within the current era of educational diplomacy. Additionally, the study examines the role of online education within the current field of international diplomacy.

2. Literature review

The academic literature on global diplomacy and education has long acknowledged that education has been a diplomatic tool rather than a neutral social welfare function. Theoretical works on the topic have identified educational efforts as a case of ‘soft’ diplomatic power, particularly concerning efforts aimed at international cultural exchange, ideological persuasion, and international cooperation efforts (Nye Jr., 2004). The historical approach illustrates that academic exchange initiatives, educational institutions, and educational initiatives were used as diplomatic efforts before, as well as after, the Second World War to further diplomatic relationships as a means for maintaining global stability (Smith, 2023). The current book, on the other hand, covers the impact of technology on these diplomatic educational initiatives on a global scale. More recent scholarship has moved the focus toward the increasing nexus between education, technology, and global governance. Research related to digital globalization suggests that technological innovation has seriously disrupted the spatial and temporal boundaries of education, allowing learning to finally move beyond national borders and beyond diplomatic jurisdictions. Online learning platforms, digital applications, and transnational networks of education increased access while at the same time reforming how states and international organizations exert influence through diplomacy. Although there is a division in the literature between those who believe that such technological changes democratize education or reproduce existing global inequalities, especially between developed and developing parts of the world. The adoption of technology in educational diplomacy is explored through the prism of international development and inclusivity. Literature drawing insights from critical theories of education identifies the serious implications of digital educational initiatives presented through the ideology of global bodies as they may essentially prioritize political and economic ideologies at the expense of other regional perspectives. Although global bodies like UNESCO support the utilization of technology for the sake of inclusive education, the contradictions between the ideologies of global educational diplomacy and its execution at a pragmatic level in affected zones of conflict and poverty as well as lack of technological development have been identified (Tikly, 2019). From the theoretical viewpoint, the current research is founded upon the interdisciplinary approach that involves the combination of theories of soft power, global governance, and digital transformation, especially in the field of education. The role of soft power is illuminated in the process by which education enables states to use diplomatic mechanisms that lack coercion, and

the adoption of global governance helps in understanding methods by which international institutions focus on globalization in educational and technology matters which were unachievable by nation-states (Held & McGrew , 2019). On the other hand, the theories of digital transformation discuss the impact of technology and innovations that focus on the development of global citizenship through shared platforms in the field of education and diplomacy (Castellas, 2010). Although the importance of the theories is unquestionable, the existing literature lacks the combination of the theories in the form of the analytical approach. The literature review discussed above shows that the need for a comparative and integrated approach that combines the past and present paradigms of educational diplomacy and technological innovation, respectively, has been made evident. It also shows that the relationship between the three areas of education, diplomacy, and technology has been explored separately by previous studies and has not been systematically explored with regards to how the convergence of the three areas affects global co-operation and educational policies. The need for this study, therefore, has been made evident as it seeks to provide a conceptual synthesis, which views technological innovation as an enabling force within educational diplomacy for addressing global challenges like inequalities, conflict, and sustainable development. (Castellas, 2010)

3. Research Methodology

This paper makes use of a qualitative research paradigm that entails the use of document analysis. This approach is suitable because the research is conceptual and aims to explore rather than produce quantitative data. Through various documents, the paper seeks to gain a better understanding of the way in which the education sector has been addressed in the context of technology. Analyzing documents was chosen as a fundamental methodological approach because it is an examination of officially expressed thoughts, policies, and narratives regarding education diplomacy and technological innovation that is being studied. The analysis focuses on international policy documents, conventions, strategic reports from organizations such as UIS and the UN, and scholarly journal articles related to education, diplomacy, and technological innovation. These documents were selected due to their relevance and authority. The analysis was conducted systematically to ensure clarity and rigor. First, relevant documents were identified to establish context. Next, they were analyzed for themes such as educational diplomacy, technological innovation, digitalization, inclusion, and global dialogue. Based on the analysis of past literature, this research has been able to identify changes related to the impact of technology on educational diplomacy. This

methodology ensures alignment between the research objectives and the analytical approach, providing a systematic framework for examining the dynamic role of technology in international educational diplomacy.

4. Global diplomacy and technological innovation in education

Historically, education has been a global diplomatic priority, serving as a strategic tool that facilitates international cooperation, cultural exchange, and the exercise of political influence. According to (Nye Jr., 2004) education is an integral component of soft power, as through this process, states and other key international actors can influence global perceptions without necessarily using coercive means. In the period following World War II, educational diplomacy became institutionalized in the form of scholarship programs, academic exchanges, and international partnerships aimed at rebuilding societies and fostering stability in the long run. These initiatives had placed education as a diplomatic gateway between nations that further supported the notion that the exchange of knowledge was carried out in a manner to underpin peace and global cooperation (Smith, 2023). However, it should be noted that early waves of educational diplomacy were delimited by mobility, capacity, as well as geopolitical borders. The aspect of taking part in global learning projects was limited or reserved for member social circles in society. According to (Castellas, 2010), this aspect was linked to broader structural patterns associated with industrial society and early information society, where access was unequal concerning learning and aligned along national structures. However, digital technology has drastically altered this historical paradigm of educational diplomacy. With technological innovation, education is now beyond geographical borders. There is learning as well as academic collaboration online. According to (Selwyn, Cset, & Olliv, 2025), digitalization has created a new paradigm of education that is not confined to geographical borders. There is participation in transnational networks as opposed to being bound by geographical borders. Online platforms as well as virtual academic spaces have, therefore, altered educational diplomacy. There is sharing of learning spaces. In modern-day understanding, global diplomacy now recognizes the role of technology as a tool to address the challenges associated with education inequality and the promotion of inclusivity. Global organizations like UNESCO recognize the role of online education as an important aspect to enable the achievement of inclusive education globally (Selwyn, Cset, & Olliv, 2025). In fact, the above approaches to education show the role of technology in addressing marginalized groups and providing an opportunity to access education in situations associated with inequality, conflict, and displacement due to poverty. However, critical scholarship

recognizes the role of innovation in information and communication technology in addressing education inequality since the goal of innovation in this field does not necessarily address the issue of inequality since it mainly serves the interests of the political superstructure and the global economic structure without addressing the local capacity and equality in education, as indicated by (Tikly, 2019). The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) represents an important milestone within the bridging process associated with the relationship between education, technology, and international diplomacy. The acknowledgment by the CRPD of the rights of education and technology as being basic human rights has reinforced the norms associated with the inclusive education policies adopted throughout the world (Nations, 2006). The CRPD has encouraged the inclusion by states of digital and assistive technology within the education field, highlighting the importance that technological development has both been an educational issue as well as an international diplomatic topic. Therefore, the field of education represents one of the leading platforms at which international norms, technological development, and international diplomacy converge. In general, it seems that from literature, education diplomacy is now from a mobility-dependent system to a global digital system due to technological innovation. While it is important to appreciate that the former mobility-dependent education diplomacy system was cumbersome and inadequate, contemporary education diplomacy systems now prioritize digital networking, learning spaces, and global citizenship (Castellas, 2010). The success of this new education diplomacy, however, now depends on how cooperation and unity there is in education policies at an international level. With this background of continued globalization of contemporary issues like inequality and development, incorporating innovation in education diplomacy is important in building inclusive societies in the twenty-first century. (Tikly, 2019)

5. Results

The analysis of the document reveals that the use of education as a strategic tool has been featured as an instrument of global diplomacy across historical and contemporary sources. The use of education as a strategic instrument has been promoted as a means of global cooperation, knowledge sharing, and development, especially within organized policy documents and reports. The historical approach to educational global diplomacy occurred using human mobility, for instance, educational scholarships and exchange programs. On the other hand, technology-driven mechanisms like online education, digital knowledge sharing, and virtual collaboration have been featured as key dimensions of educational global diplomacy within contemporary documents.

The use of technology to provide access to educational knowledge beyond national borders is consistently highlighted across the analyzed sources.

6. Findings

The results illustrate a significant transformation in the operational paradigm underlying educational diplomacy. Whereas traditional methods emphasized partnerships and human mobility, modern strategies focus on digital learning environments. Technological innovations have broadened the framework in which educational collaboration takes place, incorporating new contexts across diverse geographical and social settings. The study further concludes that educational technology is linked with inclusiveness, with digital technology playing a key role in addressing educational inequalities. Furthermore, education is increasingly recognized as a shared global responsibility, with technological infrastructure playing a crucial role in facilitating international cooperation.

7. Discussion

However, it should be noted that the difference between the change in thinking that occurred in history and the new change in thinking occurring in the field of educational diplomacy highlights the revolutionary role of technology in transforming contemporary global engagement with education. A paradigm shifts towards a digitally enabled education framework, therefore, symbolizes a change in thinking from a type of educational diplomacy based on the logic of mobility towards one based on networking as a way of collaborating. Issues related to accessibility, equality, and sustainability arise when there is inequality pertaining to technology use within this context defined by inequalities pertaining to technology use. Here, it becomes essential to highlight the importance of integrated policies from perspectives related to technological innovation as well as educational diplomacy objectives facilitating the establishment of a digitally enabled education framework symbolizing the future of global collaboration rather than merely reimagining the paradigms of inequality.

9. Conclusion

This research aims to explore the relationship between the field of global diplomacy and technological innovation in education. This is accomplished by analyzing key documents from both historical and contemporary contexts using a qualitative research approach. The results indicate that education has

consistently been utilized as an instrument of diplomacy, with technology increasingly enhancing its role and mechanisms. This work contributes to the field by providing an integrated perspective on the intersections of education and technology.

The implication of this study has two aspects. The first, and most important, implication is that technological innovations in education, to be effectively aligned with diplomatic initiatives, must operate within frameworks that are inclusive, equitable, and supportive of global cooperation. The second implication is that educational technology not only plays a role within education but can also serve as a tool in global diplomacy, development, and sustainability initiatives.

There are certain limitations of the study which must be pointed out. Firstly, the study is limited to the analysis of the document. This is difficult to understand when it is put into perspective of the actual life situation, which exceeds the boundaries of the document. Secondly, there is a possibility that the study may overlook the local educational programs which are beyond the boundaries of the global document. As is obvious, each of these points does not possess any relevance to the study.

In this regard, future studies in the field are bound to benefit by using such approaches that involve, for example, case studies, analyses, and/or stakeholder knowledge, thereby making it easier to examine technological innovation based on the framework of educational diplomacy. Such studies would also build upon the findings of previous research.

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Recommended Practices for Early Childhood Intervention

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Abstract: This paper explores the contemporary approach to early childhood intervention (ECI), emphasizing the shift from the traditional biomedical model to a family-centered ecological-systems perspective. The importance of the earliest years of life (0–6 years) is central, supported by scientific evidence from the field of neuroscience on brain plasticity and the impact of early experiences on long-term development.

The paper details recommended practices for ECI, emphasizing the family-centered approach as a key factor in empowering parents and caregivers to become active mediators in child development. Specific methodologies are reviewed, such as interventions in natural environments and daily routines, which enable functional learning and social inclusion.

In addition, the importance of intersectoral and transdisciplinary collaboration between health, education and social work is elaborated. The paper also highlights the necessity of continuous professional development of professionals through training and reflective supervision, in order to provide quality and ethically justified support for children with developmental delays or disabilities and their families.

Keywords: *Early childhood intervention (ECI), family-centered approach, neuroplasticity, transdisciplinary collaboration, developmental delays*

1.Introduction

Early intervention is a key aspect in supporting the development of children with disabilities or at risk of delay, as well as in empowering their families. As a scientifically proven approach, it combines health, educational and social work models in order to maximize the child’s potential in the earliest stages of life (0-6 years). The book “Recommended Practices in Early Intervention: A Guide for Professionals” offers a comprehensive guide to contemporary principles and methods that have proven to be effective in this area. This guide aims to be a practical tool for professionals who face the complex challenges

of supporting children with disabilities or developmental delays and their families on a daily basis.

Early intervention (EI) is a key factor in alleviating developmental difficulties and enabling a better future for children with specific needs. Research, especially in the field of neuroscience, confirms that early experiences have a fundamental impact on brain development. In doing so, the role of parents and caregivers, as well as the environment in which the child grows up, are of crucial importance for his cognitive, emotional and social development.

The goal of ECI is to support families with children aged 0 to 6 years, who face developmental delays, disabilities or increased risk of such conditions, through the active inclusion of formal and informal support networks. Effective early intervention programs focus on strengthening the abilities of parents and caregivers, since they are the most important intermediaries in the child's development process.

The book and the elements presented in it are of great practical and social importance, because early intervention not only improves the quality of life of children, but also reduces the need for intensive services in the later stages. Through this paper, we want to highlight best practices that can be adapted in different cultural and institutional contexts, as inspiration for improving existing systems.

Early childhood intervention – from neurons to family and social environment

The main purpose of this guide is to serve professionals as a practical tool in their daily work. However, quality intervention cannot exist without a solid theoretical foundation. As Fernando Pessoa says: *“Every theory should be such that it can be applied in practice, and every practice should come from theory. In real life, theory and practice complement each other. They are made for each other.”*

A complete presentation of early intervention (EI), highlighting its theoretical foundations, conceptual frameworks, historical development and the laws that regulate it, serves as an “introductory bridge” to the recommended practices presented in the following sections.

Early Intervention: Definition, Meaning and Practices. What is early intervention?

Early childhood intervention (ECI) programs emerged in the 1960s in the United States, initially as compensatory programs for socially disadvantaged children (e.g., Head Start), and later expanded to include children with disabilities. These early models (the so-called first generation) were

biomedical and therapeutic, child-centered, with the aim of preventing or alleviating developmental delay.

The conceptualization and implementation of ECI models and practices have gradually undergone significant evolution due to scientific advances and research in developmental sciences, educational sciences, social sciences, and related fields. The foundations that provide a conceptual framework for the practice of RI emerged in the late 1970s, mainly through the theoretical proposals of the ecological-systems and bioecological models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2007) and the transactional perspective (Sameroff, 1983; Sameroff & Chandler, 1975). The second-generation RI model then emerged during the 1980s, where practice is not exclusively centered on the child with problems, and intervention is extended to the family and community. The contribution of Carl Dunst's theories was decisive because, based on scientific evidence, they highlighted the decisive role that social support and the leading role of the family and social support networks in the community play in promoting child development and in strengthening the competences and self-esteem of parents. Thus, in 1985, Dunst defined early intervention as "a form of support provided by members of formal and informal social support networks to families of children at an early age (...) that will have a direct and indirect impact on the functioning of parents, family and child". This definition, revolutionary at the time, follows a new paradigm of competence promotion, that is, based on "models of promotion, empowerment and partnership, based on strengths and resources and focused on the family", entrusting the key role in decision-making to the family. In the 1990s, the third generation emerged, focused on: children's learning opportunities, supporting parental competences, leveraging family and shared resources.

The concepts and practices proposed by these third-generation programs were conceptually framed by Dunst's theories. Thus, we arrive at the latest definitions of ECI, the most comprehensive of which are the following two definitions:

a. "Early intervention for children with special needs is a set of services/provisions for very young children and their families, provided at their request at a certain point in the child's life, encompassing any action taken when the child needs special support to ensure and improve his/her personal development, strengthen the family's own competences and promote the social inclusion of the family and the child. These activities should be provided in the child's natural environment, preferably at the local level, with a family-oriented and multidimensional team approach" (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2005, p. 17).

b. *“The everyday experiences and opportunities offered to infants and young children by the children’s parents and other primary caregivers in the context of naturally occurring learning activities that aim to promote children’s acquisition and use of behavioral competencies, shaping and influencing prosocial interactions with people and materials” (Dunst, Raab, Trivette & Swanson, 2010, p. 62).*

The goal is for the family, the community and professionals to be able to provide the relationships, experiences and support that children need to develop functional competencies, in order to enable them to participate meaningfully in these settings (Moore, 2012). This shift implies that RDI professionals need to replace the rationale for service-centered practices with a family-centered approach, which, in turn, will contribute to a change in the mindset of these families. In fact, in a service-centered approach, families are encouraged to think that experts are the ones who can best help their child by working directly with the child. In contrast, in this family and community-centered approach, families will consider that their child’s learning takes place in natural settings and is promoted through collaboration with the RDI team.

2. Why is it important to intervene early?

Advances in scientific knowledge of early development, its neurobiological basis, the role of early experiences and the child’s interaction with the environment, have been an important factor in the rise of ECI. There is now strong evidence that whatever happens during the early years can have decisive lifelong effects (Shonkoff, 2009). From a neurobiological perspective, this corresponds to a period when children are particularly flexible and “receptive” to changes that, for better or worse, may occur in their global development.

- **Neurobiological foundations:** Confirming this popular belief, scientific evidence establishes a solid empirical evidence base demonstrating the importance of the early years in establishing lifelong learning. Interestingly, the explosion of fundamental research in neuroscience, developed in recent decades and centuries of common sense, is remarkably in tune with the basic principles underlying human development during the first few years of life.

- **Neuroplasticity:** The brain of young children is highly adaptable. Early experiences shape its development. The rationale for EI in children with neurodevelopmental disorders is closely related to the concept of neural plasticity (Johnston, Nishimura, Harum, Pekar, & Blue, 2001). Neuroplasticity is at the heart of the logic for EI. In addition to life stages, neuroplasticity also varies among individuals and is different depending on the nervous system. Because specific experiences influence specific brain

circuits during certain developmental stages, it is crucial to take advantage of these early learning opportunities.

-Genes and environment: Neuroscience research has highlighted how the interaction between genes and early experiences creates the foundation for subsequent neurodevelopment and behavior. Accordingly, the old idea that genes and their influence are immutable and independently determine all development has been put aside (Meaney, 2010). Research shows that environmental factors, especially during the prenatal and early postnatal periods, cause chemical changes in the structure of genes, without changing the genetic code, but rather the way genes are expressed.

- Critical period: There are time windows when certain skills (e.g., vision, language) develop most intensively. The first three years of a child’s life represent a period of exceptional sensitivity to environmental influences, called the critical or sensitive period, and represent a real window of opportunity for “learning” and play a decisive role in shaping the structure and function of the brain (Fox, Levitt, & Nelson, 2010). A critical period corresponds to a stage of maturation in which certain key experiences have the strongest effect on the development or learning of a particular skill or behavior. According to Hall (2005), the fixed or rigid nature of critical periods has been questioned by some neuroscientists, who point out that the link between a critical period and maximum learning has only been demonstrated for the sensory system.

- Neurons and synapses: Unlike the adult brain, the developing brain has a neuronal surplus that acts as a reserve against possible lesions (Anastasiow, 1990). Neurons, the basic structural units, mature by growing axons and dendritic branches, forming synapses (Letourneau, 2008).

Synaptogenesis is the process of creating synapses, which builds the neural network. The critical period is an opportunity for learning, and neuronal surplus is the basis for neuroplasticity. Early synapses are genetically programmed (“expected by experience”), but if they are not used in time, they are deactivated (e.g., amblyopia in children). Other synapses are formed through new experiences and adaptation (“experience-dependent”). The brain is built hierarchically – sensory pathways develop first, then language and cognitive functions. Synaptic thinning removes unnecessary connections, improving efficiency.

- Animal studies and human studies

Donald Hebb (1947) found that mice raised as pets had better problem-solving skills than those raised in small cages. Later studies showed that animals in **affluent environments** had: thicker cortex with more synapses, more complex dendritic branches, greater vascularization and myelination, and better cognitive and health outcomes. While those in an **isolated environment**

showed stress, poor adaptation, and learning difficulties (Anastasiow, 1990). Neglect in early childhood can cause **cerebral atrophy**, as shown by comparison of the brains of 3-year-old children. Poor children (e.g., Eastern Europeans) showed **delayed social and cognitive development**, and some developed autistic traits (Beckett et al., 2006). **Education and cognitive activity** increase the brain's resistance to dementia, Alzheimer's, and other diseases (Baroncelli et al., 2010).

3. Recommended practices for early childhood intervention

In the daily practice of early childhood intervention (ECI), professionals often face uncertainties and challenges as they strive to provide effective support to children and their caregivers. These challenges are an integral part of their work, as each interaction with families and children is unique and brings new demands. Knowledge of recommended practices in ECI is of fundamental importance, as it allows professionals to work with greater confidence, relying on proven and internationally recognized approaches.

3.1 The Family-Centered Approach: Guidelines for Early Childhood Intervention

For more than three decades, Carl Dunst and his collaborators have conducted extensive research on intervention with children and families. Based on this work, the authors developed an explanatory model for how to work in early integrative family support, based on the adoption of family-centered practices (Dunst, 2000). This integrated model is evidence-based, emphasizing the influence of social systems and environmental variables related to the promotion of family development and strengthening. According to Dunst's model, called the third-generation early integrative family support model, early childhood intervention aims to influence children's learning and development within a broad framework that incorporates the principles of family-centered practice and aims to ensure that experiences and opportunities from natural contexts (such as the family context, nursery, kindergarten or others) result in the promotion and strengthening of the competencies of children, caregivers and families.

Main components of the third generation integrated model for early childhood intervention and family support.

- **Learning opportunities for children** — One of the focuses of early childhood work will be to maximize children's learning opportunities in order to promote their development. Learning opportunities arise in all interesting and meaningful activities in which the child is involved, enhancing the development of competencies and resulting in the child's sense of

mastery/control over his or her own abilities and over others and the environment. These opportunities arise both in family life (routines, family events, playful activities such as gardening, etc.) and in community life (family outings, community events, going to church/religious groups, plays, etc.), or in formal learning settings such as nurseries and kindergartens;

- **Parental support** — Another goal of early childhood work is to strengthen parenting skills, promote opportunities that will enable the acquisition of new knowledge and competencies, and also strengthen the self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy of parents. Parental support activities include the availability of information, counselling and guidance, emotional support and instrumental support from professionals, as well as parent-to-parent support. These different and complementary modes of support are used both to strengthen existing parental knowledge and competences, which are necessary for carrying out their caregiving responsibilities, and to promote the child's learning opportunities;

- **Family and community resources** — A third focus of intervention will be to ensure that parents have the support and resources needed to provide the time, physical and psychological energy they need to be involved in parenting and childcare tasks. Family and community support encompasses all types of family and community resources, informal (e.g.: friends) or formal (e.g.: services), that parents (all parents) need to engage in the parenting and educational activities of their children. These include experiences such as: story time at the local library, swimming lessons at a sports club, music or drama groups at a recreational club, childcare services, a nursery or kindergarten, etc. (Dunst, 2000)

4. Family-centered intervention approach

The intervention cycle and effective practices of helping and applying the early childhood intervention process from a transdisciplinary perspective

Collaboration between professionals and families, based on the principles of a family-centered approach and from a transdisciplinary perspective, develops throughout the assessment and intervention process, from initial contacts to the moment when the family/child moves on to another support service. The family, parents or other caregivers are active partners in the development and implementation of the intervention process, and the professional supports the family in taking on its leading role. Therefore, a family-centered approach is not an end in itself, but a way to increase the effectiveness of the entire assessment and intervention process. Although many professionals identify with the basic assumptions and principles of a family-centered approach, implementing them in practice is not an easy task, since it is impossible to

define a clear set of procedures to follow. In fact, there are no “recipes” or “hard rules” that can be applied to a family-centered philosophy (McWilliam, Winton, & Crais, 2003), since each situation is unique and the basic principles need to be applied individually, depending on the specific situation when working with children and their families in their different contexts. This diversity is both the true wealth of early childhood intervention and the main challenge that professionals face, which can generate discomfort and uncertainty! A quality response requires early childhood intervention professionals to have specific knowledge to support families, and this knowledge goes beyond knowledge related to a specific area/subject or their primary academic education. In this sense, the transdisciplinary team model stands out as one of the quality forms of effective and efficient response to the different needs of children and families, to the extent that it aims to provide support to the family in a cohesive, coordinated and integrated manner. Professional characteristics and attitudes can be predictive factors for the success of the intervention

4.1 The intervention cycle of personalized services for children and their families

The assessment and intervention cycle proposed by Simeonson and colleagues (1996) characterizes a continuous process of individualized encounters in the context of collaboration between families and professionals and can serve as a guide for professional practice. Simeonson and colleagues (1996) revisit Kempler’s (1969, 1974, 1981) concept of “encounter,” which is updated and representative of the focal point, which is collaboration between professionals and families in family-centered early childhood intervention. In this approach, Simeonson defines encounters as meaningful experiences where interaction with others contributes to the development of skills for coping with future events. The emphasis is on building relationships that make these experiences possible. Therefore, an encounter can be seen as a segment in a broader continuum of experiences and can be positive (completed encounters) or negative (uncompleted encounters). In the context of families with children with developmental problems or at risk, the concept of completed or incomplete meetings is related to the families’ perception of the way in which their expectations, concerns and needs are recognized. In this way, the meeting is positive and is experienced as completed when, with an attitude of listening and understanding the family’s concerns, the professional responds to the family’s needs, avoiding feelings of discomfort, fear or anxiety in the family. In this framework, taking into account the family-centered approach and considering that meetings influence the family’s adaptation, the main goal of the early childhood intervention team’s action is to make all meetings with

families complete. Based on this framework of Simeonson’s intervention cycle, referral, assessment, intervention planning, service implementation, monitoring and preparation for transition are specific elements that define a series of phases that represent the child and family’s encounters with service systems. The intervention cycle begins at the point of referral to the system, and its phases are repeated over time, with the intervention process determined by the family’s concerns and priorities. This cycle should not be seen as a simple sequential progression of phases, but rather as a dynamic process that responds to the unique circumstances of each family. The intervention process is therefore a continuum of articulated activities, and each phase has a clear goal, with empowerment and capacity building as the motto for its achievement. Figure 4.1 illustrates this idea of a dynamic process.

In this process of assessment and intervention, all the information shared, as well as the attitudes adopted, have a single meaning and purpose: to strengthen the functioning of the family in order to promote the development of the child. At each new step in the sequence, which integrates a continuous but circular line, the circumstances of the child and the family, as well as the relationships between professionals and parents, change. As these changes occur, the way in which families are involved in early childhood intervention will also change. Although generally sequential, the different moments of the process are also integrative, in that the information exchanged and the activities carried out at each moment of the process are included in the activities developed at other moments, in a non-linear way and in a “back and forth” format. And all the information shared at each moment must be taken into account at each new moment and should not be considered specific only to each phase of the process.

In the context of a family-centered approach, at each step of the cycle, each of these moments or encounters is defined in terms of the mutual expectations, roles, and activities of families and care providers, resulting in personalized services.

5. Integrated Early Childhood Intervention System: Intersectoral and Transdisciplinary Collaboration

This chapter discusses topics of importance not only to professionals in local intervention teams, but also to those who plan, organize and coordinate services related to early childhood intervention (ECI). Leaders and policy makers in each country have the responsibility to define policies and make decisions about measures, investments and resource allocation for children at risk or developmental problems and their families. Guralnik (2012) asks key questions: how to ensure that when making decisions about measures,

investments and resources, decision-makers choose the best practices for children and their families, and not less recommended ones? Do policy makers rely on scientific knowledge, research data and evidence to guide and base their decisions in policies and practice? These questions underlie the organization of this chapter, dedicated to the policies and systemic organization of ECI services.

A dialogue between science and policy is needed to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice and to test innovations and scientific advances in the service of public policies and professional practice, with the aim of improving the quality of services for children at an early age, especially those who are more vulnerable for biological and/or environmental reasons, as well as for their families. Early childhood intervention should be seen as a combination of philosophy, policies and practice, which should be articulated coherently and consistently. Despite existing limitations, there has been significant progress in this dialogue at the international level. The application of scientific knowledge and evidence in policies and practices has contributed to the evolution of ECI models, from their conceptual framework to the organization of professional services and practices with families and children, as well as in the political agendas of different countries in the field of childhood.

Early childhood intervention is gradually gaining importance internationally as an innovative model of integrated intervention to support children and families, striving to overcome the fragmentation of traditional therapeutic and rehabilitation practices. Systemic and ecological visions, the central role of families in child development, and a family-centered approach are reflected not only in the direct work of professionals and teams with families and children, but also in the definition of public policies and organizational models of ECI systems and services.

Some of these guiding principles are highlighted because of their particularly relevant role in proposing a rethinking of policies and services: the developmental perspective and the centrality of the family, the perspective of integration and coordination of ECI services, and the perspective of inclusion and participation of children and families in natural contexts and typical community resources and activities. Historically, efforts at intersectoral and interinstitutional collaboration have been informal in nature and often the result of innovative projects linked to the initiative of professionals and local communities. The strong evidence of the benefits of collaboration across sectors and subject areas in the field of ECI, together with the recognition of the complexity of the task, has demonstrated the need to design and implement formal collaboration mechanisms, both of an organic-administrative nature between different systems and services (public or private), and in constituting

and consolidating teamwork between professionals from different subject areas.

5.1 Professional development opportunities

Early childhood intervention (ECI) is based on specific knowledge that is explained in this guide and should guide the work of professionals in this field, emphasizing the importance of an intervention that is: timely, family-centered, collaborative, and implemented in natural and inclusive settings. To achieve a model of intervention based on these principles, technical quality is needed - the knowledge and specialization of professionals - but also their practical and reflective expression, based on empathy and collaboration, leading to the transdisciplinary provision of services aimed at the family in their natural environment. Training, in different phases (initial, specialized and continuous), is a critical element for the success of the intervention, as it allows the transformation of the attitudes and competencies of ECI professionals to new demands. Defining recommended practices for professional development and training in ECI involves redefining the common understanding of professional development in this field, in order to identify structural and procedural features in training proposals that, based on evidence-based practices, will support the development of quality and effectiveness in intervention. These training proposals clearly include reflective supervision as a continuous training process based on professional support and empowerment, as a necessary component for the development of quality practice in ECI.

6. Training – Building knowledge, competencies and attitudes for better intervention

6.1. Profile, development and training of professionals in ECI.

For successful family-centered, collaborative, and natural-based ECI, adequate training and support for professionals is necessary (Moore, 2011). The different areas of knowledge from which professionals come pose an additional challenge. Initial training offers specific knowledge and skills, but their readiness for key aspects of ECI varies (Brito et al., 2015; Moore, 2011). Therefore, ECI training should be continuous and lifelong, aimed at developing competencies for involving others, continuous personal development, and providing quality services based on recommended practices. These competencies aim to promote the development and well-being of children, strengthen the participation and empowerment of families, and optimize community inclusion through transdisciplinary teamwork.

Professional development in ECI is crucial for quality and effective intervention (Snyder et al., 2011; Stayton, 2015). The definition of professional development is complex, including structural and procedural dimensions in terms of purpose, content, and learning process. The National Professional Development Center for Inclusion (NPDCI, 2010) defines professional development through intensive collaboration with families, professionals, researchers, and other relevant stakeholders, creating a conceptual framework for the development, implementation, and evaluation of effective professional development. The planning and implementation of training should be based on the components of a professional development program (‘who’, ‘what’, ‘how’) and contextual variables such as policies, resources, and organizational structures.

Training for IEP has unique challenges due to the specific developmental needs of early childhood (Bruder & Dunst, 2005) and the need for family involvement throughout the process (Peterander, 2004). Effective practice involves building capacity and involving the family in individualized intervention (McCollum & Catlett, 1997). Training content and procedures should be based on an explicit philosophy, promote the values and attitudes of recommended ECI practice, target different groups of participants from a transdisciplinary perspective, and be practical and relevant to the intervention. For example, in training for family-centered practices, it is crucial to establish a clear link between the content, the training process, the professional profile and the outcomes of the intervention (Brotherson et al., 2008).

Training for ECI has unique challenges in terms of participants (‘who’), content (‘what’) and process (‘how’). Participants come from different fields (health, education, social services), which requires redefining the continuity between initial, specialized and continuing training (EBIFF, 2009; McCollum & Catlett, 1997). When planning training, principles of adult learning should be taken into account (Dunst & Trivette, 2009b; Trivette et al., 2009). The way in which the content is presented and processed is crucial for the success of the learning and its practical application. Close collaboration between training institutions and ECD systems/services is needed to adopt recommended and evidence-based practices as a framework for quality training, which should be aligned with legislative and policy guidelines (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2014; Stayton, 2015).

Initial training should introduce the basic principles of ECD, emphasizing seeing each child as unique, promoting safe and inclusive environments, and respecting the family as part of the intervention (SNIPI, 2009). Recommended transversal content for initial training includes: promoting children’s learning and development, building consistent relationships with the family and community, observing, documenting and evaluating, using developmentally

appropriate approaches, and developing a professional identity (Chandler et al., 2012). Adult learning principles should be taken into account, and families and local ECD professionals should be active partners in the training.

The specialized training process should combine theoretical and practical classes, analysis of scientific papers, fieldwork with mentoring and supervision, as well as assessment tools that encourage reflective learning. Training should be delivered by recognised experts in ECI in partnership with families and ECI professionals.

Continuous training is essential for all those who have a direct or indirect role in ECI. It helps professionals develop the necessary competences to apply the acquired knowledge in concrete situations. There is a transition from traditional to reflective training ('inside-out') (Sheridan et al., 2009), where the individual life and professional experiences of the participants are taken into account. The aim of continuous training is to develop and deepen the competences inherent to the profile of ECI professionals, based on recommended practices, in order to ensure the quality of the desired outcomes. There are different types of continuous training, such as consultation, coaching, mentoring, reflective supervision and communities of practice (Buysse et al., 2009), which promote professional development in a contextualised and participatory way. The qualification of the trainer is crucial for the quality and impact of training (Sparrow, 2014; Winton & Catlett, 2009). Team training has additional benefits in promoting competencies and changing the attitudes of professionals.

7. Supervision — Towards a trusting relationship that promotes development in early childhood intervention

The development of quality ECI practice is closely linked to the professional development of professionals from many professional fields and services who, through training and supervision opportunities, eventually become RDI professionals (Santos, 2007).

7.1 The role of supervision in ECI

Supervision in ECI, according to the “golden rule”, implies a relationship of mutual respect and care. Transdisciplinary knowledge in ECI arises from the sharing of knowledge among professionals in the team when analyzing their intervention with children and families. The supervisor should enable the development of competencies among professionals through a relationship of trust and support, building individual and team competencies, which will be translated into appropriate actions for children, families and communities.

Promoting these competencies can include seminars, publications and participation in the creation of national legislation (Santos et al., 2011).

In the life cycle of a family with a child with special needs, ECI is a time of discovery of the child, his strengths and competencies, as well as of other family members, a time for self-knowledge and transformation, communication and activation of resources. The ECI can be a privileged interlocutor of the family, providing support from the initial difficult moments to inclusion in the community. To function in this way, ECI needs to adopt the principles described above, and professionals need to have quality supervision, which is crucial for quality RDI and the rights of children, families and professionals. The aim of this chapter is to inspire reflection and metacognition among supervisors and supervisees in ECI (Santos, 2007).

Every supervisory encounter is unique, but there are basic assumptions that guarantee respect for the values and recommended practices in ECI.

7.2 Effective Technical Supervision: The Case of Reflective Supervision in ECI

Reflective supervision is a person-centered relationship aimed at empowerment and capacity building. The professional development of the participants in supervision is reciprocal (Dunst, 2000a, 2000b; Borders & Brown, 2005; Alarcão & Canha, 2013). Reflective supervision implies the belief that learning takes place in the context of relationships and depends on their quality, and that the way we feel, think, and act affects others and vice versa. The quality of supervisory practice is reflected in the functioning and outcomes of the supervised group. Self-awareness and self-knowledge of values and expectations are powerful tools in the work. When planning a supervision session (Heffron & Murch, 2010), the supervisor should prepare, recall the current situation of the team, and carry out the tasks undertaken. The supervisee should select significant data from the intervention for analysis. The session should begin by establishing contact and an atmosphere of trust, setting an agenda, collecting relevant data, listening to participants, formulating hypotheses, and planning next steps.

During supervision, the supervisor should use techniques to empower participants (Heffron & Murch, 2010), such as: starting from the supervisee's discourse, asking open-ended questions, managing the pace of discussion, offering choices and options, expanding questions and analyses, applying a problem-solving methodology, offering specific feedback, seeking understanding, formulating hypotheses, active listening, introducing information relevant to the team, summarizing, observing and empathetic communication, seeking consent, and stimulating self- and hetero-evaluation.

Conclusion

The book “Recommended Practices in Early Intervention: A Guide for Professionals” is a comprehensive concept that connects theory with practice, highlighting the key role of early childhood intervention (ECI) in maximizing the developmental potential of children and empowering families. Through an analysis of scientific research, legal frameworks and practical strategies, the author highlights ECI not only as a set of services, but as a unique approach that transforms the lives of the most vulnerable members of society. The structure of the book emphasizes certain important elements of ECI, as follows:

1. Family-centeredness as a foundation

Families are not “beneficiaries”, but active allies in the process. This paradigm, supported by models such as the individualized family plan, emphasizes family priorities and cultural contexts, enabling personalized solutions.

2. Transdisciplinarity and collaboration

- Effective ECI requires the dismantling of professional barriers. The Portuguese model (SNIPI) demonstrates how teams from different disciplines (health, education, social work) can create synergy, reducing fragmented approaches.

3. Evidence-based practices

Strategies such as interventions in natural environments and play-based methods are supported by empirical data, making them both effective and ethically justified.

4. Continuous professional development

Training and supervision are not optional extras, but necessary components for maintaining quality. Innovative tools, such as telemedicine and digital platforms, expand the possibility of global outreach.

Although digital tools offer seamless access, they must not replace human empathy. Models need to be adapted to different cultures, especially in developing countries where resources are limited. Early intervention is not just a profession — it is a social responsibility. Policymakers, researchers, professionals and the community must work together for: universal access to services, without geographical or economic barriers, investments in prevention programs, which save long-term costs, building a society where every child, regardless of ability, has the right to a life of dignity.

The book leaves a clear message: ECI is not a luxury, but a basic human right. As one of the key quotes says: “Building a better tomorrow begins with the support we offer today”. In a way, the book represents a manifesto for a more inclusive future.

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The ethical integration of new technologies in educational processes and the central role of schools in the digital age of educational innovation

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Abstract: This study investigates educational innovation in the digital era, emphasizing the ethical responsibility of schools in guiding the integration of emerging technologies into teaching and learning practices. The growing presence of digital technologies has profoundly reshaped contemporary education, generating new opportunities for pedagogical renewal alongside increasingly complex ethical challenges. Based on a critical review of the literature and analysis of recent studies, this research examines how technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality are influencing teaching methodologies, learning environments, and students' learning experiences. Adopting a mathetic perspective, understood as the art of learning grounded in active engagement, experimentation, and the construction of meaning, the study highlights learner-centered approaches that position students as active agents in their educational trajectories. From this viewpoint, digital technologies are not merely instructional tools, but cognitive and cultural mediators that can foster autonomy, creativity, and deeper engagement when aligned with human-centered and ethically grounded pedagogical designs. Special attention is given to the ethical dimensions of digital transformation in education, including issues of responsibility, agency, inclusion, and the development of critical digital awareness. The analysis underscores the central role of schools in designing learning environments that integrate digital resources in ethically responsible and pedagogically meaningful ways. By articulating educational innovation, ethical reflection, and mathetic learning principles, this study contributes to contemporary debates on how educational institutions can navigate digital change while preserving their formative, social, and ethical mission.

Keywords: *Educational innovation; ethics and artificial intelligence; mathetic learning; digital technologies in education; ethical integration of technology*

1.Introduction

In the contemporary digital age, educational innovation has become a strategic imperative for preparing new generations to navigate a world shaped by continuous technological transformation. Within this context, schools assume a central responsibility in the ethical integration of emerging technologies into teaching and learning processes. Artificial intelligence (AI), in particular, offers unprecedented opportunities to personalize learning and enhance pedagogical practices, while simultaneously raising complex ethical, social, and institutional challenges (Rivoltella, 2020). AI can act as a powerful driver of educational innovation by enabling adaptive learning pathways and more responsive teaching strategies. However, its uneven or uncritical adoption risks exacerbating existing educational inequalities, especially in contexts marked by unequal access to digital infrastructure. Addressing this tension requires not only technological investment, but also ethical and regulatory frameworks capable of ensuring data protection, algorithmic transparency, and the preservation of teachers' central pedagogical and ethical role.

Education, therefore, cannot be reduced to the acquisition of technical skills alone. It must also promote critical awareness and ethical responsibility in the use of digital technologies. This study aims to analyze how schools can ethically integrate emerging digital technologies, particularly AI, by combining pedagogical innovation with mathetic and human-centered perspectives, contributing to the debate on whether digital transformation represents a gradual adaptation or a deeper epistemological shift in education. Digital technologies are reshaping not only how people learn, but also how they think, evaluate, and relate to knowledge and work. Teachers are thus required to develop new pedagogical and cultural competencies to respond to challenges that are unprecedented in scale and complexity, especially given the rapid pace of technological change.

Rather than offering an exhaustive account of these transformations, this study focuses on key ethical dimensions that are often overlooked in educational policy and practice. It highlights the role of schools in safeguarding fundamental values and rights in a technologically mediated and globalized society. In this context, educators are called not only to master new tools, but to critically interpret the transformations shaping contemporary society and to formulate responsible visions for the future of education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The importance of schools in the integration of new technologies

The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and immersive technologies has reshaped contemporary societies and educational systems. In Brazil, a country marked by deep social and regional inequalities, the integration of digital technologies into education is particularly complex. Schools are not only learning environments but strategic institutions for mediating access to digital culture and ensuring that technological innovation supports social inclusion rather than reinforcing historical disparities.

Research shows that schools remain a central space for the development of students' digital and cognitive competences. Vannini and McCleary (2020) emphasize that formal education plays a decisive role in enabling young people to participate meaningfully in digitally mediated societies. In Brazil, this role is especially critical, since schools often represent the main or only point of structured access to digital technologies for students from low-income backgrounds. Teachers play a pivotal role in this process. They are not merely facilitators of technology use, but mediators of meaning, ethics, and critical thinking. As digital competences must be integrated transversally into the curriculum, students need to learn not only how to operate digital tools but also how to critically evaluate their social, ethical, and economic implications, particularly in the context of artificial intelligence.

The development of digital competence is shaped by infrastructure, pedagogical quality, and institutional support. In Brazil, disparities in connectivity, equipment, and teacher training make the integration of digital technologies a collective and institutional challenge rather than a purely technical one. As Smith and Jones (2021) and Fullan and Langworthy (2014) argue, schools function as protected environments in which technological innovation can be pedagogically tested and ethically guided. This, however, depends on sustained teacher education and professional development (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). Inequitable access to digital resources remains one of the most pressing challenges. As Selwyn et al. (2023) show, the digital divide is a social and political issue that reproduces broader patterns of exclusion. Without equity-oriented policies, digital innovation risks producing what Bonaiuti and Tortora (2019) describe as a two-speed society. Although Brazilian policies such as the BNCC and national digital education programs aim to expand connectivity and digital competences, their impact depends on effective implementation and targeted support for vulnerable schools.

Ensuring that digital technologies contribute to educational democratization therefore requires coordinated action among schools, policymakers, and civil society. Only through an inclusive and ethically grounded approach can technological innovation strengthen, rather than undermine, democratic citizenship in a digitally mediated society.

2.2. Strategies for the ethical integration of new technologies

Educational innovation in the digital age requires a fundamental reconfiguration of teacher education and professional knowledge. The ethical integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence, learning analytics, and immersive environments depends not on infrastructure alone, but on teachers' capacity to critically understand and pedagogically appropriate these tools. Technical competence is a necessary foundation. As Bates (2015) argues, technological literacy has become a core professional competence for educators. Teachers must use digital platforms, software, and communication tools strategically to enhance learning, feedback, and student engagement. However, technical mastery alone is insufficient.

Teacher education must also include a strong ethical and socio-cultural dimension. In the case of artificial intelligence, educators need to understand how algorithmic systems influence surveillance, personalization, and inequality, and to cultivate in students not only digital skills but also critical and ethical judgment about how technologies shape social relations and power structures. The pedagogical integration of technology requires reflective and theoretically grounded practice. As Mishra and Koehler's (2006) TPACK framework shows, effective technology use emerges from the interaction between content, pedagogy, and technological knowledge. Without this integration, digital tools tend to automate traditional teaching rather than support collaboration, creativity, and deep learning.

Continuous professional development is therefore essential. Rapid technological change makes initial teacher training insufficient, requiring ongoing learning through professional communities and institutional support. As Selfe (1990) warned, without coherent theoretical frameworks, educational technology risks becoming fragmented and superficial. Cobb et al. (2003) likewise argue that theory shapes how learning problems are defined and how pedagogical interventions are designed.

Finally, contemporary digital systems differ qualitatively from earlier technologies. They no longer merely support teaching but actively shape learning processes, assessment, and even student identities. Because these systems evolve rapidly and remain opaque, teachers must develop adaptive and reflective capacities alongside technical skills. In this context, ethical, pedagogical, and technological knowledge become inseparable, making teacher education the strategic core of any responsible digital transformation in education.

2.3. Importance of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), as conceptualized by Shulman (1987), constitutes a foundational pillar for educational innovation in the

digital age. PCK refers to the integrated understanding of subject matter and pedagogy that enables teachers to transform disciplinary knowledge into forms that are pedagogically meaningful and accessible to learners. In digitally mediated contexts, this integration becomes critical, as teachers must decide how technological tools such as simulations, learning platforms, and artificial intelligence can support rather than distort pedagogical and curricular goals. PCK allows educators to move beyond the mere transmission of content toward the design of learning experiences that are responsive to students' cognitive, social, and cultural characteristics. Digital environments offer unprecedented opportunities for visualization, interaction, and personalization; however, without strong PCK, such tools risk being used superficially or in ways that fragment learning. Teachers with well-developed PCK are therefore better positioned to critically evaluate digital resources and to select those that genuinely enhance conceptual understanding, promote active engagement, and support inclusive learning processes.

Recognizing the growing influence of technology on teaching, Koehler and Mishra (2006) extended Shulman's model through the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework. This model emphasizes that effective technology integration arises from the dynamic interaction between content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge. Technological PCK thus represents the capacity to design learning experiences in which digital tools, instructional strategies, and disciplinary knowledge are coherently aligned.

Beyond instructional design, the TPACK framework also provides an ethical lens for analyzing teachers' professional competence in digitally mediated education. As Angeli and Valanides (2009) argue, developing teachers' technological PCK requires professional learning opportunities that integrate pedagogical reasoning with ethical reflection, particularly in relation to issues of representation, assessment, power, and inequality embedded in digital systems. Reflective and collaborative professional development is therefore essential. Teachers must critically examine the pedagogical and ethical implications of the technologies they adopt and adapt their practices to diverse learning contexts. In rapidly evolving digital environments, communities of practice play a crucial role in sustaining high-quality and ethically grounded innovation. Although PCK and TPACK offer robust frameworks for understanding how teachers integrate content, pedagogy, and technology, the literature remains largely teacher-centered. These models provide limited insight into how learners themselves actively construct meaning, exercise agency, and develop epistemic responsibility in digital environments. This theoretical gap highlights the need for complementary perspectives that place

learner agency and meaning-making at the center of ethical digital education, a gap that the mathetic perspective seeks to address.

2.4. Mathetic learning as the missing link between PCK, ethics, and digital technologies

While PCK and TPCK provide robust frameworks for understanding how teachers integrate content, pedagogy, and technology, they leave a theoretical gap regarding how learners themselves actively construct knowledge, agency, and meaning within digitally mediated learning environments. A mathetic perspective fills this gap by shifting the analytical focus from instructional structures to the processes through which learners actively construct knowledge through exploration, experimentation, and the production of meaning in digitally mediated environments.

This theoretical limitation motivates the introduction of a mathetic perspective, which explicitly theorizes learning as an active, constructive, and ethically significant process rather than as the outcome of instructional design alone.

Originally developed by Papert (1980) and later expanded within European educational theory, mathematics conceptualizes learning not as the passive reception of information, but as an active process of intellectual construction. Learners build mental models by interacting with symbolic, material, and digital environments, using external representations to test, revise, and refine their understanding. From this perspective, digital technologies are not merely instructional supports, but epistemic tools that enable learners to externalize thought, explore hypotheses, and engage in iterative meaning-making.

A mathetic approach is therefore deeply aligned with the ethical dimensions of digital education, particularly those related to agency, autonomy, and responsibility. When learners are positioned as active constructors of knowledge rather than as algorithmically managed recipients of content, technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital platforms can expand creativity, judgment, and reflexivity instead of reducing learning to processes of automated adaptation. As Rivoltella (2020) argues, educational technologies function as cultural and cognitive mediators that shape how individuals think, decide, and relate to the world.

Integrating mathetic principles into PCK strengthens the ethical foundations of technology-enhanced education. Teachers are no longer seen merely as designers of instructional sequences, but as facilitators of learning ecologies in which students engage with problems, tools, and communities to construct understanding. In this framework, the ethical integration of technology is achieved not primarily through rules or restrictions, but through pedagogical

designs that preserve learner agency, foster critical reflection, and support epistemic responsibility.

By bringing together PCK, TPACK, and mathetic learning, this study highlights a human-centered perspective on digital education in which technologies are understood as instruments of intellectual empowerment rather than mechanisms of behavioral or cognitive control. This perspective is particularly relevant in contexts shaped by artificial intelligence, where the increasing delegation of cognitive and moral agency to automated systems makes the cultivation of active, reflective learners an ethical priority.

3. Methodology

This study adopted an integrative systematic literature review combined with qualitative thematic analysis in order to examine how contemporary research addresses the ethical integration of digital technologies in education from pedagogical and learner-centered perspectives. The integrative review approach was selected because it allows the inclusion and synthesis of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical studies, enabling a comprehensive understanding of complex and multidisciplinary phenomena such as digital education, ethics, and learning (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

3.1. Research design

The research design is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical, focusing on the systematic examination and interpretation of published academic literature. This design is appropriate for identifying conceptual patterns, ethical concerns, and pedagogical implications across diverse educational contexts without reducing them to purely quantitative indicators.

3.2. Data sources and search strategy

A systematic search was conducted in major international academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The search focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and high-impact policy documents published between 2015 and 2025, reflecting the period of accelerated expansion of artificial intelligence and digital platforms in education. The search strings combined key terms related to digital technologies, ethics, pedagogy, and learning, such as: *“artificial intelligence” OR “digital technologies” OR “educational technology” AND “ethics” OR “ethical integration” AND “learning” OR “pedagogy” OR “teacher education” OR “learner agency” OR “PCK” OR “TPACK” OR “mathetic learning”*.

3.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Publications were included if they addressed the use of digital technologies in educational contexts, discussed ethical, pedagogical, or learner-centered dimensions, were published in English between 2015 and 2025, and consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, or authoritative institutional and policy reports. Publications were excluded if they focused exclusively on technical system design without educational or ethical discussion, were not available in full text, or addressed digital technologies in non-educational contexts.

3.4. Data analysis

After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, the selected corpus of publications was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved iterative reading, coding, and categorization of the material to identify recurring concepts, tensions, and interpretive patterns related to the ethical and pedagogical use of digital technologies. Through this process, themes were generated inductively from the literature rather than imposed a priori. The analytical focus was placed on how digital technologies mediate learning, how agency and responsibility are conceptualized, and how educational institutions are positioned in relation to digital transformation.

3.5. Ethical considerations

As this study is based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available academic and policy documents, no human participants were involved. Therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. Nevertheless, all sources were treated with academic integrity, transparency, and full respect for authorship and intellectual property.

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

The thematic analysis of the selected literature corpus revealed four dominant and interrelated themes concerning the ethical integration of digital technologies in education. These themes reflect how contemporary scholarship conceptualizes the role of digital systems, learner agency, and the institutional responsibilities of schools in digitally mediated learning environments.

4.1. Digital technologies as active mediators of learning

Across the reviewed studies, digital technologies—particularly artificial intelligence, learning analytics, and platform-based systems—are consistently

conceptualized not as neutral instructional tools, but as active mediators of cognition, learning, and social interaction. The literature emphasizes that these technologies shape how knowledge is accessed, how learning processes are organized, and how educational decisions are made. Rather than simply supporting instruction, digital systems increasingly influence attention, feedback, assessment, and even learners' self-perceptions.

From a mathetic perspective, this mediation is epistemically significant. Technologies function as external cognitive artifacts that enable learners to explore, test, and construct meaning through interaction with digital representations. However, the same mediating role also raises ethical concerns, since technological systems embed assumptions, values, and forms of power that can influence learning trajectories in subtle and often invisible ways.

4.2. Tension between technological personalization and human agency

A second dominant theme identified in the literature is the tension between technological personalization and human agency. Many studies highlight the promise of artificial intelligence and adaptive systems to individualize learning pathways, provide tailored feedback, and increase efficiency. At the same time, the literature warns that these systems risk displacing both learners and teachers from active decision-making roles by transferring cognitive and moral agency to algorithmic processes.

This tension is particularly evident in discussions of data-driven personalization, where learners may be reduced to behavioral profiles and predictive models. From a mathetic viewpoint, this dynamic threatens the learner's role as an active constructor of knowledge. Ethical integration of technology therefore requires pedagogical designs that preserve learners' capacity to make choices, reflect on their learning, and engage critically with digital systems rather than passively follow algorithmic recommendations.

4.3. The growing invisibility of technological mediation

The analysis also revealed a third theme: the increasing invisibility of technological mediation in digital learning environments. Interfaces, algorithms, and automated processes are designed to operate seamlessly, often concealing their influence on attention, judgment, and behavior. As a result, learners and teachers may be unaware of how educational experiences are being shaped, filtered, or optimized by digital systems.

This invisibility complicates ethical responsibility, since unexamined technological mediation can normalize surveillance, bias, and subtle forms of control. The literature therefore emphasizes the importance of critical digital awareness and transparency, both of which are central to a mathetic and

human-centered approach to learning. Making technological processes visible becomes a pedagogical and ethical imperative.

4.4. The central role of schools in ethical digital transformation

Finally, the literature consistently positions schools as key institutional actors in mediating the ethical and social implications of digital technologies. Despite the expansion of informal and platform-based learning, schools remain one of the few spaces where technological innovation can be pedagogically guided, ethically reflected upon, and democratically debated. Schools are not merely sites for the acquisition of digital skills, but cultural and civic institutions responsible for fostering critical thinking, ethical judgment, and social inclusion. The reviewed studies emphasize that without strong institutional frameworks, technological innovation risks reinforcing inequality and undermining democratic values. A mathetic perspective reinforces this view by highlighting the importance of learning environments that support exploration, dialogue, and epistemic responsibility.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study examined the ethical integration of digital technologies in education through a human-centered and mathetic perspective. The analysis showed that digital technologies such as artificial intelligence function not merely as tools, but as active mediators of learning, cognition, and social relations. It also revealed a persistent tension between technological personalization and human agency, as well as the increasing invisibility of technological mediation in contemporary learning environments. Finally, the findings highlighted the central role of schools as institutional spaces for fostering critical digital literacy, ethical reflection, and democratic participation.

These results contribute to current debates in educational innovation and digital ethics by offering a theoretically integrated perspective that connects pedagogical frameworks such as PCK and TPCK with mathetic learning and ethical responsibility. By foregrounding the learner’s epistemic agency, the study advances a view of digital education in which technologies are understood as cognitive and cultural mediators rather than as instruments of control or mere efficiency.

The implications of this analysis are both pedagogical and institutional. For educators, the findings reinforce the need to design learning environments that preserve learner agency, promote critical reflection, and support ethical engagement with digital systems. For schools and policymakers, they suggest that digital transformation must be guided not only by technological or

economic criteria, but also by humanistic, democratic, and ethical considerations.

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on an exploratory and interpretive review of the literature rather than on empirical data, which limits the generalizability of its conclusions. Second, the analysis is primarily theoretical and does not examine how these dynamics unfold in specific school contexts or educational systems. Third, the rapidly evolving nature of digital technologies means that some of the issues discussed may change as new tools and policies emerge.

Future research could address these limitations by conducting empirical studies on how teachers and students experience artificial intelligence and digital platforms in everyday school practices. Comparative studies across educational systems and sociocultural contexts would also help to test and refine the theoretical insights proposed here. In addition, further research could explore how mathetic learning principles can be operationalized in concrete pedagogical designs and teacher education programs.

In conclusion, a digitally mediated society demands not only technological competence, but also ethical commitment and critical awareness. Schools remain uniquely positioned to shape this future by preparing learners to engage with digital technologies in ways that support human dignity, democratic participation, and social justice.

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Reflection on legal reforms in the pre-university education system in Albania: Comparative analysis of the changes to Law No. 33/2024 in relation to Law No. 69/2012

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Abstract: This paper provides a comparative analysis of the amendments introduced by Law No. 33/2024 on Amendments and Additions to Law No. 69/2012 in relation to the existing legal framework governing pre-university education established by Law No. 69/2012 on the Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania. The study aims to examine the legal implications of the reform and to assess its impact on the organization, governance, and functioning of the pre-university education system in Albania. The research is based on a qualitative legal methodology that combines normative legal analysis with a comparative approach. The study examines the relevant legal provisions and conducts a detailed article-by-article comparison between the original provisions of Law No. 69/2012 and the amendments introduced by Law No. 33/2024. In addition, the analysis is supported by a review of academic literature and policy documents related to education governance and legal regulation of education systems.

The findings indicate that the legislative amendments aim to modernize the legal framework of pre-university education in Albania by strengthening the regulatory role of the state in ensuring education quality, improving transparency and accountability in school governance, and increasing the

participation of local communities and stakeholders in decision-making processes within educational institutions. Furthermore, the reform reflects broader efforts to align Albania’s education legislation with contemporary governance standards and international educational policies.

Despite these improvements, the study highlights that the effectiveness of the new legal provisions largely depends on their practical implementation, the administrative capacities of educational institutions, and the development of supporting regulatory mechanisms. Overall, the reform represents an important step toward improving governance, accountability, and quality within the Albanian pre-university education system.

This study contributes to the literature on educational reforms and policies in Albania by providing a detailed analysis of the recent legal reform and highlighting the challenges and prospects for the further development of the pre-university education system.

Keywords: *Pre-university education, Education law, Education reform, Albania, Comparative analysis*

1. Introduction

Pre-university education constitutes one of the fundamental components of the social and economic development of a state. In Albania, the legal framework regulating this sector is built mainly on Law No. 69/2012, which defines the structure, organization and functioning of the pre-university education system. This law establishes the foundations for the functioning of public and private educational institutions, for the role of the state in guaranteeing the quality of education and for the rights of the actors of the education system.

In 2024, the Albanian legislature adopted Law No. 33/2024, which brings important changes to this legal framework. These changes aim to improve the governance of the education system, increase transparency in the administration of educational institutions and modernize the objectives of pre-university education.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the changes brought by the new law, as well as to assess their impact on the functioning of the Albanian education system.

2. Theoretical and legal framework of pre-university education

The right to education is a fundamental human right and is guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania. The state has the obligation to ensure equal access to education and to guarantee the quality of the education system.

Within the framework of Albanian legislation, pre-university education includes several educational levels: (i) preschool education, (ii) primary education, (iii) lower secondary education and (iv) upper secondary education. This system is organized according to international standards of education classification and aims to provide comprehensive educational, social and cultural development for students.

Law No. 69/2012 has defined for the first time an integrated structure of the pre-university education system, also defining the competencies of state institutions and the mechanisms for monitoring the quality of education.

3. Literature Review

Legal literature and studies on pre-university education in Albania have highlighted several key challenges of the education system. Studies on Albanian education policies have highlighted: (i) The need to improve the quality of education, (ii) Increasing transparency in the administration of educational institutions, and (iii) Adapting the education system to social and technological developments.

International literature on educational governance also emphasizes the importance of (i) institutional autonomy of schools, (ii) performance assessment mechanisms, and (iii) community involvement in educational administration.

The legal, institutional, and political development of the pre-university education system in Albania has been the subject of increasing scholarly attention, especially after the adoption of Law No. 69/2012 on the Pre-university Education System in the Republic of Albania and the subsequent reforms that culminated in Law No. 33/2024 on Amendments and Additions to Law No. 69/2012.

Albanian academic literature addressing this area generally focuses on three main dimensions: the legal and institutional framework of education governance, the decentralization of educational administration, and the quality and inclusiveness of the education system (Boce & Shabani, 2016; Marku 2018; Kume, 2021, 2023, Papa, 2024; Tahiri, 2023).

Marku (2018) emphasizes that the transition period after the 1990s required the construction of a modern legislative framework capable of ensuring institutional stability, professional autonomy of schools, and accountability mechanisms. His analyses highlight the importance of comprehensive legal regulation to balance central oversight with institutional autonomy. According to Kume (2024), the relationship between central government institutions and local authorities in the management of educational institutions is one of the challenges facing the pre-university education system in Albania. Kume a

argues that decentralization reforms have gradually transferred important administrative responsibilities to local government units, yet the legal framework still retains a strong regulatory role for the central government in order to maintain national education standards.

Issues related to curriculum development and educational quality are discussed by Papa (2024), according to whom legislative reforms alone cannot ensure improvements in educational outcomes unless they are accompanied by professional development for teachers, institutional capacity building and continuous monitoring of learning outcomes.

Kume (2023) has examined institutional effectiveness and accountability within public sector institutions, including education. She highlights the importance of transparent governance mechanisms, performance evaluation and data-based policymaking for improving the functioning of the education system.

In general, the Albanian academic literature suggests that the development of the pre-university education system has been closely linked to broader governance reforms and the modernization of public administration. Scholars generally agree that the legislative framework established by Law No. 69/2012 marked an important step towards institutional consolidation, while recent amendments seek to address new challenges related to the quality of education, accountability and institutional coordination. However, the literature also consistently emphasizes that the success of legal reforms ultimately depends on effective implementation, administrative capacity and sustained political commitment by education authorities. Educational policy analyses have shown that the education system also faces demographic and social challenges. For example, statistics in recent years show a decline in the number of students in pre-university education, mainly linked to demographic factors and emigration.

This situation makes it even more important to reform the legal framework and improve the quality of education.

4. Comparative analysis of legal changes made

Law No. 69/2012 establishes that basic education is compulsory for children from 6 to 16 years of age. Law No. 33/2024 specifies: (i) the age of commencement of education, (ii) the age limit for completion of basic education and (iii) the procedures for registering students.

This amendment represents a normative clarification, which aims to avoid different administrative interpretations and ensure a more uniform application of the law.

The new law expands the competencies of the ministry responsible for education to include: (i) monitoring the quality of education, (ii) assessing the performance of educational institutions and (iii) developing educational projects and policies.

This amendment creates supportive conditions for strengthening the regulatory role of the state in the education system.

From the perspective of administrative law, this amendment implies: (i) expanding the competencies of the public administration and (ii) increasing institutional responsibility for the quality of education.

Law No. 33/2024 changes the method of selecting the heads of educational institutions. According to these changes: (i) the director is appointed by the regional educational institution, (ii) candidates are selected through open competition and (iii) representatives of the school community are included in the process.

The evaluation committee for candidates for the position of head of the educational institution is composed of (i) representatives of the local government, (ii) representatives of the school board, (iii) representatives of parents and (iv) teachers of the educational institution.

The changes made affect: (i) increasing transparency in the administration of educational institutions and (ii) increasing community participation in decision-making.

In this way, the legislation has created an effective space for the transition from the centralized model of governance and administration of education to a model with comprehensive participation.

5. Analysis of outcomes and developments to date

Although the time that has passed since the legal changes made to the law on pre-university education is relatively short, several developments in the pre-university education system can be identified, which support the consideration of the positive value that these changes have.

One of the most noticeable trends in the pre-university education system in Albania is the decline in the number of students in pre-university education, related to demographic factors and emigration. In the 2024–2025 school year, about 405,989 students were enrolled in pre-university education, marking a decrease of about 2.6% compared to the previous year.

This situation has generated several implications/challenges for educational policy, among which can be listed

- The need to optimize the network of educational institutions
- Increasing the quality of education to reduce educational emigration
- Improving the management of educational resources.

The legal reform carried out with Law No. 33/2024 aim to address some of these challenges through:

- (i) improving the governance of educational institutions
- (ii) strengthening quality monitoring mechanisms
- (iii) increasing transparency in school administration.

To successfully address these challenges, the interventions and adjustments that have been and can be made in legislation are not sufficient. In addition, it is necessary to draft policies and implement programs and projects through which the continuous increase in the quality of the pre-university education system will be and can be achieved. It is necessary to build new monitoring mechanisms, which will make it possible not only to better control and monitor in real time the progress of the education process, but also to identify opportunities and paths that should be pursued with the objective of continuously improving the performance of educational institutions.

The democratization of school administration and the greatest and most effective involvement of the community in school affairs is a necessary condition for increasing the transparency and legitimacy of decision-making that addresses various issues and aspects of the functioning of the pre-university education system.

The reform in legislation and the regulatory framework, the policies and programs that must be drafted and implemented in accordance with the requirements arising from these reforms, should in any case aim to bring the Albanian education system closer to European practices of education governance. The analysis of the progress of the implementation of the changes made in 2024 to the law on pre-university education in Albania highlights as priorities the needs for (i) effective implementation of the reforms in practice, (ii) securing the necessary financial resources and (iii) balancing between centralization and institutional autonomy.

7. Conclusions

Law No. 33/2024 constitutes an important step in the reform of the pre-university education system in Albania.

Comparative analysis shows that the new law:

- (i) expands the competencies of state institutions in monitoring the education system
- (ii) improves the governance of educational institutions
- (iii) modernizes the objectives of education in line with contemporary developments.

The effectiveness of the legislative reform depends on the practical implementation of legal provisions and on the ability of institutions to implement changes efficiently.

Increasing the quality of the pre-university education system requires the coordination of legislative reforms and the design and implementation of policies and programs that align this system with European education systems

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The Readiness of a Foreign Language Novice Teacher to Perform the Teaching Profession

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Abstract: The paper focuses on the readiness of novice foreign language teachers to perform the teaching profession, with particular attention to the relationship between pre-service education and the real demands of pedagogical practice. The study examines how knowledge and competences acquired during pre-service teacher training correspond with novice teachers' expectations and with the requirements they encounter when entering school practice.

The research adopts a mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase is based on focus groups and semi-structured interviews with novice foreign language teachers and aims to identify problematic areas of pedagogical practice, especially in the domains of administrative duties, professional communication, and adaptation to the school environment. The quantitative phase follows using an online questionnaire derived from qualitative findings to explore the prevalence of these issues within a wider group of respondents. The expected results indicate gaps between declared learning outcomes of pre-service training and the actual requirements of the teaching profession. The findings are intended to contribute to the improvement of pre-service teacher education and to provide recommendations for targeted support of novice foreign language teachers.

Keywords: *novice teachers, foreign language teacher education, pre-service training, teaching profession requirements*

1 Introduction

Graduates of foreign language teacher education programs enter the teaching profession with the intention of applying subject-specific and didactic knowledge acquired during their university studies. However, contemporary educational practice increasingly places complex and multifaceted demands on novice teachers that extend beyond classroom instruction. In addition to

linguistic and methodological competences, novice foreign language teachers are expected to manage administrative responsibilities, communicate effectively with multiple stakeholders, integrate digital technologies into teaching and assessment, and adapt to the institutional and cultural environment of schools. These expanded expectations intensify the challenges novice teachers face during the initial phase of their professional practice and raise questions regarding the adequacy of pre-service training.

International educational policies reflect a broadened understanding of teacher competence. Recent OECD reports emphasize that teacher professionalism now encompasses not only subject expertise but also digital, social, and adaptive competences necessary for functioning within rapidly transforming educational systems (OECD, 2023). Similarly, the European DigCompEdu framework conceptualizes digital competence as an integral component of teachers’ professional identity, including the effective use of digital technologies for instruction, assessment, collaboration, and professional communication (Redecker, 2017). Within the context of digital transformation and innovation in education, such competences are considered essential rather than supplementary to teaching practice.

At the national level, professional standards and legislative frameworks define a broad spectrum of expectations placed on teachers. Slovak professional standards and related legal regulations outline pedagogical, communicative, organizational, and administrative responsibilities that shape the professional role of teachers across educational levels (Ministry of Education, 2017; Act No. 138/2019 Coll.). Research focused on the development and assessment of professional competences further highlights the complexity of teacher preparedness and the need for systematic evaluation and support (Butašová et al., 2017). These normative research-based perspectives demonstrate that teacher competence is understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions.

Despite this clearly articulated framework of expectations, the transition from pre-service preparation to real school practice represents a critical phase in teachers’ professional development. This transition has been described as a demanding period, often referred to as “reality shock,” and associated with professional uncertainty, increased workload, and the challenge of reconciling theoretical preparation with the practical realities of school environments (Veenman, 1984; Flores, Day, 2006). The extent to which pre-service foreign language teacher education effectively prepares graduates to meet these multifaceted and context-dependent demands therefore remains an open empirical question.

In light of these considerations, examining the perceived professional readiness of novice foreign language teachers and exploring the relationship

between pre-service preparation and actual practice demands represents a relevant and timely research issue. Such investigation may contribute to a more coherent alignment between teacher education programs and the evolving requirements of educational systems in a digital society.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Professional Readiness as a Multidimensional Construct

Professional readiness of novice foreign language teachers cannot be reduced to the mere possession of subject knowledge or methodological expertise. Rather, it represents a multidimensional construct encompassing a complex integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional dispositions that enable teachers to perform their role effectively within authentic school contexts. In competence-based approaches to teacher education, professional competence is generally understood as a dynamic combination of cognitive, practical, and affective components that are activated in real-life professional situations.

In the Slovak context, Butašová et al. (2017) conceptualise teacher professional competence as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, emphasising the multidimensional nature of professional performance in educational settings. This understanding aligns with broader European and international perspectives, which frame teacher competence as a multidimensional construct extending beyond disciplinary expertise. According to OECD (2023), contemporary teacher professionalism includes not only subject-specific competence but also digital literacy, collaboration skills, adaptability, and the ability to respond to diverse educational environments shaped by rapid social and technological change.

From this perspective, professional readiness cannot be equated with theoretical preparation alone. While pre-service education provides foundational knowledge and pedagogical principles, readiness implies the capacity to apply these competences flexibly and responsibly in real teaching and after class situations. It involves decision-making, communication, classroom management, and reflective evaluation of one's own practice. Reflection, understood as the conscious and critical examination of one's professional actions and decisions (Průcha et al., 2001), constitutes an essential component of professional growth and ongoing competence development. Therefore, professional readiness may be interpreted as an integrative construct that connects formal preparation, contextual demands, and the teacher's capacity for adaptive and reflective practice. Such conceptualisation provides a theoretical basis for examining not only what

novice teachers know, but how they perceive their ability to perform effectively in the complex realities of school practice.

2.2 Competence-Based and Normative Frameworks in the Slovak Context

In the Slovak educational system, professional expectations placed on teachers are formally articulated through professional standards and legislative regulations. The Professional Standards for Teachers issued by the National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVaM, 2022) define key domains of teacher competence across educational levels, including lower and upper secondary education. These standards structure professional competence in relation to the pupil, the educational process, and the teacher’s professional role, thus reflecting a multidimensional understanding of teacher professionalism. Within this framework, teachers are expected to demonstrate subject-didactic expertise, effective communication, classroom management, cooperation with stakeholders, and engagement in continuous professional development. The legislative framework further specifies the professional status and developmental trajectory of teachers. Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on Pedagogical and Professional Employees regulates the conditions for entry into the teaching profession and establishes adaptation training as a compulsory phase for novice teachers. During this period, novice teachers are assigned a mentor and are required to demonstrate their professional competence in practice before being classified as independent teachers. The existence of structured adaptation training suggests an institutional recognition that initial teacher education does not automatically guarantee full professional readiness for independent practice.

Taken together, professional standards and legislative regulations define a comprehensive normative model of teacher competence. However, while these documents clearly articulate expected professional performance, they do not provide empirical insight into how novice teachers themselves perceive their readiness to meet such expectations. This distinction between formally defined competence requirements and perceived professional preparedness constitutes a central focus of the present study.

2.3 International Perspectives on Early Career Challenges

The transition from pre-service education to full professional responsibility has long been recognized as a demanding phase in teachers’ careers, often associated with the need to reconcile theoretical preparation with the complex realities of school practice (Veenman, 1984). Contemporary large-scale international data further confirm that the early years of teaching are shaped by multifaceted professional demands extending beyond subject instruction.

Findings from the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS, 2018) illustrate the breadth of expectations placed on teachers in everyday practice. On average across OECD countries participating in TALIS, only 78% of classroom time is devoted to actual teaching and learning, while the remaining time is spent on maintaining order and dealing with administrative tasks. This indicates that organisational and administrative responsibilities constitute a significant component of teachers' daily workload. Classroom management and clarity of instruction are widely applied practices, highlighting the central role of organisational competence in effective teaching.

TALIS data also reveal areas where pre-service preparation may not fully align with evolving professional demands. While most teachers report receiving instruction in subject content and pedagogy during their pre-service education, considerably fewer indicate preparation in the use of information and communication technologies for teaching. At the same time, teachers identify the development of advanced ICT skills as an area where further professional development is needed. These findings underscore the growing importance of digital competence within contemporary teaching practice.

The survey further highlights the role of induction and mentoring during the early career phase. Despite evidence suggesting that structured induction positively influences novice teachers' transition and perceived efficacy, only a small part of teachers reports having participated in formal or informal induction processes during their first employment, and fewer indicate having been assigned a mentor. These data suggest that institutional support structures for novice teachers vary considerably and may influence teachers' perceptions of their own readiness and professional confidence as well as their willingness to stay in the profession.

Overall, international empirical findings point to a complex interplay of instructional, organisational, administrative, digital, and adaptive demands characterising the early stages of teaching. While normative frameworks define what teachers are expected to demonstrate, large-scale survey data reveal the practical realities and support conditions shaping novice teachers' professional experiences. This international evidence provides a relevant backdrop for examining how novice foreign language teachers within a specific national context perceive their own professional readiness in relation to formally defined expectations.

2.4 Conceptual Model of the Study

Based on the synthesis of competence-based perspectives, national normative frameworks, and international empirical evidence, professional readiness of

novice foreign language teachers is conceptualised in this study as a multidimensional construct comprising five interrelated domains.

The first domain, *subject-didactic readiness*, refers to the ability to apply subject knowledge and pedagogical principles effectively in classroom practice, including planning, instruction, and assessment. The second domain, *socio-communicative readiness*, encompasses professional communication with pupils, parents, colleagues, and school leadership, as well as the capacity to manage classroom interactions and contribute to a positive learning climate. The third domain, *digital and administrative readiness*, reflects the ability to integrate digital technologies into teaching and to manage administrative responsibilities associated with documentation and school administrative procedures and culture. The fourth domain, *adaptation and professional support*, relates to the transition into the profession, including experiences of induction, mentoring, and institutional support during the early career phase. The fifth domain, *reflective readiness*, concerns the capacity for critical self-evaluation and ongoing professional learning.

These domains are understood as analytically distinct yet mutually interconnected components of professional readiness. They serve as guiding categories for the qualitative exploration of novice teachers’ experiences and subsequently inform the construction of the quantitative research instrument. The study does not aim to assess objective competence levels but rather focuses on novice teachers’ self-perceived readiness within these domains in relation to the demands of pedagogical and school practice.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study is designed as a mixed-methods research project employing a sequential exploratory design. The qualitative phase is intended to generate an in-depth understanding of novice foreign language teachers’ experiences during their first year of working at school. The subsequent quantitative research builds on qualitative findings and aims to examine the prevalence of identified challenges within a broader sample and to test the hypothesised relationship between perceived quality of pre-service preparation and experienced professional difficulties.

3.2 Participants

The qualitative phase will involve six novice foreign language teachers in their first year of teaching at school. Participants will be selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation from both lower secondary and upper secondary schools (three participants from each educational level). The

inclusion criterion is the completion of pre-service teacher education in a foreign language teaching programme and current employment as a foreign language teacher in the first year of professional practice.

The quantitative phase is expected to include a broader sample of novice foreign language teachers across lower and upper secondary schools in Slovakia. Participants will be recruited through professional networks and school contacts. The target population consists of teachers in their first year of practice who have completed pre-service teacher education in a foreign language teaching programme.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection will proceed in four stages. First, a focus group discussion will be conducted with approximately 15 recent graduates of foreign language teacher education programmes shortly after passing their final state examinations. The focus group will explore participants' perceptions of their preparedness for school practice, with particular attention to perceived strengths and anticipated challenges in administrative, communicative, organisational, digital, and reflective domains. This initial stage will also serve to establish contact with potential participants for the subsequent longitudinal qualitative research phase.

Second, participants who enter school work will be contacted at the beginning of the school year to identify their employment context. Those who begin teaching will be invited to participate in a first round of semi-structured individual interviews approximately one month after starting their teaching position. The interviews will focus on their early experiences from transition to practice, perceived demands of the school environment, and initial discrepancies between pre-service preparation and professional realities.

Third, a follow-up semi-structured interview will be conducted with the same participants at the end of their first school year at school. This interview will explore changes in perceived readiness over time, adaptation processes, experiences with mentoring and institutional support, and the development of professional confidence and reflective practice.

Following the qualitative phase, an online questionnaire will be administered to a broader sample of novice foreign language teachers in Slovakia. The questionnaire will be based on the qualitative findings and structured around the five domains of the conceptual model, using Likert-scale items to measure perceived preparedness and experienced difficulties in each domain.

3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected from the focus group and semi-structured interviews will be analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis will involve coding the

data, identifying recurring patterns, and organising themes in accordance with the five domains of the conceptual model. Particular attention will be paid to changes in perceived readiness over time between the first and second interview rounds.

Quantitative data from the online questionnaire will be analysed using descriptive statistics to examine the prevalence and perceived intensity of challenges across domains. To test the stated hypothesis, correlation analysis will be applied to determine the relationship between perceived quality of pre-service preparation and the extent of experienced and faced professional difficulties.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study will be voluntary at all stages. All participants will be informed about the purpose of the research and the procedures involved prior to data collection. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured by removing identifying information from transcript and questionnaire data. Data will be stored securely and used solely for research purposes. Participants will have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

4 Expected Results and Discussion

Given the theoretical grounding and international evidence discussed above, it is expected that novice foreign language teachers will report certain discrepancies between the competences developed during pre-service education and the practical demands encountered in their first year of teaching at school. In particular, challenges may emerge in areas extending beyond subject-didactic expertise, such as administrative responsibilities, professional communication, and adaptation to institutional procedures.

It is further anticipated that digital and organisational aspects of teaching may represent areas where novice teachers perceive greater difficulty, especially in relation to documentation, requirements, classroom management, and the integration of digital tools into everyday practice. While pre-service education provides foundational pedagogical knowledge, the complexity and intensity of real school environments may require types of competence that are developed progressively through experience and professional support.

In line with findings from international surveys such as TALIS, the study may also reveal the importance of structured induction and mentoring novice teachers during their early career phase. Differences in perceived readiness across domains could indicate areas where stronger alignment between pre-

service education, professional standards, and the realities of school practice might be beneficial.

The anticipated findings are not intended to question the overall quality of teacher education programmes but rather to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of professional readiness as a developmental process. By examining self-perceived preparedness in relation to normative expectations, the study aims to provide empirically grounded insights that may inform the ongoing refinement of pre-service training and early career support mechanisms in the Slovak context.

5 Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

This study proposes a multidimensional conceptualisation of professional readiness of novice foreign language teachers and outlines a mixed-methods research design aimed at examining the relationship between pre-service preparation and the practical demands of early career teaching. By integrating qualitative exploration with quantitative validation, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how novice teachers perceive their preparedness within the Slovak educational context.

The proposed design emphasises the importance of examining professional readiness not solely as a product of pre-service education, but as a dynamic process shaped by institutional expectations, adaptation experiences, and professional support structures. In doing so, the study aspires to offer empirically grounded insights that may inform discussions on the alignment between teacher education programmes, professional standards, and early career induction practices.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The qualitative phase involves a relatively small number of participants, which limits the generalisability of findings. Furthermore, the study focuses on self-perceived readiness, which may not fully correspond to objectively assessed professional competence. Further research could expand the sample size, incorporate additional data sources, or compare novice teachers across different subject areas or educational contexts.

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A Review on Classroom Management Strategies and Students' Behavior

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to offer a comprehensive exploration of the critical issues facing contemporary education, emphasizing the need for systematic reorganization and modernization to meet the demands of the 21st century. Over the past decade, societal transformations, whether positive or negative, have underscored the importance of improving everyday life, driven by the democratization phenomenon, which empowers individuals to seek solutions for personal and collective improvement. Effective analysis of societal needs and human resources capable of managing change is fundamental to this process. A central theme discussed though is the urgent need to reform educational institutions, particularly schools, which are often outdated and insufficiently equipped to serve modern societal needs. It also highlights the importance of continuously updating curricula to incorporate digital media and technological advancements, recognizing that students are growing up immersed in digital environments. This evolution necessitates changes not only in content but also in pedagogical methods, assessment strategies, and classroom management practices. The paper also underscores the significance of individualized learning approaches, advocating for the recognition and respect of diverse learning styles. Teachers are encouraged to foster positive, supportive, and equitable classroom atmosphere, characterized by support, friendship, and mutual trust, thereby facilitating a conducive environment for learning and personal development. The role of the teacher is positioned as pivotal, requiring the ability to establish motivational climates and set realistic expectations for students' success.

Keywords: *classroom management, educational setting, learning and personal development, conducive environment*

1. Background and significance of classroom management

Management within education is defined as a scientific discipline involving planning, decision making, organizing, leading, and controlling resources to

achieve educational goals efficiently and effectively. Classroom management, a subset of this discipline, involves activities that align teaching strategies with students' needs and institutional objectives. Effective management practices, such as optimal time utilization, tailored teaching methods, and strategic planning, are linked to increased students' engagement, clarity of expectations, and overall classroom harmony (Kaur & Singh, 2023). There are several core components that are considered as essential to classroom management, such as: strategic planning, whether long or short term, curriculum development aligned with clear educational goals, decision making consistency, the implementation of diverse teaching techniques to accommodate varied learning styles and ongoing evaluation of classroom dynamics, mastery of these elements enables teachers to create stimulating, productive, and disciplined learning environments, ultimately fostering students' achievement and motivation (Delceva et al., 2014.).

Classroom management encompasses a broad spectrum of responsibilities beyond merely overseeing student behavior (Masood et al., 2024). As a systematic organization of classroom life, including curriculum planning, resource allocation, environmental arrangement, monitoring student progress, and evaluating the effectiveness of management strategies, it requires proactive anticipation of potential issues, enabling teachers to implement preventative measures that foster a conducive learning environment (Chine et al., 2022).

2. Literature review

Considering the importance of the classroom management in students' performance, from primary to elementary and secondary school, several studies have been made in this regard. Delceva (2014) shares a study where she emphasizes that among elementary teachers, a slight majority (53%) affirm the importance of management in the classroom, whereas 47% are unfamiliar with its precise meaning, indicating a significant gap in pedagogical awareness. According to the study, most elementary teachers (87%), consistently plan their lessons, demonstrating a proactive approach to instructional preparation, with only a small fraction (13%) relying solely on textbook content. Regarding classroom atmosphere and student engagement, 84% of elementary educators prioritize delivering material in engaging ways to facilitate understanding, whereas 16% cite large class sizes as a barrier to establishing an effective teaching environment.

In contrast, high school teachers exhibit a lower level of familiarity with classroom management, with only 34% affirming its significance, and a substantial 67% lacking understanding of the concept altogether. Similar to

elementary teachers, 82% of high school educators plan their lessons regularly, leaving 18% to depend exclusively on textbooks. However, only 26% of high school teachers focus on presenting material in an engaging manner to enhance absorption, while dominant 74% attribute difficulties in maintaining a positive classroom climate to large class size (Ubod, 2020). On the other hand, both elementary and high school teachers predominantly rely on traditional evaluation methods such as tests and exams, with no significant use of self-evaluation techniques. This reliance raises questions about objectivity and the depth of student self-awareness positively, often dismissing the need for self-evaluation which suggests a positive under evaluation of reflective practices in professional development. As a result, the study highlights that elementary teachers possess a comparatively better understanding of classroom management principles than their high school counterparts. This discrepancy underscores a critical deficiency in pedagogical training among high school educators, emphasizing the necessity for targeted professional development initiatives to enhance their pedagogical competences, particularly in management and student evaluation methodologies (Delceva et al., 2014.).

However, another primary finding across the literature review reviewed is that positive reinforcement stands out as one of the most effective methods for fostering student engagement and reducing disruptive behaviors. Empirical evidence demonstrates that teachers who implement reward systems and constructive feedback can significantly diminish disruptive conduct while promoting active participation in learning activities (Asiyai, 2011). On the other hand, research on positive behavior support indicates that structured reinforcement of positive behaviors coupled with clear consequences for negative actions creates a more conducive learning environment, effectively decreasing disruptions and supporting students' emotional well-being. Complementary behavioral strategies, restorative practices, centered on rebuilding relationships and fostering constructive dialogue, have been shown to reduce aggression and improve interpersonal dynamics between students and teachers, offering a constructive alternative to punitive measures (Salama et al., 2025).

The physical classroom environment also plays a crucial role in behaviors management. Well organized classrooms, with strategic settings and the usage of appropriate learning tools, support students to focus and diminish tendencies toward disruptive behaviors. This underscores that classroom management extends beyond behavioral techniques to include environmental design that facilitates effective learning (Cole et al., 2021; Amiruddin et al., 2024). In multicultural settings, culturally inclusive strategies combined with positive reinforcement have proven effective in respecting diversity, reducing

tensions, and enhancing students' engagement. These approaches acknowledge the importance of understanding students' social and cultural backgrounds in implementing management strategies that foster inclusive and positive interactions (Fatmawati et al., 2023; Ashrafova, 2024; Hariyadi & Rodiyah, 2023; Marvi, 2023). Moreover, teacher training emerges as a vital component influencing classroom management efficacy. Structured training programs enhance teachers' managerial skills, boost their confidence, and equip them with practical techniques to handle challenging situations more effectively (Pozo-Rico et al., 2023; Ahmed et al., 2021; Pratiwi et al., 2020). Instructional materials constitute another critical component, facilitating richer learning experiences and aiding teachers in delivering content effectively. The provision of diverse and appropriate instructional resources enhances instructional quality and student engagement, thereby supporting classroom management objectives (Chine et al., 2022). Control techniques in classroom management involve reinforcing desirable behaviors while addressing undesirable ones constructively. Teachers are advised to reward positive behavior through praise, gestures, or tangible rewards, and to ignore minor deviant behaviors when appropriate. When addressing misconduct, it is crucial to focus on the behavior rather than the individual, employing language that expresses disapproval without humiliating the student. Expressing emotions honestly but respectfully, using statements in the first-person singular like “I”, help maintain a positive teacher-student relationship. Punishment should be viewed as a last resort, applied judiciously, fairly, promptly, and in accordance with legal and ethical standards. Guidelines for professional punishment include ensuring it is legal, infrequent, appropriate, impersonal, non-violent, and administered without anger, maintaining fairness and justice (Hall, P.E., 2010).

On the other hand, discipline in the classroom can be effectively established through meticulous lesson planning and engaging instruction, which occupy students' attention and minimize opportunities for disorder. Teachers who are neat, approachable, considerate, and supportive foster respect and voluntary compliance among students. Involving students in establishing rules cultivates ownership and acceptance of behavioral standards (Rahman, 2010). Consistency in enforcing rules and sanctions reinforces self-control and predictability, essential for maintaining discipline. Transparency, honesty, and fairness in disciplinary actions reinforce students' trust and adherence to classroom norms (Chika & Chinyere, 2019).

Other scholars agree that effective management involves a strategic combination of preventative and reactive strategies. Preventative strategies aim to foster positive student behaviors through group discussion, motivation, positive interventions, and nurturing teacher-student relationships.

Conversely, reactive strategies, such as warnings, threats, and punishments, are employed when preventive measures fail, to address and correct undesired behaviors (Kumar & Liu, 2019). However, there exists a fundamental distinction between these strategies. More specifically, preventive approaches focus on proactive classroom climate building, while reactive approaches are responses to specific behavior issues. Both can be applied broadly, class wide, group specific, or individually, with interventions tailored to students' needs, especially those with behavioral disorders or other challenges. In this regard, Evertson and Weinstein (2006) recognize that classroom management interventions often integrate both predictive and resistive strategies. Empirical studies in this field, including meta-analysis, highlight the significance of teacher-student relationships, classroom environment, and instructional practices in managing behavior. Research done by Marzano et al. (2003) underscores that positive teacher-student relationships substantially enhance classroom management effectiveness, on average, improving management outcomes by approximately 31%. Key factors influencing these relationships include establishing appropriate dominance, characterized by clear expectations and confident authority, and fostering mutual cooperation.

Strategies for establishing dominance involve assertive body language, clear communication of rules, and consistent enforcement of expectations. Simultaneously, fostering cooperation requires flexibility, mutual goal setting, and responsiveness to students' individual needs. Effective classroom management balances assertion with flexibility, allowing teachers to adapt to specific student contexts, such as providing additional support or revision sessions for students with weaker prerequisites, while maintaining clear boundaries and expectations (Kumar & Liu, 2019). Moreover, teachers should be attentive to students with high needs, including those experiencing emotional or behavior difficulties. Regular engagement with such students, in collaboration with counselors and support staff, is crucial for addressing their unique challenges and promoting their well-being and academic success (Kumar & Liu, 2019).

Establishing a conducive learning environment in today's school settings is challenging for teachers. Traditional pedagogical methods, such as lecture-based instruction, often promote passive learning and may hinder cognitive development, especially when information delivery is unidirectional (Augustine, 2014). The integration of information technology can enhance teaching strategies, transforming passive lectures into more interactive and engaging experiences that promote active student participation. Brophy (2003) emphasizes the importance of an organized environment and considers classroom management as an instrument in facilitating effective teaching and learning outcomes. According to Brophy (2003) study, successful classroom

management necessitates skillful planning and deliberate action to cultivate a positive and supportive atmosphere that encourages student engagement.

Though the role of the teacher in managing the class is essential, there are other facts that affect the process and challenges that can significantly impede a teacher's ability to establish conducive learning atmosphere and achieve educational objectives. These challenges and barriers derive from students themselves. (Iswan et al., 2020) summarizes some students barriers as leadership styles, learning format, personality and knowledge, behavior and family influence. In this regard, the authors highlight that authoritarian or less democratic leadership in classroom management fosters passive student attitudes, undermining active engagement. On the other hand, repetitive or monotonous instructional methods contribute to student boredom, frustration, and disciplinary issues. However, students' personality traits such as warmth, fairness, and flexibility are vital for positive classroom dynamics, while negative attitudes hinder management. Limited understanding of management principles and approaches further impairs students' ability to participate actively and understand behavior norms. Furthermore, students' lack of awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities, coupled with behavior influenced by fatigue, playfulness, or sleep deprivation, pose challenges in class management. Additionally, family backgrounds such as authoritarian parenting or poor disciplinary habits, reflect in classroom behavior, often leading to aggression or apathy (Iswan et al., 2020). Besides this, there are also found other challenges in the classroom that might affect the teaching process such as environment and facility related barriers. Large classes, for example, reduce individual attention and may diminish teaching quality, whereas smaller classes increase resource demands. The physical environment, including classroom size, layout, and availability of learning tools and materials, directly affects student motivation and behavior. Inadequate facilities or overcrowded spaces can foster apathy, creativity deficits, and narrow perspectives among students.

3. Research Methodology

This paper adopts systematic literature review design and is implemented as a structured narrative synthesis of empirical and conceptual data on classroom management strategies and their relationship to students' behavior. A systematic review was selected because it offers a transparent and reproducible procedure for locating and evaluating relevant literature, thereby enhancing the credibility of conclusions drawn from a diverse evidence base. In accordance with established standards for reporting systematic reviews, the review process is organized and presented following the logic of PRISMA

2020, which provides guidance for clearly documenting identification, screening, eligibility decisions, and inclusion of sources (Page et al., 2021; PRISMA, 2020). On the other hand, this approach supports comprehensive coverage of the field while permitting careful comparison across contexts, age groups, and educational settings. Methodological decisions throughout the review are aligned with guidance for systematic evidence synthesis, including structured researching, transparent selection of studies, and explicit appraisal of methodological quality (Cochrane Training, 2024; Cochrane Methods, 2023). Finally, findings are synthesized using a narrative synthesis framework rather than a purely statistical meta-analysis. This decision is made due to the expected heterogeneity across studies in research design, intervention definitions, outcome measurement, and educational context. Narrative synthesis enables systematic organization of evidence into conceptually meaningful groupings while maintaining transparency about how conclusions are reached. The synthesis approach follows established guidance for producing rigorous narrative integration of research evidence, including explicit description of how studies are grouped, how patterns are identified across studies, and how study quality and context moderate interpretation (Popay et al., 2006; Rodgers et al., 2009).

4. Conclusion

To sum up, pedagogical training of teachers should be enhanced to include comprehensive and ongoing professional development opportunities. This would ensure that educators possess a solid foundation in classroom management, innovative teaching methods, and assessment strategies, thereby elevating the overall quality of instruction. Special emphasis should be placed on integrating self-evaluation into the pedagogical framework. Currently underutilized, self-assessment is crucial for fostering reflective teaching practices and promoting student autonomy. To improve its adoption, institutions must develop targeted training programs that demonstrate the tangible benefits of self-evaluation and provide practical methods for effective implementation. Recognizing the motivational challenges faced by teachers, it is imperative to address systemic issues such as administrative burdens, performance pressures, and lack of institutional support. Enhancing teacher motivation is essential, as motivated educators are more likely to engage actively with their students, thereby creating a positive learning environment and improving educational outcomes. The responsibility for these improvements extends beyond individual institutions to the broader management and policy framework of the education system. The state must assume a proactive role in reforming educational policies, ensuring adequate

resource allocation, and fostering an environment conducive to professional growth and motivation. The progress of educational democratization hinges on a systematic commitment to reform, professional development, and motivational strategies. Only through concerted efforts at all levels can we hope to break the cycle of ignorance and equip future generations with the knowledge and skills necessary for meaningful participation in society.

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The impact of discussion techniques on fostering critical thinking and effective communication among students

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Abstract: This study examines the pivotal role of educators in developing students' communication skills during the first grade a period that marks a fundamental shift in a child's psychosocial development. The primary objective was to empirically validate the teacher's influence on shaping communication dynamics (teacher-student and student-student) in alignment with the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF).

Within this paradigm, the educator's role shifts from a traditional lecturer to a facilitator and mentor, encouraging students toward independent inquiry and problem-solving.

The research design incorporates theoretical analysis, comparative methods (urban-rural), and statistical evaluation. The sample comprised 80 teachers and 200 primary school students from the Municipality of Viti. Data were gathered through structured observations and Likert-scale questionnaires, subsequently processed using MS Excel 2007 and IBM SPSS v.19.0.

The findings demonstrate that the strategic implementation of discussion techniques stimulates critical thinking and advances the "Effective Communicator" and "Creative Thinker" competencies outlined in the KCF. Furthermore, the study indicates that students with prior preschool education exhibit significantly higher levels of communicative competence.

The study concludes that face-to-face communication remains the most effective medium for teacher-parent collaboration. Investing in pedagogical interaction at this early developmental stage is a vital prerequisite for holistic growth and the cultivation of a well-rounded personality.

Keywords: *Active methodology, discussion techniques, critical thinking, effective communication, pedagogical interaction.*

1. Introduction

Student-centered instruction initiates a progressive movement aimed at enhancing the overall quality of teaching and learning. Within this pedagogical paradigm, the core challenge lies in fostering a more open instructional environment. Educators must remain receptive to actively involving students across all stages of the learning process (Kraja, 2008). The Curriculum Framework establishes the mastery of key competencies as its primary objective, viewing them as essential for individuals to successfully navigate personal, social, and professional demands ([IZHA], 2011). In the contemporary educational landscape, teaching focuses on scaffolded learning, prioritizing the cultivation and application of critical thinking skills over the mere acquisition of isolated facts and data. Rather than passively absorbing information, students are now required to autonomously construct and create knowledge (Misini, 2014). Discussion serves as a strategic technique through which students engage in collaborative dialogue regarding a predetermined topic, aiming to exchange and synthesize information. The procedural execution of a classroom discussion involves selecting a teacher-defined topic, establishing clear learning objectives, assigning specific roles to participating students, and configuring an appropriate environment to facilitate the discourse. The discussion effectively commences when students begin posing inquiries and responding directly to the perspectives shared by their peers. Consequently, it represents a dynamic synthesis of teacher-student explanations and a reciprocal exchange of viewpoints and questions (QTKA, 2005).

2. Literature Review / Theoretical Framework

Educators profoundly influence student life through their instructional decision-making, ranging from the spatial configuration of the classroom to the design and duration of learning activities. Even during collaborative group work, students are shaped by the teacher's prior decisions regarding resource allocation, grouping strategies, and time management.

Modern didactics, through the application of innovative research-based methodologies, has fundamentally restructured the traditional role of the teacher. The conventional image of the teacher as a mere provider of information and lecturer has been superseded by the role of a facilitator and coordinator. In this capacity, the educator proposes problem-based inquiries, suggests research directions, and stimulates students' intellectual curiosity and creative thinking. Rather than delivering a monotonous narrative of rote

memorization—characterized by endless names and dates—the modern educator fosters an environment of active inquiry.

As Gino De Vecchis and Giuseppe S. Staluppi aptly suggest, the role of the teacher in modern didactics can be compared to that of a "skilled orchestral conductor; while he does not play the instruments himself, he ensures the production of a harmonious symphony." ([ISP], 1986).

An educator employing inclusive strategies conceptualizes the classroom as an indivisible collective actively engaged in discourse. In this model, knowledge is not merely delivered but is viewed as a product emerging from the students themselves, empowering them to be creators and active participants in the instructional process. The inclusive teacher facilitates full student engagement in classroom activities and peer interaction, enabling the testing of various hypotheses that arise during learning. This approach encourages problem-posing, the expression of diverse perspectives, and the critical examination of opposing views. Such a dynamic is designed to elevate the student's learning process, achieving a high level of cognitive processing regarding new information.

Key characteristics of an educator utilizing inclusive classroom strategies include:

- Active student participation in the exploration of ideas and concepts;
- The co-construction of instructional content based on student responses and input;
- Holistic collaboration among all students within the classroom environment;
- Student involvement in decision-making processes
- Peer-to-peer discourse and the collective evaluation of ideas;
- The integration of student hypotheses into authentic problem-solving scenarios. (Tamo, A. Karaj, Th. Rapti, E.

3. Methodology

General Objectives

This is a quantitative study. The primary objective of this research is to examine the impact of discussion techniques on the development of students' core competencies—specifically "Effective Communicator" and "Creative Thinker" as defined by the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) within primary education classrooms.

Furthermore, the study aims to achieve the following secondary objectives:

- To identify the advantages and challenges associated with the implementation of discussion techniques in the instructional process;

- To evaluate the level of teacher proficiency and knowledge regarding the practical application of discussion-based methodologies in the classroom.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The appropriate selection of discussion techniques by educators significantly contributes to the achievement of desired learning outcomes.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Without proper facilitation, classroom discussion risks devolving into a "stadium-like" environment, where students become "partisans" of their own opinions rather than collaborative learners.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): There is a demonstrably low level of engagement among teachers regarding continuous professional development and pedagogical advancement.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): There is a strong positive correlation between the systematic use of discussion techniques and the advancement of students' critical thinking and effective communication skills.

Variables

Independent Variables (IV):

Teacher attitudes regarding the impact of discussion techniques;

Professional advancement of teachers;

Teacher training levels for the mastery of discussion techniques;

Teacher-student communication dynamics;

Peer-to-peer (student-student) communication patterns.

Dependent Variables (DV):

Critical thinking skills;

Effective communication competencies.

Methods, Techniques, and Research Instruments

The following scientific methods were employed in this study:

Theoretical Analysis Method: Used to analyze synthesized empirical materials and research-relevant information, providing the conceptual framework necessary for the study's completion.

Comparative Method: Utilized to compare the implementation and efficacy of discussion techniques between urban and rural educational settings.

Statistical Analysis Method: Applied to process raw data and present the findings through comprehensive tables and graphical representations.

Descriptive Method: Employed to describe the research phenomena and the specific characteristics of discussion-based instructional techniques.

Observation Method: Facilitated the direct monitoring of classroom dynamics, focusing on student-centered teaching and learning practices, organizational structures, participant engagement, and teacher commitment.

Empirical Research Design The empirical component was implemented through survey questionnaires administered to both students and teachers, alongside structured classroom observations.

Research Instruments - The survey was specifically designed to investigate the impact of discussion techniques on fostering critical thinking and effective communication. The instrument's cover page provided respondents with essential information, including:

The primary investigator's credentials;

The research aims and scope;

Detailed instructions for completion;

Strict guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality;

An expression of gratitude for cooperation.

The questionnaires collected demographic data (gender, age, school, grade, and residence) and consisted of 15 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Research Sample

The study sample consists of a representative group selected from both urban and rural educational settings. This representative cohort includes two primary schools from urban areas and three schools from rural regions. The total research sample comprises 80 primary school teachers and 200 primary school students within the Municipality of Vitia.

A purposive sampling technique was employed for this research. The study was conducted in the following locations:

- Urban Areas: "Bafti Haxhiu", "Dëshmorët e Vitisë" in Vitia.
- Rural Areas: "Mirali Sejdiu", "Nazmi Pajaziti", "Safet Rexhepi".

4. Results / Findings and Discussions

Analysis of the Main Hypothesis

"There is a strong correlation between the utilization of discussion techniques and the enhancement of students' critical thinking and effective communication skills." To test this hypothesis, variables related to the promotion of critical thinking, communication proficiency, and student achievement levels were analyzed. According to the data presented in the table, the statement "Discussion techniques encourage students to think critically" yielded a significantly high mean of 4.15, while the impact on the development of communication skills was rated at 4.11. These figures indicate a robust consensus among educators regarding the efficacy of these instructional strategies. From a statistical standpoint, the SPSS analysis revealed a Sig. (2-tailed) value of .000, which is lower than the significance level of $p < 0.01$. Consequently, it is established that the relationship is

statistically significant. These findings suggest that student success in the Municipality of Vitia is not coincidental but is directly contingent upon classroom interactivity. Specifically, there is a positive linear relationship: as the application of discussion techniques increases, so does the students' ability to analyze and articulate their ideas. Accordingly, the Main Hypothesis is fully accepted.

Table 1:

		Correlations		
		7. Discussion techniques prompt students to engage in critical thinking.	8. Discussion techniques facilitate the development of students' communicative skills.	15. The level of student-led discussion determines their overall degree of academic success.
7. Discussion techniques prompt students to engage in critical thinking	Pearson Correlation	1	.910**	.713**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	80	80	80
8. Discussion techniques enhance students' communicative competence.	Pearson Correlation	.910**	1	.746**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	80	80	80
15. Student-led discussion serves as a determinant of their academic success.	Pearson Correlation	.713**	.746**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	80	80	80

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Analysis of the First Sub-hypothesis

"The appropriate selection of discussion techniques by educators facilitates the achievement of desired learning outcomes." - According to the data, educators perceive that these techniques significantly impact student motivation and engagement. However, a lower mean score was observed regarding the students' sense of psychological safety (2.57) and the comprehensiveness of their responses (2.71). This suggests that while discussion is motivating, it may also create a sense of vulnerability. Therefore, techniques must be strategically selected to ensure that students do not feel overly exposed or intellectually insecure.

Correlation Analysis:

The correlation matrix confirms several critical relationships:

- A near-perfect positive correlation ($r = .929$) exists between the quality of instruction and student motivation.
- A strong correlation ($r = .845$) indicates that lessons become significantly more engaging when student responses are thorough and comprehensive.

These findings support the premise that the success of a lesson depends on the teacher's ability to "calibrate" the chosen technique to the specific age group and subject matter. When a technique is correctly implemented, the student transcends the role of a passive listener to become a co-creator of the learning process. Consequently, the first sub-hypothesis is accepted.

Table 2:

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
5. Discussion techniques contribute to the enhancement of instructional quality.	3.8750	.73562	80
6. Discussion techniques positively impact student motivation during the learning process.	3.9000	.64827	80
9. The application of discussion techniques increases the instructional appeal of the lesson.	3.3125	1.06252	80
10. Students exhibit higher levels of active participation in articulating their ideas during classroom discourse.	4.1125	.76297	80
12. Classroom discussion fosters a sense of psychological safety and confidence among students.	2.5750	1.35735	80
13. Student responses demonstrate greater complexity and comprehensiveness through discussion-based learning.	2.7125	1.11598	80

Analysis of the Second Sub-hypothesis

"Classroom discussion risks transforming the learning environment into a 'stadium-like' atmosphere, where students become mere 'partisans' of their own opinions." - The correlation matrix reveals an extremely high relationship ($r = .911$) between classroom management challenges and the deviation from intended learning outcomes. This finding indicates that when educators struggle with moderation, the discussion invariably loses its pedagogical focus. It confirms that discourse, if not rigorously structured, may produce cognitive noise rather than productivity. Consequently, the second sub-hypothesis is accepted, serving as a critical indicator of the paramount importance of classroom management in interactive settings.

Table 3:

Correlations		
	11. Classroom discourse may lead to a deviation from the planned instructional trajectory	14. Classroom management becomes increasingly complex and challenging

		and the attainment of learning outcomes.	during the implementation of discussion-based activities.
11. Classroom discourse may lead to a deviation from the planned instructional trajectory and the attainment of learning outcomes.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 80	.911** 80
14. Maintaining effective classroom management becomes increasingly complex during the implementation of discussion-based activities.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.911** .000 80	1 80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Analysis of the Third Sub-hypothesis

"The advancement of teachers through Continuous Professional Development (CPD) remains at an insufficient level."

The empirical data reveals that the statement "Sufficient training sessions have been conducted in our municipality" received the lowest mean score in the entire survey (2.45). This indicates a pronounced dissatisfaction among educators regarding institutional support. Conversely, teachers report a moderate level of familiarity with discussion techniques (3.40), suggesting that their professional growth is largely driven by individual initiative and self-informed learning rather than structured institutional programs.

Correlation and Strategic Impact:

The correlation analysis shows a strong positive relationship ($r = .789$) between the implementation of professional training and the enhancement of teacher expertise. This statistical evidence implies that a systematic increase in training opportunities would significantly elevate the pedagogical competence of the staff. Consequently, the third sub-hypothesis is accepted, underscoring the urgent need for strategic intervention from the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) and the Municipal Directorate of Education (MDE).

Tabela 4:

Correlations

		3. Sufficient professional training sessions regarding instructional techniques have been conducted within our municipality.	4. I possess sufficient pedagogical knowledge regarding the implementation of discussion-based techniques.
3. Sufficient professional training sessions regarding	Pearson Correlation	1	.789**

instructional techniques have been conducted within our municipality.	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	80	80
4. I possess adequate pedagogical knowledge regarding the implementation of discussion-based techniques.	Pearson Correlation	.789**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	80	80

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A profound contrast is observed between traditional instruction and contemporary methodologies. This evidence suggests that educators in the municipality of Vitia have achieved an ideological pivot toward the new curriculum; however, they continue to face significant technical hurdles, such as a lack of instructional resources and inadequate classroom environments.

The student-reported results are highly optimistic. Students place a high value on teacher communication and peer-to-peer collaboration. Notably, the sense of "warmth" and social cohesion felt during discussions validates Vygotsky's Social Development Theory, reinforcing the premise that learning is inherently a social process.

Nevertheless, the low mean score of 2.11 regarding classroom noise levels confirms that the "stadium effect" remains a tangible issue from the students' perspective. This highlights a critical need for refined moderation strategies to balance social engagement with acoustic and cognitive order.

The study culminates in several pivotal conclusions that reflect the current state of education in the Vitia municipality:

- The Primacy of Discussion Techniques: Interactive discourse is not merely a method but a fundamental necessity. It enhances instructional quality while simultaneously fostering critical thinking and communicative competence—both of which are classified as essential 21st-century skills.
- The Teacher as a Moderator: There is a radical shift in the educator's role. The traditional instructor has evolved into a facilitator who must cultivate a collaborative and safe learning environment. Effective classroom management is shown to be the catalyst for student reflection and self-assessment.
- Institutional Barriers: A significant "pedagogical gap" exists between the teachers' motivation to implement innovative techniques and the actual institutional support provided. Professional advancement opportunities remain at an unsatisfactory level, hindering the full potential of the new curriculum.

5. Conclusion and Limitations of the Study

Based on the empirical evidence gathered from the Vitia municipality, the following measures are recommended to enhance the quality of classroom discourse:

1. Specialized Professional Training: MESTI (MASHTI) and the Municipal Directorate of Education (DKA) should prioritize the organization of specialized workshops focused on "Discussion-Based Pedagogies." These programs must transition from theoretical presentations to practical, hands-on modeling, providing teachers with concrete tools to facilitate dialogue.
2. Advanced Classroom Management: Educators should implement structured protocols and clear ground rules for discourse to mitigate unproductive noise and prevent instructional deviation. Establishing a "scaffolded" discussion environment will ensure that the lesson remains aligned with the intended learning outcomes.
3. Ensuring Inclusivity and Engagement: To move beyond the "stadium effect," instructional designs should prioritize inclusivity. Teachers should utilize small-group configurations (e.g., Think-Pair-Share) to stimulate participation among introverted or hesitant students, ensuring that active learning is accessible to all.
4. Promoting Action Research: Schools should foster a culture of Action Research and peer-to-peer observation. By encouraging educators to observe their colleagues and share feedback on innovative methods, institutions can create a self-sustaining environment for continuous pedagogical improvement.

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Climate Policy Education for Coastal Zone Management: Eu Assistance to Albania and the Role of Higher Education

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Abstract: Climate change presents multidimensional challenges for regional development, environmental governance, and tourism sustainability in Albania. This research examines how educating youth about climate change can aid in the preservation of coastal regions and ensure proper management of tourism. We used a kind of research to look at what the European Union is doing about climate change and coastal areas and how universities in Albania are teaching students about these issues. We also talked to people who work in universities and in areas to see how teaching about climate change can help make things better. Drawing upon critical pedagogy, place-based civic science, and empowerment theory, the study conceptualizes climate policy competence as an evolution beyond climate literacy. Findings demonstrate measurable improvement in students’ qualitative analytical skills, stakeholder engagement capacity, and ability to translate climate evidence into locally relevant policy recommendations. The paper highlights the strategic role of higher education institutions i.e Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës (UAMD) in fostering research-informed and regionally embedded climate policy education. The study contributes to climate education scholarship by demonstrating how universities in small and climate-vulnerable economies can function as regional policy laboratories, linking higher education to evidence-based territorial governance.

Keywords: *European Green Deal, IPA III, Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), Climate Change, Higher Education, Albania.*

1. Introduction

Climate change is a problem that affects coastal areas all over the world. These problems are especially bad in places where the economy depends a lot on tourism like the areas of Albania. Over the twenty years tourism has grown a lot along the Adriatic and Ionian coasts, which have brought in money but also

hurt the environment. This is why we need to take into account climate change protecting the environment and make sure tourism is sustainable. The European Union has made a plan to deal with climate change manage areas and help them develop in a sustainable way. They have started some projects, like the European Green Deal, the Integrated Coastal Zone Management framework and plan to help coastal areas adapt to climate change.

Universities are very important in turning these plans into knowledge and skills. They teach students who will be professionals in the future help put policies into action and do research on sustainability and how to govern the environment. In Albania universities are expected to follow plans as the country gets closer to joining the European Union. Some universities, like Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës which is in a coastline area are in a good position to teach students about climate policy and how it relates to tourism and the environment.

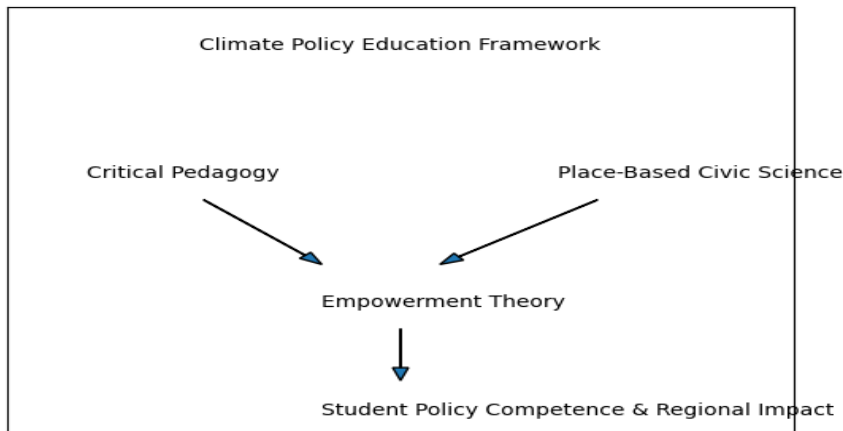
This study looks at how teaching climate policy can help manage areas and govern tourism in Albania. It wants to know how European plans can be used in university classes and practices to help develop tourism in coastal areas. The main goal of this paper is to see how teaching climate policy in a way can help universities, local community to make better decisions about managing coastal areas in Albania. Climate policy education is very important and can really help with coastal zone management in Albania. By focusing on climate policy education we make sure that universities are preparing students to deal with the challenges of climate change in coastal areas.

Critical pedagogy aims to foster an understanding of tourism governance and an awareness of social justice. The main objective is to empower youth to participate more effectively and conscientiously in civic life, thereby fostering a more informed and ethically driven public discourse on issues of environment. The concept of place-based civic science emerges as a specialized pedagogical and research framework, specifically designed to integrate climate learning with the distinct environmental, social, and economic characteristics of particular geographical regions (Gallay et al. 2022). This approach underscores the critical importance of moving beyond generalized climate narratives to engage with the specific manifestations and implications of climate shifts across diverse locales.

The application of empowerment theory serves the ability of stakeholders to actively participate in and shape policy processes, thereby increasing their sense of ownership and efficacy in addressing societal challenges (Newell et al. 2021). This conceptual framework posits that the interplay of pedagogical consciousness, territorial embeddedness, and participatory production collectively contributes to the development of climate policy competence. An awareness of the educational implications within climate discourse, coupled

with a deep integration into the local socio-geographical context, and further enhanced by active involvement in co-creative processes, are able using practical efficacy in addressing climate-related challenges.

Empowerment theory, as articulated by Zimmerman (2000), aims to cultivate policy agency and enhance individuals' self-efficacy. Research pertaining to climate education suggests that an action-oriented learning approach contributes to a reduction in eco-anxiety and an enhancement of engagement, as evidenced by studies such as Schwartz et al.2022. This methodology enhances analytical robustness and reinforces policy autonomy, particularly within smaller and developing nations characterized by evolving institutional frameworks. In the context of higher education, the operationalization of empowerment may be observed through the formulation of institutional policies, active engagement with relevant stakeholders.



2. Literature Review

2.1 Climate Change and Coastal Zone Vulnerability

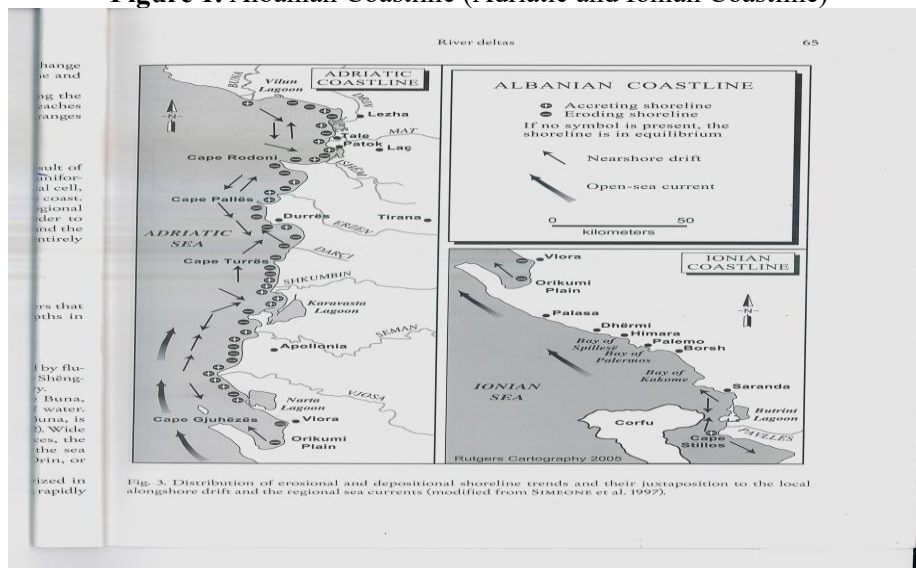
Climate change affects zones in a big way, where rising sea levels and coastal erosion are problems. Flooding and ecosystem degradation affect the environment and the economy in coastal zones. Tourism is a part of the economy in some coastal zones. Tourism can also hurt the environment and these areas face a lot of challenges. We need to manage zones in a better way, looking at the environment, the economy and society. We need to balance the benefits of tourism with protecting the environment. ICZM is a way to do this, as it brings together groups and sectors to make plans, taking care of the ecosystem and involving the community.

Coastal area is considered, as one of the areas with the highest growth in tourism today thanks to its core attributes as sand, sea and sun. In order to

build attractive, safe and sustainable coastal environments with clean water and healthy habitats, is very important to develop sustainable and well-managed coastal tourism. Integrated Management Coastal Zone is the best treatment for achieving this goal. According to (EEA, 2011: 4) a sustainable coastal tourism means ‘practice for sustainable coastal management, healthy eco-systems, water and clean air, where a recreational environment ensure management coastal hazards such as erosion or flood’.

The main reason for choosing Albania as a tourist destination is attributable to its natural coastal environment. Adriatic Sea has become recipient of urban discharges, industrial, agricultural and livestock. Cleaning of waste is an evident problem. Population growth in some urban centres has overwhelmed the process of self-purification of the sea, because of the large amount of urban emissions. The coastline is a rapidly changing environment, continuously modifying its shape as a result of changes by human intervention and natural forces parameters. The Albanian coastline is divided into two sectors: the Adriatic and Ionian Coast (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Albanian Coastline (Adriatic and Ionian Coastline)



Source: Adopted from Rembeci and Mele, 2015

2.2 Climate Policy and European Union Assistance

The European Union has made some policies to deal with climate change and coastal sustainability. One big plan is the European Green Deal. It wants to make Europe a climate-neutral continent by 2050. The European Green Deal looks at a lot of areas like energy, biodiversity, transport and adapting to climate change. Coastal regions are important for this plan. They are environments and they have a big impact on the economy.

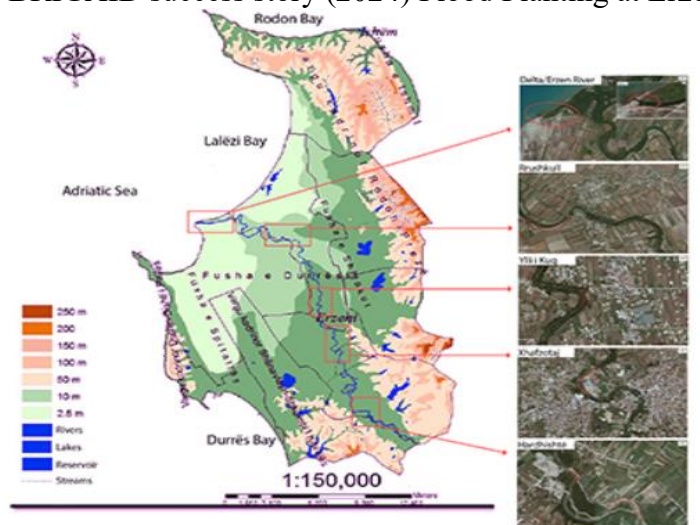
IPA III together with civil society environmental initiatives supports development projects such as: wastewater infrastructure, coastal resilience projects and municipal climate strategies. These projects demonstrate how EU funding fosters bottom-up environmental governance through community engagement in Albania.

Integrated Coastal Zone Management helps plan and govern areas in a sustainable way. The European Union wants its member states to get ready for climate change. ICZM promotes ecosystem-based planning, cross-sectoral coordination, stakeholder participation and adaptive governance. For Albania case, ICZM principles serve as normative and operational guidance in coastal tourism planning.

EU Floods Directive

Albania, being a candidate for EU membership, is required to fulfill these requirements and, in this regard the EU Floods Directive. Regarding the Floods Directive, Albania is on the right track but needs a lot of work to finish the directive (planned for 2014 and its implementation in 2023). The directive requires institutional strengthening and good coordination (local, regional and central). The above framework of the Flood Directive continues with Albania being required to start assessing and mapping flood hazards and risks as soon as possible. (EU, 2016). Case study projects on coastal tourism vulnerability assessments, heritage site adaptation strategies and regional risk mapping exercises following student research outputs like adaptation proposals, and group presentations.

Figure 2. BRIGAD success story (2024) Flood Planting at Erzeni River



Source: <https://brigaid.eu/project/brigaid-success-story-flood-planting-at-erzeni-river/>

EU support to tackle pollution crisis and the GreenAL project is the winners of its second call for grant proposals aimed at empowering environmental organizations in Albania. GreenAL carried out some educational activity of environmental challenges along the Ishëm River. The impact of waste on nature directly affects human life. Six Regional Grants and twenty Initiative Grants have been awarded to civil society organizations (CSOs) for projects that will significantly enhance local capacities to tackle some of today's most pressing environmental challenges. These projects empower communities to lead sustainable actions, advocate for environmental justice, and protect natural ecosystems. Each selected project embodies the transformative power of locally driven environmental action. These grants adopt a strategic and operational approach, aiming to strengthen collaboration between local government units, environmental organizations, and civil society.

The Dutch Experience in the Adaptive Delta Management (ADM) approach aims to ensure that any short- to medium-term decision on flood and drought risk management is set within a framework that will be adaptive. The process of aligning with the EU Flood Directive is not easy, even for EU member states. However, the Netherlands is internationally recognized for its expertise in flood prevention by using different strategies. The Dutch government introduced a new approach in the new National Water Plan of 2008, which is based on the Multi-Layered Security Approach. The city of Dordrecht implements risk communication and fulfil the obligation of the EU Flood Directive to inform citizens in flood-prone areas about flood risks (Gersonius et al., 2016: 213).

2.3 Climate Change Education and Sustainability

Albania policies and national adaptation plans regarding the Decision No. 466 approving the National Strategy on Climate Change and Action Plans. The National Strategy on Climate Change is a national policy with a cross-sectoral approach and has two annexes: the National Action Plan on Mitigation (NAPM) and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP). This Strategy focuses on three main components of climate change in Albania: mitigation measures, adaptation measures, and sustainable development. The purpose of this Strategy is to ensure the development towards a low-carbon economy, in order to achieve global mitigation objectives and to strengthen adaptation for the benefit of present and future generations.

Students are paying attention to climate change education, as part of thinking critically and solve polluted-prone issues, also involving the community. Climate change education should not just teach students about climate change, but also help them find solutions and get involved in their communities. Young people often get frustrated when they only learn about the problems.

Some good ways to teach climate change education is to involve the community teach subjects together and use local examples. This helps people understand climate change and take care of the environment. Universities therefore play a crucial role in advancing climate education by integrating sustainability topics into curricula, supporting research on environmental governance, and facilitating collaboration between academic institutions and local communities.

3. Methodology

This article develops and empirically evaluates an interdisciplinary climate policy education framework implemented at Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës. Drawing on Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy promotes structural analysis of power relations. Applied to climate policy, students interrogate institutional arrangements, financing constraints, and equity implications. Place-based civic science connects climate learning to territorial realities (Gallay et al., 2022). Coastal regions such as Durrës and the Ishëm River basin become living laboratories. Zimmerman’s empowerment theory posits that competence requires self-efficacy and participatory opportunity. Climate policy education therefore integrates stakeholder interviews, policy drafting, and adaptation design. National climate policy documents, analytical reasoning with stakeholders’ engagement helps to explore the role of climate policy education in coastal management. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for examining institutional practices, educational strategies, and stakeholder perceptions related to climate policy implementation.

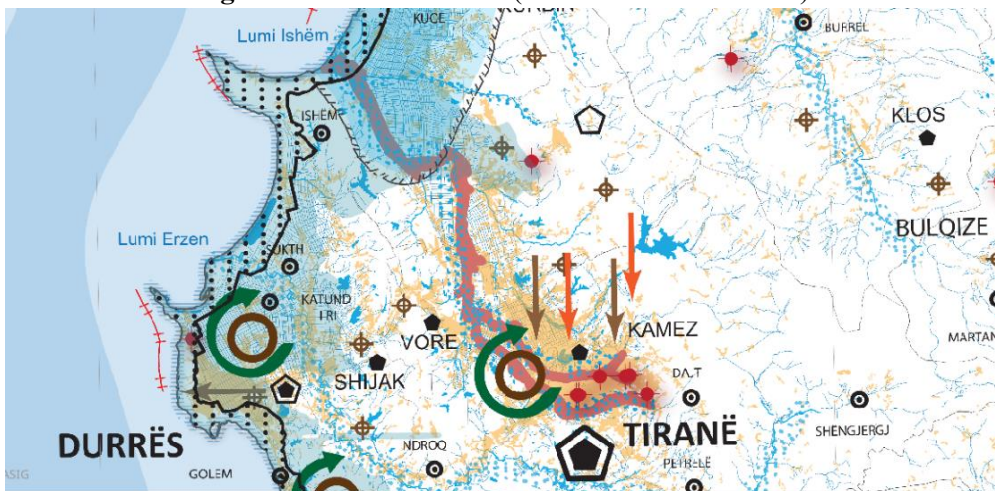
Three main sources of data were used, starting with document analysis EU climate policies, ICZM frameworks, European Green Deal documents, Decision No. 466 approving the National Strategy on Climate Change and Action Plans and Albanian environmental and tourism policies. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on climate policy integration in higher education, governance capacity for coastal tourism management, and institutional barriers and opportunities for climate education.

3.1 Durrës Case study

The Adriatic coastline, especially alongside the Durres region, is characterised by the very low accretion rates between 1970-1990. After the 1990s human intervention (abusive exploitation of sediments for construction purposes), has triggered coastal recession with great intensity of about 900m in some areas, i.e Mali i Robit beach. In recent years Albania has also been steadily losing many of its values of biodiversity and natural habitats, including coastal

destinations. In reference of data from Ministry of Environment regarding the region, some of the most pollution beaches are considered Plazh Zhiron, Shkembi i Kavajes, Mali i Robit, Erzen River, Ishem River, etc. (Rembeci and Mele, 2015: 6). In the last decade, there is an improvement due to the measurements taken both from the local government in cooperation with private businesses. Nevertheless, some of Albanian beaches are still below the limits of pollution, this is not due to their careful management, but simply for not massive tourism.

Figure 3. Durres coastline (location of Ishem River)



Sources: https://geoportal.asig.gov.al/map/?fc_name=Sistemi_ujor&auto=true

The Ishem River flows through central Albania (74 km long; basin area 673 km² and average elevation 357 m above sea level. The Ishem River has an average annual discharge of 20.9 m³/s and an average flow modulus of 31.0 l/s/km². The maximum discharge is 1,980 m³/s. The amount of sediment carried into the sea is 2 million tons per year. The Ishem is mainly fed by surface waters with a relatively high mineralization rate (461 mg/l). Water temperature varies between 6.12°C in January and 24.7°C in August (Rembeci and Mele, 2015). The pollution covers approximately 8 kilometers of coastline.

This area has been in this situation for years despite various measures, awareness campaigns, and funds spent, still little improvement is made. In the photo below the UAMD students of the Faculty of Professional Studies guided by lecturer Laura Gjyli in 2025, are along Ishëm River.

Photo 1. GreenAL project with UAMD students along the Ishëm River, Durrës in 2025



Source: Credits of UAMD website, 2025

From the activity shown above in Photo 1 one environmental activist during the activity said: “People do not always take these problems seriously, and do not see the risks involved in extreme natural events, which will become more frequent and increasingly severe. Small-scale actions by local communities can help deal with these changes, which are no longer merely imminent, but are already happening”. An environmental project, initiated by GreenAL is raising environmental awareness among children and adolescents. These projects not only offer a simple approach and passion for environmental and social justice, but also the commitment to building bottom-up solutions through the active participation of local community, schools, youth, women, stakeholders and all those who have often been left out of decision-making processes.

6. Discussion - From knowledge to action: Advancing climate literacy in Albania

This document presents the findings of a mixed-methods study aimed at assessing the prevalence and effectiveness of climate literacy across (in)formal education sectors in Albania. Through discourse analysis and NGOs activities in Durres coastline, the study maps key actors, evaluates national policies, and analyzes the integration of climate change education across the education system. Despite Albania’s environmental frameworks and international commitments, the study identifies some gaps in the education sector, particularly the absence of climate literacy objectives in the Education Strategic Plan (PEE 2020–2029) and limited teacher training. Non-formal initiatives are more dynamic but remain somehow disconnected from formal education systems.

“The role of the population in adaptation strategies is essential in Durrës coastline” said one development expert. He added that a project can be more successful “if the coastal communities have an adequate level of awareness about the problems. The local level is key for climate adaptation, and the roles of the population and of the different organisations present in the community are essential for taking appropriate action”. Finally, he emphasized the necessity of links between these sectors and national institutions handling environmental problems.

6.1 Universities as Territorial Policy Laboratories In small transition countries like Albania, universities fill institutional gaps through knowledge. Aleksandër Moisiu University of Durrës is a good example and seems to function as evidence producer, policy incubator and EU alignment mediator. However, limited research examines how place-based climate education operates in regional development programs in small economies like Albania. Coastal tourism regions (e.g., Durrës and southern coastal zones) provide real-world laboratories for analyzing climate vulnerability, tourism pressures, and adaptation governance.

7. Conclusion

Education is becoming a central mechanism of Europeanization and climate adaptation. EU assistance frameworks provide structural guidance for Albania’s coastal governance reform. However, sustainable transformation depends on educational mediation. This paper demonstrates that integrating qualitative methodologies, place-based civic science, and empowerment-oriented pedagogy significantly enhances climate policy competence in higher education. The framework developed at Aleksandër Moisiu University illustrates how higher education institutions in climate-vulnerable regions can operate as territorial policy laboratories, translating EU environmental norms into locally grounded adaptation strategies.

By moving beyond disciplinary silos and embedding climate learning in local realities, universities can produce graduates equipped to interpret climate risks in territorial contexts, to navigate complex policy environments and contribute meaningfully to climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Universities in transition economies can act as Territorial Policy Laboratories regarding evidence producers, governance conveners and policy incubators.

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Ethics and Functional Literacy: The Challenge of Academic Integrity in the Age of Generative AI

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Abstract: The rapid emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT has profoundly transformed the landscape of higher education, offering new opportunities for teaching and learning, but at the same time raising serious challenges to academic integrity. This paper analyzes the complex interplay between ethics, functional AI literacy, and the maintenance of academic standards. The study argues that the traditional approach based on AI plagiarism detection is insufficient and often inaccurate, requiring a paradigm shift from “policing” to “pedagogy.” We propose a new framework of Functional AI Literacy that equips students with the critical skills to use AI tools ethically, transparently, and as collaborators, not as substitutes for critical thinking. This framework includes the ability to understand the limitations of AI, to perform effective prompt engineering, and to verify the facts generated. Finally, the paper offers practical recommendations for educational institutions, highlighting the need to review academic integrity policies and to integrate ethical AI education into the curriculum, ensuring that students are prepared to navigate an increasingly technology-mediated world.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, paradigm, literacy, implication, application, challenge.*

1.Introduction

The rapid emergence and massive diffusion of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, such as **ChatGPT, Bard (Gemini), and Claude**, have marked a turning point in the higher education landscape. These large language models (LLMs) have demonstrated an unprecedented ability to

generate coherent texts, synthesize complex information, and create original content at a scale and speed previously unimaginable. For educators and students, these tools offer tremendous opportunities to improve the teaching and learning process, automating routine tasks and facilitating access to knowledge. However, this technological transformation has come with a number of fundamental challenges that require an immediate review of academic practices and policies.

The unrestricted use of generative AI has created a direct conflict with the essence of **academic integrity**, which is based on the principles of authorship, originality, and genuine acquisition of knowledge. The ease with which students can generate essays, reports, or even programming code calls into question the validity of traditional assessment methods. If a piece of work is submitted as a student product, but has been generated in whole or in part by an AI, the fundamental question arises: Where does intellectual responsibility lie, and how can we ensure that the educational process fosters critical thinking and not simply the use of automated tools? This gap between technological capability and ethical framework has exposed the urgent need to develop a new pedagogical approach that goes beyond simply detecting AI plagiarism, which is often inaccurate and inadequate.

To address this paradigm shift, this article aims to explore two main research questions:

- 1. How can academic integrity be redefined in the era of Generative AI, moving from a focus on banning technology to a focus on its ethical and transparent use?*
- 2. What are the essential elements of Functional AI Literacy that students and educators must master to successfully navigate this new technological environment?*

The importance of this study lies in providing a **practical and actionable framework** for educators, administrators, and policymakers in higher education. Rather than offering a temporary solution to the problem of cheating, this paper proposes a long-term approach that integrates AI ethics as a core component of the curriculum. By developing and promoting Functional AI Literacy, educational institutions can ensure that students are not simply passive consumers of technology, but critical and ethical users, capable of engaging with AI in ways that enhance the quality of their work and maintain high standards of academic integrity. The findings and recommendations of this article will serve as a roadmap for redefining assessment policies and practices in the digital age.

2. Literature review and theoretical basis

Definition of generative AI: basic functioning and applications in the academic context

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) refers to a class of AI models, most commonly Large Language Models (LLMs), that are trained on massive amounts of data to generate new, human-like content, including text, images, code, and music. Unlike discriminative AI, which classifies or predicts based on existing data, Generative AI actively creates new content. In an academic context, the applications of Generative AI are broad and immediate. Students use it to:

- **Generate drafts** of essays, reports, or literature reviews.
- **Synthesize complex information** from multiple sources.
- **Create programming code** or debug existing code.
- **Translated** and improved the quality of writing.

This ability to automate cognitive tasks has changed the essence of what constitutes "student work," necessitating a redefinition of authorship standards.

Traditional academic integrity: defining plagiarism, fraud, and authorship

Academic integrity is the foundation of any educational institution, encompassing the principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Traditionally, violations of integrity have been clearly defined:

Plagiarism is the use of another person's words, ideas, or work without proper citation.

Cheating involves the use of unauthorized tools or materials during assessment.

Authorship implies that the submitted work is the student's original product, reflecting the acquisition of the required knowledge and skills.

However, Generative AI blurs this definition. Work generated by AI is not plagiarism in the traditional sense, as it is not taken from an existing human source; it is new content created by an algorithm. This has led to a conceptual crisis, where existing plagiarism policies fail to adequately address the use of AI.

The concept of AI functional literacy: the difference from simple digital literacy

In the face of this crisis, research literature has begun to emphasize the need for **AI Literacy**. This concept goes beyond **Simple Digital Literacy**, which focuses on basic technology skills (e.g., using software, searching the internet).

AI Functional Literacy is a deeper concept that includes the ability to:

1. **Understand** how AI tools work, their limitations (e.g., “hallucinations”), and ethical implications.
2. **Use** AI strategically and transparently to achieve specific academic goals.
3. Critically **evaluate** the results generated by AI and correct its errors .

This change emphasizes that the goal of education should not be to ban the tool, but to educate students to become responsible and critical users of it.

3. Methodology

Current policies: brief analysis of different institutional approaches (detention vs. integration)

Higher education institutions around the world have responded to Generative AI with a variety of approaches that can be broadly divided into two categories:

Access	Description	Implications and Challenges
Prohibition (Prohibitive)	Complete ban on the use of AI in academic assignments and reliance on AI detection tools.	This approach is often ineffective, as detection tools are inaccurate and students can use AI covertly. It also prevents students from developing the skills needed for the job market.
Integration (Integrative)	Allowing the use of AI, but with clear guidelines for citation and transparency. This requires redesigning academic assignments.	This approach sees AI as a collaborative tool. Challenges include training staff and creating clear policies that distinguish permitted use from fraud.

A growing number of institutions, including major universities, are moving towards an integrative approach, emphasizing that the focus should shift from “detecting fraud” to “teaching ethical use” This move supports the thesis that AI education should become a core part of the curriculum, treating it as a foundational skill, just like library research or academic writing.

4. Findings and Discussion

The emergence of Generative AI has created a profound ambiguity about when a work is considered the product of the student and when of the AI . This challenge of authorship calls into question the fundamental principle of

academic integrity, which requires that submitted work reflects the personal acquisition of knowledge and skills . Consequently, educational institutions must clearly redefine the role of AI as a collaborative tool and require full transparency in citing its use.

Covert plagiarism describes the use of AI to generate content that is novel but evades detection by traditional plagiarism detection tools . This practice undermines trust in the assessment process, as AI detection tools are often inaccurate and produce "false positives". To address this, the focus needs to shift from detecting fraud to redesigning tasks that require critical thinking and the application of local knowledge that AI cannot easily generate.

The overuse of generative AI poses the risk of addiction, leading to a reduction in students' critical thinking and writing skills . If students rely on AI to generate ideas, structure arguments, and write, they miss out on developing their core cognitive skills. This potential addiction threatens the fundamental goal of education, which is to develop independent and competent thinkers.

Another ethical challenge is the reproduction of bias and social inequalities through the use of AI, as these systems are trained on existing data that may contain historical biases. The use of AI that reproduces the biases of the training data can lead to biased or inaccurate content, especially in specific cultural or linguistic contexts. Therefore, education on data ethics and AI resources should become an essential part of students' functional literacy.

To maintain academic integrity, it is essential that students implement clear rules for **transparency and citation** of AI use. Major citation standards, such as APA and MLA, have developed specific guidelines that require users to document exactly how and when the AI tool was used in the work process. This practice ensures that the student's contribution is distinguishable from machine-generated content, supporting the principle of responsible authorship.

Functional AI Literacy requires students to develop **the skills of "Prompt Engineering"**, learning how to formulate precise and critical requirements for AI . This skill goes beyond simple requirements, including specifying the role, format, and constraints of the desired response. In this way, students use AI as a research and analytical tool, directing it towards their academic goals, rather than accepting generic answers.

A core element of Functional Literacy is the ability to **fact-check and think critically**, not blindly accepting AI answers. Because of the problem of AI "hallucinations," where models generate false but convincing information, students should be trained to cross-reference information with credible scientific sources. This process emphasizes that AI is a tool for synthesis, but not a reliable source of truth, reinforcing the role of human critical thinking.

The use of AI should be promoted as a **collaborative tool** for ideation, editing, and synthesis, but not as a substitute for full-fledged work generation. This approach places the student at the center of the creative process, using AI to increase the efficiency and quality of work, while maintaining the ultimate responsibility of authorship. In this way, AI is transformed from a threat to academic integrity into a powerful tool for increasing the productivity and depth of research.

5. Conclusions and suggestions

The proliferation of Generative AI requires an **urgent review of** academic integrity policies and regulations at the institutional level. These changes should move from a blanket ban to the creation of clear guidelines that define permissible uses, mandatory citation, and consequences for AI fraud. A new policy framework should support the ethical integration of AI, viewing it as a tool to augment, not replace, human learning.

To maintain the validity of diplomas, it is essential **to redefine assessment methods** by focusing on tasks that require synthesis, application of local knowledge, or work with cutting-edge resources that AI does not have. This includes moving from memorization-based assessments to tasks that require critical thinking, complex problem solving, and the demonstration of unique human skills. New tasks should be designed in such a way that the use of AI is necessary, but not sufficient.

The success of AI integration depends largely on **training academic staff** on the tools and challenges of AI. Educators must be equipped with the knowledge necessary to understand how AI works, how to redesign curricula, and how to educate students on functional AI literacy. This investment in the professional development of staff is essential to ensure that institutions are able to respond effectively to rapid technological change.

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From Waste to Flowers and Butterflies: An Approach to Environmentally Sustainable Education (ESE)

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Abstract: This study examines how students’ involvement in an artistic and co-creative process with plastic materials influences the way they experience and understand this material. The study was conducted within the framework of the “Visual Art” course with 24 students of the Bachelor’s program in Primary Education. A qualitative interpretive approach was used, based on art-based research (ABR), together with the Slow Memory Method (SMAM) and the Motivational Competence Model (MMC). Data were collected through observations, group discussions and reflective notes during the creative process and were analyzed thematically to identify changes in perception and ways of experiencing the material. The findings show that direct interaction with plastic contributes to a shift in its perception, from an ordinary and neglected material to an object of reflection and responsibility. The co-creation process emerged as a space where meaning is not transmitted, but constructed through action, interaction and reflection. In this context, the study treats the material not only as a medium for creation, but as an active element in the development of ecological reflection.

Keywords: *environmental sustainability education (ESE), art-based research (ABR), co-creation, material, reflection, recyclable plastic*

1. Introduction

In Albania, plastic is part of everyday life, making it one of the most visible environmental challenges. In coastal cities such as Durrës, its presence

increases the problem of pollution of public and natural spaces. Furthermore, plastic waste contributed to the floods in late January 2026, blocking drainage infrastructure and worsening the situation. Public discourse and media articles have emphasized that “plastic is taking over the city”. However, this problem is not only technical, but also related to the way society irresponsibly produces, uses and disposes of secondary materials. Even at a global level, studies show that poor management of plastic waste has a direct impact on ecosystems and human health (European Commission, 2025).

At “Aleksandër Moisiu” University in Durrës, a long-standing initiative has addressed this issue through the separation of plastic waste at source, its collection within the university, and its transfer for recycling, which has been supported by several students and lecturers. This initiative, launched on the idea of the biologist, Professor Laura Gjyli, had visible results. The proceeds from recycling were used to purchase and plant trees and flowers in the university park. From this practical impact, questions arose in a less visible but essential dimension for us lecturers - how can we purposefully engage students in the subjects we develop in the auditoriums, to understand plastics and their relationship with the environment. Traditional approaches to education, which are based mainly on theoretical information, often prove insufficient to achieve sustainable changes in thinking and behavior (Zárate Rueda et. al, 2023). In this regard, there is a need for forms of learning that involve students not only at the cognitive level, but also through experience and action. The creative process has been treated as a way of producing knowledge, where meaning is developed through action, material and reflection (Eisner, 2008; Barone & Eisner, 2012).

For this need, the authors of this study implemented an art-based pedagogical practice for sustainable environmental education. This approach takes on particular importance in the formation of primary education students, as it confronts them with ways of learning that are not based only on content, but on experience, interaction and meaning-making. By going through a creative and reflective process themselves, students develop the ability to conceive learning situations that deeply engage students. In this way, this experience serves as a basis for practices that they can transfer and adapt in their future work in primary education. This study aims not only to present this practice, but to understand how engagement with the material – in this case plastic – can reshape the way students perceive it and relate it to environmental responsibility.

In this context, the research aims to explore how students’ involvement in an artistic and co-creative process with plastic materials influences the way they understand and experience this material. More specifically, the study is guided by the following questions: how does student participation influence the way

they understand plastic? And to what extent is it transformed from an ordinary material into an object of reflection and responsibility? In this way, the study shifts the focus from learning about environmental issues to learning through the transformation of the material and co-creative processes, treating the material not only as a medium of expression, but as an element that shapes meaning and reflection during the learning process.

2. Literature Review

Art practices and Arts-Based Research (ABR) are presented as consolidated alternative approaches that shift the focus from knowledge transfer toward the exploration and production of meaning through the process of creation. Elliot Eisner is one of the most important scholars in the field of art education, who since the 1970s developed the theoretical foundations for using art as a way of knowing, and later articulated the concept of Arts-Based Educational Research (Eisner, 1993; Barone & Eisner, 1997). The concept was further developed by Shawn McNiff, who consolidated the term now known as ABR (1998). ABR includes practices that use artistic processes as ways of inquiry, shifting art from a purely illustrative role to an epistemological function (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Patricia Leavy (2020) argues that ABR is suitable for exploring forms of experience that are difficult to articulate through traditional forms of research.

In some applications of ABR, a strong focus on individual experience can be observed, without this experience being extended to a relational or collective level. In this way, it remains less articulated as an approach that can influence broader pedagogical or social practices. This raises important questions: What happens after experience is expressed? Does anything change beyond the individual?

These issues are addressed in approaches that connect ABR with critical engagement and co-creation. Art is understood as a relational and critical practice, developed in interaction with others and with the social context, as well as raising awareness (Finley, 2008; Mamur & Çelik, 2025). In this way, art does not remain only an individual experience, but becomes part of a collective process in which shared meanings are constructed and possibilities for change are opened.

Walter and Earl (2017), based on a synthesis of a number of studies in the field of environmental education for adults, point out that arts-based pedagogies are recognized for their role in increasing environmental awareness and in developing critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, as well as influencing behavioral change toward sustainability and transformative learning, “credited with helping to raise environmental awareness... and foster

transformative learning”, while at the same time noting that these approaches remain “relatively under-theorized and under-researched” (p. 146).

More recent studies on education for sustainable development suggest that art is not simply a “decorative” tool for ESD, but can develop essential competencies for sustainable thinking, and a shift can be observed toward approaches that emphasize experience and active student participation “to raise awareness, establish a caring bond to the environment” (Göbel, 2022:5). Hilary Inwood argues that the integration of art education with environmental education can develop awareness and engagement with concepts such as interdependence, biodiversity, restoration, and sustainability (2010). In the same theoretical area, Graham (2007) places art education within a critical place-based pedagogy, arguing that artistic learning becomes more powerful when it is connected to local ecology and culture. The study by de Sousa (2021) on a participatory approach in education for sustainable development (ESD) shows that the involvement of students in collaborative processes can foster forms of social learning, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration. Similarly, Niederhauser et al. (2024) emphasize the power of artistic practices for ESD, while the systematic review on co-creation in higher education shows that co-creation is associated with broader engagement, better pedagogical relationships, motivation, communication, and a sense of agency among students.

One dimension that remains relatively underexplored is the role of material in this process. In many cases, material is treated as a medium for expression, but not as an active element that influences how meaning is constructed and reflection is developed. Ingold (2013) argues that making is not simply the realization of an idea in material, but a process that develops in continuous relation with it, where the material co-shapes the creative process and meaning-making. This perspective shifts the focus from the product to the process and interaction, opening a new space for understanding the role of materiality in education.

These theoretical perspectives suggest that the combination of artistic practices with recycled materials and co-creation processes has the potential to encourage critical reflection on the relationship between materials, the creative process, and ecological reflection. At the same time, care for the environment through art can have a financial impact on the educational institution.

2. Methodology

This study applies a qualitative, interpretive, and participatory approach. It is based on the integration of the Slow Memory Anthropocentric Method

(SMAM) (Garneva & Satka, 2026), Arts-Based Research (ABR) (Barone & Eisner, 2012), and the Motivational Competence Model (MMC) (Satka & Garneva, 2024), which are used in a complementary way to explore how students construct meaning during the creative process with the material.

By applying SMAM, students were engaged in recalling knowledge they had acquired earlier in school about the stages of a butterfly’s life transformation (caterpillar → pupa → butterfly), linking this process meaningfully with the “life” transformation of plastic (production, industrial use, market function, use, disposal). To complete the task of making plastic flowers, SMAM required conversations among three generations (children, parents, grandparents) about the role of flowers, plants, and trees in the family garden, in the ancestral ecosystem, and consequently in the ecosystem and national culture.

In the preparatory phase, the Motivational Competence Model (MMC) was used to guide students, as future primary school teachers, to reflect on moral values as a source of motivation within the educational system. They were asked to identify which moral virtues could best motivate the involvement of primary school children in addressing the problem of plastic pollution. MMC and SMAM lead to critical reflections on pedagogical tools and approaches, in alignment with the curriculum, through which moral values can be developed from an early age. At the same time, students’ reflections at the completion of the tasks functioned as a transformative unit for the development of their value-based ecological awareness.

The creative process was developed within the framework of Arts-Based Research (ABR), through which the changes that had occurred from the recall phase (through SMAM) and the motivational orientation (through MMC) were explored, now focused on the use of plastic to create flowers and butterflies. Perception, experience, and reflection during the creative process are related to subjective experiences and processes of meaning-making (Ingold, 2013). The inclusion of artistic imagination in the study (ABR) and the anthropocentric method (SMAM) combine efforts to construct new meaning. In this way, the creative process served to examine the data collected by students (recalled memories, stories told by relatives and close ones) and to generate a value-based understanding of the creative product in two dimensions: pedagogical and environmentally oriented. Material, in this case plastic, action, and reflection are treated as part of an integrated cognitive process (Bolt, 2007; Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2020).

This article approaches this practice as a case study situated within the course “Visual Arts” in the “Bachelor in Primary Education” program, aiming to understand how the creative process influences the way students experience

and interpret the material, with particular focus on how it is reshaped from an ordinary material into an object of reflection and responsibility.

2.1. Participants in the Study

The participants in this study are 24 students in their third year of the Bachelor's study program in Primary Education. The sample was purposively selected, appropriate for qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as the students were part of a course in which the pedagogical intervention is naturally integrated. The selection of this group is important, as it is related to the fact that the students are preparing to become future teachers, and that they “actively contribute to a radical shift through the concepts and practices of Environmental and Sustainability Education (ESE)” (Inwood & Kennedy, 2020: 69).

While participation in the artistic activity was part of the learning process, involvement in documenting and reflecting on the experience was voluntary, in accordance with ethical research principles. Students were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the data for research purposes. Anonymity was maintained during analysis and reporting of the findings.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

The study was conducted within the framework of the “Visual Arts” course, maintaining the authentic nature of the pedagogical situation without artificial intervention in the course structure. Three workshops were organized as spaces for co-creation.

A key element of the methodology was the students' engagement outside the classroom to collect materials in the field and to conduct conversations with relatives, close ones, and friends. Students directly encountered the presence of plastic in various outdoor environments. This phase created opportunities for direct experience and situated observation of plastic waste, linking the creative process to environmental reality and deepening the reflective dimension of practical engagement.

During the workshops, processes of experimentation with the collected materials (cutting, combining, transforming, heating, coloring), group discussions, and exchange of ideas were developed. These processes were extended by the students beyond the classroom. In the final stage of the process, the created flowers and butterflies were installed in the open natural garden in front of the Faculty, with the aim of transforming the material into a new relationship with nature and extending reflection from the artistic object to the space in which it is seen and experienced.

Data for the study were collected through: observation (during workshops), group discussions (during the creative process), students' reflective notes, and

the installation of the created artistic objects in an open environment. These data allowed for analysis across four interconnected levels: discursive (what is said), practical (what is done), material (what is created), and transformative (what changes through awareness).

The analysis was conducted using a thematic interpretative approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by the research questions. The process included identifying and interpreting patterns related to the creative experience and the ways in which students constructed meaning from the material. In line with the aim of the study, the analysis was structured around three categories:

- material transformation – how plastic was reshaped into artistic objects
- perceptual transformation – changes in how students perceived discarded plastic first as waste, and later as a material resource and a meaningful product
- reflective transformation – the development of critical thinking about consumption, awareness of the environmental problem, and the offering of a response to the issue

These categories were analyzed and consolidated to organize ecologically relevant data on the development of future teachers’ awareness and the impact of human activity on the environment.

4. Findings and discussions

The analysis of data from observations, discussions during the workshops, and students’ reflective notes identified three interrelated processes: the transformation of perception of the material, co-creation as a social learning and pedagogical process, and ecological reflection on consumption and the environment. These processes did not develop in a linear way, but mutually informed each other throughout the pedagogical approach. They were analysed across interconnected discursive, practical, and reflective levels, in accordance with the way the data were collected and interpreted.

4.1 Transformation of Perception of the Material

At the beginning of the activity, most students articulated plastic mainly as a “worthless” material and “without aesthetic qualities.” In the initial discussions, it was described as something that “is thrown in the trash” or “pollutes the environment.” The perception was generally accepted and distanced from their personal experiences.

The first change was observed during the fieldwork phase for collecting the material. Direct confrontation with the presence of plastic irresponsibly

discarded across the campus, streets, and beach appeared provocative and triggered immediate reactions:

"We pass by them every day, we see them in the streets but we don't notice them."

"...we buy them, use them, and throw them away without thinking."

"...in fact, it looks so ugly..."

"They were everywhere... when I started collecting them myself, I saw how much there was."

"When we started collecting plastic bottles at the bus station on campus, I observed how much plastic we use every day without paying attention."

These discursive reactions show a shift from general awareness to a more concrete experience. Discarded plastics were no longer perceived simply as a general environmental problem. They became associated with the ways they are used and discarded in everyday life.

During the creative process, this shift deepened further. When the future primary school teachers began cutting, bending, melting, combining, and transforming plastic bottles into flowers and butterflies (a process they found difficult), the material started to be perceived as a creative resource that acquired aesthetic functions:

"At first I saw plastic only as waste, but now that I am creating flowers, I am thinking about what else we can create."

This perceptual transformation clearly marks a new positioning of secondary waste materials.

Changes were also observed in behaviour. For example, one student refused to give plastic bottles to another student because they were needed for their own creations: "I will make more flowers." This moment signals a repositioning of the material from a rejected object to a useful resource. In practice, the material was more than a working medium; it was an active part of the creative experience. During this process, the transformation of the material influenced decisions, attention, and the way the work was carried out.



From a pedagogical perspective, unlike conventional practices where the teacher explains theory, the starting point was the material itself. Students changed their perception of discarded plastic during the process of working with it. As Ingold states, "co-operating with one's work goes on as much in the hands and fingers as in the head"

(2013:128). In this case, meaning was constructed through action and reflection on experience, in line with the way arts-based research approaches understanding (Eisner, 1997; Leavy, 2020). Plastic, from an ordinary waste material, became a starting point for reflection on consumption and the environment.

4.2 Co-creation as a Learning Process

During the workshops, the atmosphere was pleasant, experimental, and interactive. The work began with division into small groups that discussed ideas and tried different ways of manipulating the material. Students shared practical solutions: the most suitable plastics for the objects they intended to create, ways of cutting and assembling different parts, the use of heat to create the bending of petals, or types of flowers as new forms. Often, an idea tried by one student was adopted by others:

“When ... made a petal from the bottom of the bottle..., we also started trying it...”

“Look, I cut the Bravo bottle in this way.”

A little later, they began asking each other about the possibility of “building a garden with all the flowers and butterflies.” Interactions between them flowed freely. Creation was no longer an individual and predetermined process, but developed through these relationships. Students learned by observing each other, experimenting, making mistakes, and correcting them during the work. The creative process extended in time and space. They continued communication even after the workshops in class, exchanging ideas in online communication groups. They created more flowers and butterflies at home, and continued sending photos of them as ideas in the group. The models varied both in form and technique. In this case, co-creation was not simply the organization of activity in groups, but a way of building meaning together with each other and with the plastic. Techniques that are usually transmitted by the teacher were, in this case, acquired through working with the material and observing how others used it.

The most interesting aspect was the symbolic dimension of the creations. The task given by the teacher to create flowers and butterflies aimed at interpretation and critical reflection on the meanings of the flower and the butterfly. By returning to ancestral memory through the use of the Slow Memory Anthropocentric Method (SMAM), students quickly associated the butterfly with transformation and renewal, and flowers with birth and death. Plastic, as an intermediary material—both waste and resource—symbolized the cyclical nature of life, the purity of which must be cared for with a new ecological awareness:

“We have learned about the butterfly since school. It is a symbol of transformation. Plastic also transforms.”

The recalled knowledge about life transformation also led to reflections on the transformation of other waste materials such as paper and metal.

During the work, the process was also linked to the practical use of the collected material in several positive aspects: “they pollute the environment; we collect them; we sell them; we earn money; we buy materials that we need for university.”



The findings of the study show that co-creation not only produced artistic objects, but also new ways of understanding the material together. In practice, during the process, students began to consider plastic as useful, and it was not the theme of the “environment” that initially generated meaning, but the abundance of unnecessary material as a problem. The transformation toward critical thinking occurred after the introduction of themes such as “ecology,” “ecosystems,” and “eco-awareness,” in line with Inwood (2010) and Walter & Earl (2017), who argue that engagement in artistic practices is linked to the development of ecological sensitivity and critical thinking.

4.3 Critical Reflections on Consumption and the Environment

One of the most important findings of the study is reflection on personal consumption practices. In notes and discussions during and after the workshops, students connected plastic with their everyday lives. One student writes: “Now that I am paying attention, everything at home is made of plastic.” These words articulate a direct awareness of the quantity and presence of the material in daily life.

In some cases, reflection shifted to a more personal level: “from now on, every plastic bottle that I use, I will start thinking about what else I can use it for :)”

and “I will try not to use them so often...”. These are indicators of a rethinking of the relationship with the material rather than an immediate change in behaviour. In this sense, this artistic approach seems to contribute to sustainability education in an indirect way. Change does not occur immediately in action, but begins as reflection. As Sterling (2001) emphasizes, sustainable change requires time and repetition, and this is also evident in this case. Another element that emerged during the discussions was the connection with the past. Their thoughts about the “installation of plastic flowers in the university garden” led students to return to their childhood and the ways they used to live. They mentioned “the gardens of their grandparents’ houses” in villages or cities, and how “we used to take care of flowers and trees.” This articulation did not appear as nostalgia, but rather as a way to understand time and the way they live now, and to better understand change.

“Before, we used to pick flowers from the garden and give them to our teachers, the yard of our house was very beautiful. We had fruit trees. We ate fruit in the summer and prepared compote and jam for the winter... we didn’t spend money to buy them... today we only have plastics :) and other waste all around... in abundance.” This connection between the present and the past helped to rethink the relationship with the material. Students asked not only “what is this plastic?”, but also “how did we live without it?” and “how are we living with it now?” In this process, plastic, from an ordinary and overlooked object, became a point of reflection that connects personal experience, memory, and environmental awareness.

From this perspective, the study can be read as a shift from “waste management” toward “waste meaning” (Hawkins, 2006), where plastic is not treated only as an environmental problem, but also as an issue related to how we live, how we consume, and how we understand the environment around us. These reflections are also linked to the value dimension of the experience, where students begin to rethink their role in relation to the environment.



5. Conclusion

Within the framework of the ongoing initiative “Let us recycle and come together for the environment” at UAMD, we have engaged in experimental teaching practices to address the case of plastic.

The findings show that through direct interaction with plastic during the artistic co-creative process, and based on recalled experiences and narrative texts, understanding of the material was not taught, but constructed by the students themselves through action. This process influenced the way students experience and interpret plastic, shifting it from an ordinary and overlooked material into an object of reflection.

Working with waste materials had a transformative function in students’ thinking. The transformation of plastic into artistic objects was accompanied by a reconfiguration of their relationship with consumption and the environment, fostering deeper ecological awareness. This change did not appear as an immediate behavioural shift, but as a process of reflection and rethinking, indicating that sustainability education is linked to the gradual development of a culture that aims at “...a culture of sustainability... living more lightly on our planet” (Inwood, 2010:38).

The study provided a practical context for a deeper understanding of this approach, which can generate ideas for art education on ecological issues. For primary education students, this experience holds particular importance for their future teaching practices.

In this sense, the research suggests that approaches that place material and the creative process at the centre can contribute indirectly to environmental sustainability education among current and future students. They create opportunities for the continuation of experimentation with pedagogical practices, through their transfer and development in school curricula. In the future, the use of similar practices with other recyclable materials could be explored in different university or school contexts.

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Teachers' evaluation and professional development for English teachers in Albania

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Abstract: This article investigates how teacher evaluation systems affect teacher professional development through a thematic analysis of international research studies and Albanian research studies that investigate English language instructors. Teacher evaluation systems have transitioned from their original administrative function to become systems that now assist teachers with their professional development and teaching improvement needs. The research shows that institutions face multiple challenges when they try to implement these systems because of problems that affect evaluation feedback, evaluator skills, and teacher views on how the evaluation process functions. The study uses qualitative thematic analysis to examine literature published between 2000 and 2025. The research team used academic databases, which include Google Scholar, ERIC, and Albanian academic publications, to locate relevant sources. The research team used thematic synthesis to analyze selected literature, which identified common themes and ongoing academic debates about teacher evaluation and its relationship to professional development. The analysis identified four key dimensions that impact the success of evaluation systems: the purpose and perception of evaluation, the role of feedback in professional improvement, the professional capacity of evaluators and system coherence, and teachers' autonomy and reflective practice.

The results show that organizations experience difficulty maintaining a balance between using evaluation to measure performance and using evaluation to help employees develop their skills. Albanian professionals face greater challenges because evaluators receive insufficient training, while evaluation systems lack effective links to professional development activities. The study advances existing research by introducing a comprehensive framework that illustrates essential elements needed to connect evaluation systems with authentic professional development functions.

Keywords: *teacher evaluation, professional development, feedback, English language teachers*

1. Introduction

Teacher evaluation has evolved globally, moving from a bureaucratic and purely formal system to a tool for improving professional development and instruction quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 1983; OECD, 2013). This approach is based on the framework of Danielson (2007) and the model of Guskey (2000), which do not see evaluation as an end in itself but as a continuation of professional growth. However, the implementation of these practices faces challenges. Studies emphasize the role of leaders in evaluating teachers and the difficulties they have (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). Factors such as lack of time, expertise in certain subjects, and sufficient training to provide feedback turn the evaluation process into a formality (Whitehurst et al., 2014). In the Albanian reality, these topics take on a new importance. With the implementation of the competency-based curriculum, equipping teachers with new skills related to student evaluation has become essential (Roseni & Haxhihyseni, 2025). The challenges of the Albanian reality largely coincide with international ones, creating a gap between the way administrators and teachers conceive of evaluation (Leka & Beshiri, 2024).

This article aims to conduct a literature review on the changing concept of evaluation, not simply as a control tool, but as a powerful way to foster professional development. This article aims to (1) identify the main themes and debates related to teacher evaluation, (2) examine the challenges of implementation, and (3) define the gaps in the Albanian literature, especially for English language teachers.

2. Literature review

This subchapter presents the international and Albanian literature on teacher evaluation models and their professional development (PD). The main literature distinguishes between formative and summative evaluation.

According to Danielson (2007), effective evaluation should serve both as a process for professional development and as a tool for quality assurance. Coe et al. (2008) argue that evaluation should be evidence-based, especially in practices that are directly related to student outcomes. Guskey (2000) offers a model for professional evaluation, which he divides into five levels: (i) participant feedback, (ii) participant learning, (iii) organizational support and change, (iv) participant use of new knowledge and skills, and (v) student learning outcomes. International evidence also shows that teacher evaluation systems are closely linked to professional learning opportunities and that feedback from evaluation processes often influences teachers' participation in

professional development activities (OECD, 2019). As Isoré (2009) emphasizes in the OECD report, the match between the purpose of evaluation and the opportunity for professional development is the main axis of any education system.

International empirical studies have highlighted challenges in implementing evaluation systems. One of the most repeated findings is that feedback is often unclear. The research demonstrates that feedback serves as the strongest force that drives teaching effectiveness and student learning when delivered at the right time with precise details and practical steps to follow (Hattie, 2009). In their study of school leaders, Kraft and Gilmour (2016) argue that feedback is often general and shallow. Whitehurst et al. (2014) emphasize that without investment in the training of assessors, systems do not achieve the purpose, which can lead to ineffective feedback that fails to support teacher development and student learning, ultimately hindering the overall educational outcomes for students. Although classroom observations make up the largest weight of evaluation, teachers with higher-achieving students receive better evaluation results, regardless of their actual performance. In the OECD report, Isoré et al. (2009) argue that the lack of this consistency reduces the impact of improvement efforts.

In the case of foreign language teachers, studies emphasize that feedback should take into account the specifics of the subject, such as the unique challenges of language acquisition and the diverse needs of learners. Estaji & Shafaghi (2018) argue that the evaluation of English teachers should be done by considering aspects such as classroom communication management, foreign language use, and the promotion of communicative competences. According to Nugroho (2018) and Dayoub et al. (2012), evaluation models tend to fail to support foreign language teachers if they do not take into account the specific needs of the subject.

In the Albanian context, these issues become even more pressing. In the OECD report for Albania (2020), although there have been improvements, 52.2% of 15-year-old students do not possess basic reading skills, and 42.4% do not have basic numerical skills. Albanian researchers face challenges akin to those encountered internationally. Leka & Beshiri (2024), in their study involving 1,100 teachers and 80 principals, noted that there are very profound differences in the perception of feedback given by principals. Although principals indicate their feedback is qualitative, teachers assess it as rare and shallow. The study shows that 13.1% of teachers receive formal feedback because they need evaluations to monitor their progress. The results of this study confirm the results of Whitehurst et al. (2014), who state that it is necessary for observation results to be adjusted to student demographics to avoid bias. Roseni and Haxhihseni (2025) analyze foreign language teachers,

noting specific problems with the evaluation of students' competencies based on the new curriculum. According to them, 75% of teachers had difficulty distinguishing linguistic competencies from general competencies, and their training failed to equip them with the necessary tools to make an accurate evaluation. Their finding indicates a mismatch between the objectives of the curriculum reform and the real capacity of teachers to implement it. In conclusion, the lack of qualitative feedback, the insufficient training of assessors, and the mismatch between evaluation and professional development remain the main challenges. These findings justify a focused analysis of English language teachers in Albania, who face the challenge of adapting to the curriculum and the need for specialized feedback.

3. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative thematic literature review methodology to integrate and critically assess both international and Albanian research regarding teacher evaluation and its influence on professional development. With regard to English language instructors in Albania, the research design makes it possible to pinpoint key themes, conceptual conflicts, and current research gaps.

The selection of literature was based on several main criteria. Initially, studies were included that evaluate teacher evaluation in pre-university education, with a focus on upper secondary education. Finally, studies were included that considered evaluation as a tool for the professional. This includes the development of teachers, the role of leaders, their feedback, and teachers' perceptions. For this article, the literature was reviewed in the period 2000-2025. Various sources were included, including peer-reviewed articles, conceptual and theoretical frameworks, as well as Albanian studies for the local context.

The search was performed on Google Scholar, ERIC, and Albanian academic portals. The keywords employed encompassed combinations of terms such as "teacher evaluation," "professional development," "feedback," "EFL teachers," "Albania," "English language teachers," and "evaluator training." The study excluded studies published before 2000 that focused on primary education only, as well as those that addressed student evaluation without linking it to teacher evaluation.

The selected studies were analyzed through thematic synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, all repeated patterns that appeared in both the conceptual and empirical sections of the literature were identified. The study analysis was developed through this process, which produced four main themes that organize the study.

This study is based exclusively on published sources and does not involve participants. All sources are cited in accordance with academic standards of integrity and referencing.

4. Results and discussion

The thematic analysis of the selected literature identified several interrelated dimensions that influence how teacher evaluation systems function and how they contribute to professional development. In particular, international literature and Albanian studies show that teacher evaluation is influenced by four main elements: the purpose and perception of evaluation, the role of feedback in the professional improvement process, the capacity of evaluators and the coherence of the evaluation system, and teachers’ autonomy and professional reflection. These interrelated dimensions are summarized in the integrated framework presented in Figure 1.

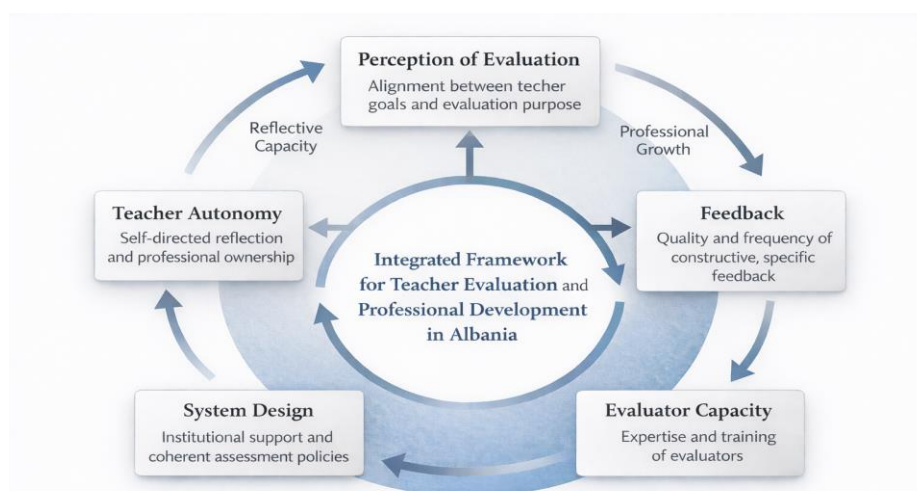


Figure 1: Integrated Framework for Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development in Albania

One of the main findings in the literature concerns how the purpose of evaluation is interpreted by actors in the education system. Studies show that there is an ongoing tension between evaluation as a mechanism for professional development and evaluation as an instrument for accountability. Kraft & Gilmour (2016) show that school leaders often interpret the purpose of evaluation in different ways, using it sometimes as a supportive tool for professional improvement and sometimes as a mechanism for identifying poor performance. These different interpretations create considerable variation in

how the process is implemented in practice. Even when policies aim to emphasize the developmental dimension of evaluation, teachers often perceive the process as a form of professional judgment related to career decisions. Estaji & Shafaghi (2018) argue that training assessors can improve perceptions of the fairness of the process, but does not eliminate the accountability dimension that accompanies evaluation systems.

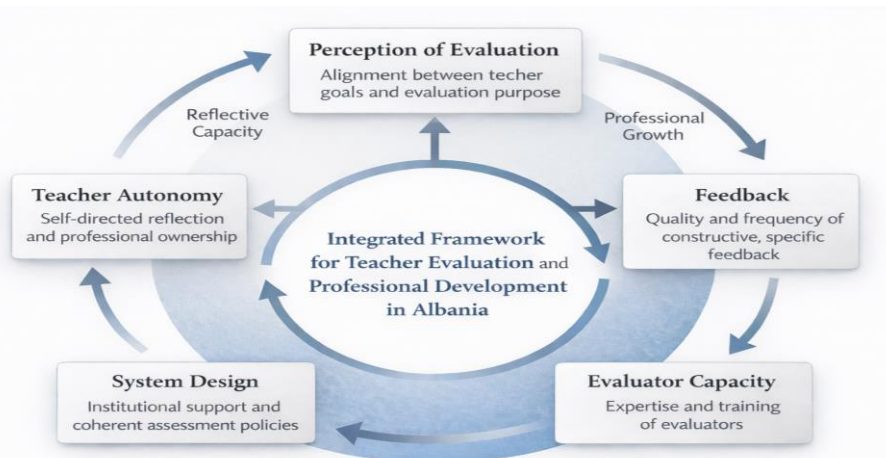


Figure 1: Integrated Framework for Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development in Albania

Albanian studies confirm the existence of this tension in the domestic context as well. Leka (2023) and Leka and Beshiri (2024) found a discrepancy in what school leaders report about evaluation and what teachers experience. School leaders display their evaluation methods through professional feedback, which they provide to teachers, but teachers describe the evaluation system as formal and bureaucratic, indicating a disconnect between the intended supportive role of feedback and the experience of teachers in their professional development. Evaluation perceptions differ between contexts because teachers' professional experience and urban-rural differences shape evaluation perceptions, leading to varied interpretations of feedback effectiveness and its role in professional development.

The literature presents an important dimension that explains how feedback functions as a professional development tool. Danielson (2007) states that effective feedback needs to provide specific information to teachers because this feedback needs to be presented directly at the appropriate time to assist them in evaluating their teaching methods and discovering which areas need enhancement. This finding is consistent with broader research showing that feedback has a significant impact on teaching effectiveness when it promotes

reflection and instructional improvement (Hattie, 2009). The study conducted by Rieckhoff and Damore (2017) demonstrates that teachers and school leaders can improve their professional development through the implementation of structured processes that take place after classroom observation. However, the Albanian context shows that organizations do not fully utilize their potential capacity. The study by Leka (2023) shows that teachers receive formal feedback only on a small scale, while classroom observation data serves primarily for annual evaluations instead of professional evaluation and development planning. The international literature establishes two major problems that affect both the reliability and fairness of classroom observation evaluations.

The research by Whitehurst et al. (2014) demonstrates that student traits affect observation results, which creates the potential for evaluation bias. The findings impact the Albanian context because research indicates urban and rural teachers have different perceptions of the evaluation process. The evaluation process needs to include such factors; otherwise, it will create existing inequalities that prevent professional practice development, particularly in how urban and rural teachers perceive and implement evaluation processes.

Another element that significantly influences the effectiveness of evaluation systems is the professional capacity of the evaluators and the overall coherence of the system. Isoré (2009) emphasizes that evaluation systems need multiple evaluators together with defined training procedures and evaluation standards to achieve maximum reliability. International studies also suggest that evaluations conducted by external evaluators show higher consistency than evaluations that school leaders perform by themselves. In Albania, however, school leaders conduct the evaluation process because there is insufficient training for them in this domain, which may lead to inconsistencies in the evaluation outcomes and hinder the overall effectiveness of the evaluation process. The observation process requires classroom evaluations to be used for ongoing reflection and professional growth, yet it currently operates as separate events instead of a continuous system, which limits the potential for teachers to engage in meaningful self-reflection and collaborative improvement over time.

A final dimension emerging from the literature relates to the role of professional autonomy and reflection in teacher development. Dayoub and Bashiruddin (2012) demonstrate that teachers can achieve professional growth through self-development activities in schools that foster professional development by encouraging reflection and team-based work. The research of Rieckhoff and Damore (2017) demonstrates that when teachers participate actively in their professional development activities, they are more likely to

implement new teaching methods, which can lead to improved student outcomes and a more dynamic learning environment. The professional reflection mechanisms and collegial culture both exhibit limited development throughout the Albanian academic system, according to multiple research studies. The study by Alimehmeti and Danglli (2012) demonstrates that teachers lack professional development through collaborative work, while Roseni and Haxhihyseni (2025) explain their challenges in evaluating language skills according to the new curriculum standards. The conditions that support autonomy and reflective practice in teacher development are summarized in Figure 2.

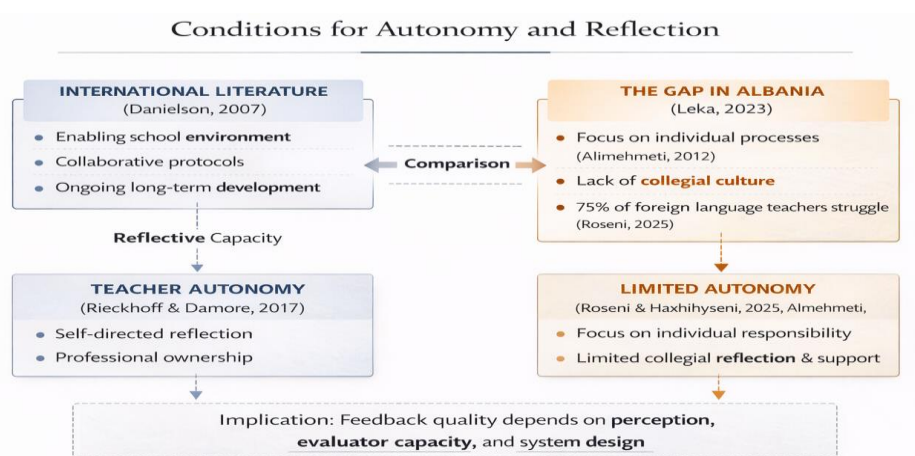


Figure 2: Conditions for Autonomy and Reflection

Overall, the findings of this review show that teacher evaluation functions as a complex system where the perception of the process, the quality of feedback, the capacity of evaluators, and the professional autonomy of teachers are interrelated. In the Albanian context, the main challenge appears to be the lack of a sustainable link between the evaluation process and teachers’ professional development. Without a stronger integration between these two elements, the potential of evaluation to contribute to improving teaching practice remains limited.

5. Conclusions and limitations of the study

This study examined the relationship between teacher evaluation and professional development through a thematic analysis of international and Albanian literature, with a particular focus on English language teachers in the Albanian context. The analysis identified four interrelated dimensions that

control the operational results of evaluation systems through their actual implementation because they define how evaluation systems are viewed and used, how feedback works as a tool for professional growth, how evaluators do their work together with their ability to assess systemic functions, and how teachers maintain their independence to evaluate their work. Together, these dimensions demonstrate that teacher evaluation should not be considered an isolated administrative process but as a systemic process linked to institutional structures, professional culture, and educational policies.

The research results demonstrate that evaluation systems achieve their effectiveness through their official design specifications and their actual implementation in schools. The international literature, together with Albanian studies, provides evidence of a persistent conflict between evaluation for professional development and evaluation for accountability. The Albanian system exhibits stronger tension because of its structural elements, which include inadequate assessor training and insufficient evaluation integration with professional development, and the implementation gap between declared policies and actual practices. The reviewed studies provide evidence that teachers receive feedback at an infrequent rate, which lacks details and serves administrative functions instead of promoting their teaching development.

The research results show that English language teachers face specific obstacles that arise from their attempt to implement a competency-based curriculum, together with their need for specialized feedback that meets the requirements of language teaching methods. International literature emphasizes the importance of specific criteria for assessing foreign language teaching, including the development of communicative competences, the use of language in authentic contexts, and classroom interaction. The current evaluation practices in Albania do not meet the requirements, which creates a gap between curriculum reform needs and the actual professional support that teachers receive. The study demonstrates that teacher evaluation systems require particular evaluation methods to evaluate English language teachers because their professional development needs differ from those of other teachers. The research reveals the need to scrutinize the established framework's capacity to carry out educational evaluation by examining its essential components. The evaluation process needs to connect with the teaching practice because otherwise, it will only serve as a formal procedure that fails to enhance teaching quality.

However, it is important to consider several limitations of the research study when evaluating its results. The study examines existing literature through thematic analysis without gathering new empirical evidence. The findings depend on the research studies that the author selected for their analysis. The existing research on teacher evaluation in Albania contains a major gap

because it has published only a small number of studies that examine this topic for English language teachers. The review mainly depends on published academic sources but fails to include all insights from policy documents, institutional reports, and field practitioners' experiences.

The research limitations demonstrate that more empirical research needs to be conducted to study teacher evaluation methods in Albanian schools. Future studies could explore teachers' and school leaders' experiences with the evaluation process, how feedback influences changes in teaching practice, and how evaluation systems can be better integrated with professional learning communities in schools. Research that investigates English language teaching as a specific disciplinary field will create evaluation systems that better fulfill teachers' professional development requirements.

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Understanding adult learners’ motivation in a company-based English course

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Abstract: The study explores adult learners’ motivation in a company-based English course, focusing on long-term engagement in workplace language learning. The theoretical framework highlights motivation as a dynamic construct shaped by professional demands and personal goals of adults learning a foreign language. Based on the theoretical perspective, the study presents a qualitative case study design to examine how motivation is experienced by two adult learners in a professional context. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview with high-profile employees in a construction company in Nitra, Slovakia, who are long-term (5+ years) attendees in a company-based English course. The findings indicate that instrumental motivation related to professional responsibilities initially predominates; however, continuous long-term involvement is supported by intrinsic factors such as increased self-confidence and improved communicative competence. The study recommends for company-based English courses to adopt learner-centered, interactive and flexible instructional practices in order to enhance long-term motivation. The findings contribute to research on the motivation of adults to learn foreign languages.

Keywords: *adult learners, motivation, English as a foreign language, company-based language learning context*

1. Introduction

In today’s globalised world, the presence of English is undeniable. Nowadays, English not only serves as a working tool but also expectation, particularly in many professional contexts, it has become a taken-for-granted part of communication. Within the business sector, English is used as a medium of

international communication, and employees are increasingly required to use it in their everyday professional routines. From writing emails and attending virtual meetings to negotiating with partners or delivering presentations. In such contexts, English serves as the language of operation. As a result, Business English is recognised as a subject within language education in both formal and informal educational settings. In response to these demands, companies frequently support their employees by offering language courses structured to their professional needs. The workplace-based courses are designed not only to improve linguistic competence but also to enhance employees' ability to function effectively in international contexts. However, even in cases where such opportunities are available, not all employees participate, and even fewer remain engaged over more extended periods. This observation raises an important question. What drives adult professionals to learn English in the workplace?

Among the many factors influencing adult language learning, motivation is widely acknowledged as a key determinant of success. According to Stranovská (2011) it shapes learners' willingness to engage with the language, their persistence in the face of difficulties, and the goals they set for themselves throughout the process. In workplace contexts, where learning is typically not compulsory and must be balanced with job responsibilities and personal commitments, motivation often plays an even more critical role than in formal education. It functions as a sustaining will that influences the initial decision to participate in a course but also the depth and continuity of one's engagement. This study focuses on the role of motivation in the long-term language learning experiences of two adult learners who have been attending a workplace-based English course for more than five years. Through informal semi-structured interviews, the study aims to explore how learners perceive their own motivation, how it has developed over time, and what personal or contextual factors influence it. The research draws on the current theories on motivation (Stranovská, 2011; Sollárová et al, 2019; Gadušová, 2020) and participants' lived experiences while acknowledging the complexity and individuality of adult language learning in professional environments.

2. Motivation in foreign language learning

The conceptualisation of motivation in foreign language education is not uniform and varies depending on the theoretical framework adopted. While some approaches emphasise sociocultural determinants and the role of the learning environment, others define motivation primarily as an individual psychological disposition or as a dynamic process emerging from the interaction between the learner and the context. For this study, we consider

motivation to be an internal driving force that directly influences the depth of language processing, willingness to communicate, and persistence when facing cognitively demanding tasks. This stance lies in line with psycholinguistic perspective, where motivation represents a key driving force behind human behaviour and learning activity (Stranovská, 2011).

In the context of foreign language learning, motivation can be understood as a set of psychological forces that initiate, direct, and sustain learning behaviour, determining both its intensity and persistence (*ibid.*). These motivational forces are not static but they develop dynamically over time and are influenced by both internal dispositions and external conditions. According to Stranovská et al (2011), motivation consists of current and potential motivational forces. Current forces manifest themselves in concrete learning behaviour, while potential forces exist in the form of motivational dispositions that shape an individual's long-term orientation towards learning (*ibid.*). These dispositions are partly innate and partly acquired through social experience.

Innate motivational dispositions are closely linked to biological and primary needs, whereas acquired motivational dispositions develop through social interaction. These acquired dispositions include social needs, interests, and value orientations, which play a crucial role in adult language learning, especially in professional contexts (Stranovská, 2011). In company-based language courses, such social and value-oriented motives often become dominant, as learning is closely connected to workplace communication and career development. Motivation in foreign language learning is further shaped by cognitive and emotional factors, as well as by the learner's level of awareness (*ibid.*). Learners are not always fully aware of the motives that guide their learning behaviour, however, motivation consistently influences their engagement, persistence, and response to success or failure. It is important to highlight that the same motive may lead to different forms of behaviour depending on personal experience, cultural background, and situational context.

A widely accepted distinction in second language acquisition research is Gardner's (1985) differentiation between integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to the learner's interest in the target language culture and the desire to identify with or become part of the target language community. It is associated with openness towards cultural integration, language identity, and interpersonal interaction. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is oriented towards the practical usefulness of the language, such as passing exams, improving job prospects, or achieving professional goals. Gardner (1985) emphasizes that integrative motivation often leads to deeper and more sustained engagement with language learning,

as it supports natural language acquisition processes, including pronunciation, fluency, and syntactic development. However, we believe that in adult and professional learning contexts, instrumental motives are equally significant. Stranovská (2011) further refines this distinction by referring to integrative motives as identity-oriented and practical motives. This process typically unfolds in several phases, including activation, direction, and goal orientation. Activation arises from the awareness of a need or deficit, such as insufficient communicative competence in professional situations. Direction reflects the learner's values, interests, and attitudes, which shape the choice of learning strategies and activities. Goal orientation involves the pursuit of clearly defined objectives, which are closely linked to the learner's aspiration level (ibid.). Goals play a central role in sustaining motivation. They represent a mental image of a desired future state and influence both the direction and intensity of learning behaviour. Therefore, it is extremely important to make the goals conscious and explicitly articulated.

In adult learners, goals and motives are strongly influenced by real-life applicability, workplace relevance, self-awareness and personal growth. Motivation in language learning never follows a linear increasing trajectory but rather develops like a process, where periods of progress alternate with stagnation or temporary decline. Learners may remain at a certain stage of motivation or experience a decrease in motivation due to internal or external factors. External factors include classroom atmosphere, teaching style, task design, and social relationships, while internal factors involve misalignments between personal interests, expectations, and perceived competence. That is why the role of the teacher is particularly highlighted to be able to align the structure of the lessons to the learners needs and expectations.

The teacher acts as a facilitator of motivation, supporting learners not only linguistically but also emotionally. The teacher should be able to create a supportive learning environment, whereas encouraging positive emotions, and addressing frustration or anxiety. In adult education, this facilitative role is especially relevant, as learners bring prior experiences, expectations, and emotional responses to learning situations. The authoritative role of the teacher shifts to the role of a partner/facilitator, where motivation of learners is shaped by the interaction. It is essential to understand these motivational processes for interpreting adult learners' engagement with language learning and providing a valuable framework for analysing their learning experiences.

3. Adult learner's motivation

Adult learners represent a unique group within foreign language education, as their motivation is shaped by a combination of personal and professional

factors. Unlike learners in formal elementary and secondary education, adults usually engage in language learning voluntarily and with clearly defined expectations related to their professional roles and everyday communication needs. Research highlights that adult learners' motivation is strongly influenced by perceived relevance, usefulness, and immediate applicability of the target language to their real life (Alrabai, 2016; Al-Hoorie, 2018). In company-based settings, learners often view English as a tool that enables them to participate more confidently in professional interactions and position themselves within an international working environment. Adult learners are more motivated when they clearly see how language learning aligns with their career goals, motives and workplace demands (Stranovská et al, 2020).

An important characteristic of adult learners' motivation is its goal-oriented nature. As reported in several studies, adult learners tend to formulate concrete and realistic goals related to their professional performance, such as improving spoken fluency in meetings, understanding professional documentation, or communicating effectively with international partners (Naumčiuk, 2023). These goals function as strong motivational anchors and help learners sustain engagement over longer periods, even when learning progress is slow or interrupted by work-related responsibilities. At the same time, adult learners' motivation is highly sensitive to contextual conditions. Research indicates that external factors such as course organisation, teaching approach, group atmosphere, and institutional support significantly influence learners' willingness to persist in language learning (Alshumaimeri & Almohaisen, 2017). In company-based courses, the learning environment is often shaped by organisational and time constraints, which can either support or hinder motivation.

Another topic on adult language learning motivation is the interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motives. While instrumental motives such as career advancement or job security often initiate participation in workplace-based English courses, long-term motivation is frequently sustained by intrinsic factors, including increased self-confidence, enjoyment of communication, and a sense of personal growth (Stranovská et al., 2020). This finding is particularly relevant for adult learners who have experienced previous failures or frustration in formal language education, as positive learning experiences in a supportive environment can gradually reshape their attitudes towards language learning.

Several authors emphasise the crucial role of the teacher in maintaining adult learners' motivation (Gadušová, 2020). The teacher is not only a language instructor but also a facilitator who helps learners manage anxiety, overcome communication barriers, and reinterpret mistakes as a natural part of the learning process (ibid.). In workplace-based contexts, where learners may feel

evaluated not only as learners but also as professionals, the teacher’s ability to create a safe and respectful learning atmosphere becomes particularly important.

Overall, motivation in adult workplace-based language learning emerges as a dynamic and complex process, influenced by personal aspirations, professional responsibilities, social interaction, and instructional practices. Research confirms that adult learners’ motivation cannot be reduced to a single factor but must be understood as a complex interplay of internal and external influences. This perspective provides an important framework for the present study, which seeks to explore how adult learners themselves perceive their motivation within a long-term company-based English course.

4. Methodology

1.1 Research Aim

Motivation is widely regarded as a key determinant of success in company-based second language courses, particularly in rapidly evolving professional demands and the enduring responsibilities associated with adult life. Despite its acknowledged importance, the specific role and long-term impact of motivation in the context of Slovak corporate language education remains underexplored. The present study aims to investigate the role of motivation as a central factor influencing adult learners’ sustained engagement in company-based English courses in the Nitra region of Slovakia. To address this aim, a qualitative research design in the form of semi-structured interviews was employed in order to gain an understanding of learners’ motivation and perceived changes over time. The primary objective of the study is to explore whether and how motivation functions as a determining factor in adult learners’ long-term participation in corporate-based language education. To fulfil this objective, the study pursues the following sub-goals:

- to identify the dominant types of motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, instrumental) reported by adult learners participating in company-based English courses,
- to explore changes in learners’ motivation over time, particularly in relation to professional demands and personal life responsibilities,
- to examine the factors that enhance or hinder sustained motivation in long-term corporate language education.
- to interpret learners’ subjective perceptions of how motivation influences their learning progress and professional development.

1.2. Research Questions

Based on this aim, the following research questions have been proposed:

- **RQ1:** What types of motivation do adult learners report in the context of company-based English courses?
- **RQ2:** How do adult learners describe the development or changes in their motivation over time?
- **RQ3:** What internal and external factors do learners experience as supporting or hindering their sustained motivation in corporate language education?
- **RQ4:** How do adult learners perceive the impact of motivation on their second language learning?

1.3. Research Sample

The qualitative research sample consisted of two adult participants enrolled in a company-based English course conducted within a corporate environment. A purposive sampling strategy was applied, as both participants met the criterion of holding senior managerial positions and are attendees of English course for more than five years. Participant 1 is a 59-year-old Production Director with extensive professional experience in operational leadership. His role involves managerial responsibility within the production sector, including coordination and communication in an international business environment. Participant 2 is a 43-year-old Bid Department Director and member of top management, with 22 years of professional experience. His position includes strategic decision-making and cooperation with foreign investors and international clients.

In terms of language proficiency, both learners are assessed at the B1.2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Their professional backgrounds and responsibilities are comparable, as well as their prior language learning experiences and confidence in spoken communication. The relative homogeneity of the participants in terms of age, professional status, and workplace context allows for a focused exploration of motivational factors within a specific corporate setting. At the same time, the qualitative design acknowledges individual variability and seeks to capture the depth and complexity of their motivational trajectories over time.

1.4. Instruments

The research methods and instruments have been selected based on the aforementioned characteristics of the study, and their use is described throughout the research process.

4.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews represent the primary data collection method in this qualitative study. This instrument has been selected due to its suitability

for exploring participants’ subjective experiences, beliefs, and evolving motivational orientations in depth (Kallio et al., 2016). An interview was developed in direct alignment with the study’s main objective and proposed research questions. It consisted of open-ended questions grouped into several thematic domains:

1. Initial motivational orientation that reflects learners’ reasons for enrolling in the company-based English course and their expectations at the beginning of the program;
2. Development of motivation over time which perceives changes in intensity or focus of motivation during long-term participation;
3. Barriers and facilitating factors, consisting of internal factors (e.g., self-confidence, fatigue, time management) and external factors (e.g., workload, company support, course design) factors which affect engagement;
4. Perceived outcomes as the impact of English learning on professional performance, communication with international partners, leadership effectiveness, and personal growth.

1.5.Procedures

The data collection has been conducted in several phases. Firstly, prior to the interviews, permission to conduct the research was obtained from the company management. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity were clearly explained, and informed consent was obtained before the interviews commenced. Both interviews were conducted individually at the participants’ workplace in a quiet, friendly and familiar environment to ensure comfort and minimize external distractions. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Slovak to allow participants to express their experiences fully and without linguistic constraint. The interviews were audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed afterwards, preserving participants’ original wording to maintain authenticity. An interview consisted of aforementioned key thematic areas (initial motivation, development of motivation over time, barriers and facilitating factors, and perceived outcomes) ensured consistency across both interviews. At the same time, the semi-structured format allowed flexibility to ask follow-up questions relevant to the research questions. The recordings were transcribed shortly after the interviews. The transcripts were subsequently prepared for qualitative thematic analysis.

5. Results

The qualitative analysis of the two semi-structured interviews was conducted using thematic categorisation aligned with the predefined thematic domains: (1) initial motivational orientation, (2) development of motivation over time, (3) barriers and facilitating factors, and (4) achieved outcomes. The findings reveal strong professional orientation, motivational stability over time, and the significant role of contextual factors in sustaining engagement.

Both participants have reported enrolling in the company-based English course primarily for professional reasons. Participant 1 has emphasised the intention to improve communication skills, particularly grammar and vocabulary development. Participant 2, a senior manager with extensive professional experience, has stated that a primary reason for his participation in the course was the need to communicate effectively with foreign investors, as the company collaborates mainly with international partners. The motivation was directly connected to workplace demands and leadership responsibilities. Unlike Participant 1, who highlighted linguistic sub-skills (grammar and vocabulary), Participant 2 framed his motivation more broadly as improving overall English competence for strategic communication purposes.

In both cases, motivation has been clearly instrumental and professionally driven. Both participants have described their motivation as stable over time. Participant 1 reported that the initial goal, which was achieving high-quality communication with business partners, “was and still is” the main driving force. Similarly, Participant 2 has explicitly stated that his motivation “has stayed the same from the beginning.” No significant fluctuations, declines, or turning points have been identified in either case. The absence of reported motivational change suggests that the initial goals were clearly defined and have remained relevant throughout participation. These results indicate motivational consistency rather than dynamic transformation.

The two participants have reported different impact factors. Participant 1 has not identified major barriers but emphasised facilitating elements, particularly the interactive structure of the course. The communicative approach, practical exercises, and engaging format were perceived as motivating and supportive. The absence of rote memorisation and the emphasis on real-life application have been described as positive contributors to sustained participation. Participant 2, in contrast, explicitly identified workload as a barrier. Professional responsibilities and time constraints have posed challenges to consistent engagement. However, he has also highlighted strong facilitating factors, including company support and the perception of personal improvement (“my results and improvement”). Overall, the findings suggest

that external contextual factors (e.g., organisational support, course design) play a critical role in sustaining adult learners' motivation. Both participants have reported improvements in communication competence. Participant 1 has stated a significant improvement in communication skills, directly aligning with his initial expectations. The link between initial goals and observed outcomes suggests goal fulfilment and satisfaction with learning progress. Participant 2 has articulated both professional and personal improvements. Professionally, he has reported increased ability to participate in negotiations and communicate with clients. This indicates enhanced functional communicative competence in authentic business contexts. Additionally, he has mentioned personal-life benefits, including the ability to communicate in FL while travelling abroad more confidently, communicate during holidays, and read or write short texts in English. In both cases, perceived outcomes correspond closely with initial motivational orientation. Overall, the findings address the primary objective of the study. The analysis confirms that motivation functions as a determining factor in sustaining long-term participation in corporate-based language education. The sub-goals were also achieved: the dominant type of motivation has been clearly instrumental and professionally oriented, motivational stability over time has been observed, contextual factors have been identified as both facilitating and constraining elements and participants explicitly linked their motivation to perceived learning progress and professional development.

6. Discussion

The findings of the present study provide coherent answers to the research questions and align with the established research in second language motivation. In response to **RQ1**, the dominant type of motivation reported by both participants has been clearly instrumental and professionally oriented. This finding corresponds with long-standing distinctions between instrumental and integrative orientations in second language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), where instrumental motivation refers to learning a language for pragmatic purposes. More recent studies (Dörnyei, 2009) further explain this phenomenon by emphasising the role of the Ideal L2 Self linked to career aspirations and professional identity. As a result, participants could become more effective L2 learners once the structure of the courses is linked to their relevant professional needs. There, the role of the teacher is highlighted to reflect this future-oriented content of the course.

Regarding **RQ2**, the study did not reveal substantial fluctuations in motivation over time. Instead, both participants described motivational stability. While motivation in language learning is often described as dynamic and context-

sensitive (Dörnyei, 2009), the present findings suggest that clearly defined professional goals may function as stabilising anchors. In this sense, motivational stability in corporate learners can indicate consistent alignment between goals and context.

In response to **RQ3**, participants have identified both facilitating and constraining factors. Workload and time pressure acted as barriers, which is consistent with research highlighting the impact of competing adult responsibilities on sustained learning engagement (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Nevertheless, organisational support, communicative course design, and visible progress have been perceived as motivational enhancers. The results therefore reinforce the view that motivation is not solely an internal trait but is constructed within institutional and instructional contexts.

Finally, in response to **RQ4**, participants have explicitly linked motivation to communicative improvement and professional effectiveness. Rather than reporting abstract linguistic gains, they have emphasised functional competence in authentic business situations. This supports the argument that adult learners are primarily oriented toward meaningful application and immediate use (Gadušová, 2020). Overall, the findings support the assumption that motivation functions as a determining factor in long-term participation in corporate-based language education. These results contribute to the understanding of adult L2 motivation by illustrating how stability, rather than fluctuation, may characterise motivation in highly goal-oriented corporate learning environments.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore whether and how motivation functions as a determining factor in adult learners' sustained participation in corporate-based English education. The findings indicate that, within the analysed cases, motivation is grounded in professional relevance of the content and long-term occupational goals. In this research, motivation has remained stable and has been supported by the continuous applicability of English in participants' working lives. This stability appears to be grounded in clearly articulated professional purposes and reinforced by actual communicative gains. The results also highlight the importance of contextual conditions. While workload and time constraints may challenge persistence, institutional support, communicative course design, and visible progress can support learners' motivation. Motivation is therefore not an isolated psychological variable, but as a dynamic factor between personal goals and organisational environment. Future research could expand the sample to include diverse corporate settings and explore potential differences across professional roles or levels of

responsibility. Despite its limited scope, the present study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of adult L2 motivation in workplace education in Slovakia and underscores the need to align instructional design with learners’ evolving professional identities and practical needs.

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Foreign language, Culture, and Learning in a Digital Society: Rethinking Intercultural Education.

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Abstract: Foreign language learning holds a central position in the Albanian education system, particularly in response to increased mobility, European integration, and globalization. This paper presents findings from an empirical study investigating the use of digital tools in foreign language education in Albanian upper secondary schools and university. The study explores how technology-enhanced learning environments contribute to students’ linguistic development and intercultural awareness. Using a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with foreign language teachers, and questionnaires administered to students. The findings indicate that digital tools such as learning management systems, online resources, and collaborative platforms are frequently used to support vocabulary development, listening skills, and learner motivation. However, their potential for fostering intercultural communication and multilingual competence remains underexploited. The study also reveals challenges specific to the Albanian context, including disparities in digital infrastructure, limited teacher training in intercultural pedagogy, and a predominantly language-form-focused use of technology. The paper argues that, in order to respond effectively to the demands of a digital society, foreign language education in Albania must move beyond instrumental uses of technology toward pedagogical approaches that intentionally integrate intercultural learning and citizenship education. Implications for teacher education and curriculum development are discussed.

Keywords: *foreign language; skills; digital society; communication; teacher training.*

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have become an integral component of language education across Europe, offering opportunities for personalized learning, adaptive feedback, and expanded exposure to diverse linguistic inputs (European Commission, 2021; Redecker, 2017). However, within the European educational paradigm—particularly as framed by the Council of Europe—language learning is not limited to linguistic proficiency but is closely linked to intercultural competence, democratic participation, and social values (Council of Europe, 2018; Council of Europe, 2020).

Despite these policy orientations, the pedagogical use of digital tools remains uneven. In contexts such as Albania, technology integration frequently prioritizes formal language acquisition and standardized proficiency outcomes aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, while insufficient attention is given to intercultural dialogue and citizenship-oriented learning (European Commission, 2020; Vuorikari et al., 2022). As a result, learners may develop receptive and productive language skills without engaging in meaningful intercultural communication or critical reflection on cultural diversity.

European frameworks, including the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, emphasize that language education should foster values such as empathy, respect, and openness to otherness (Council of Europe, 2018). However, without targeted teacher training in intercultural pedagogy, digital technologies are often employed within a narrowly linguistic scope (Satar & Hauck, 2020). This creates a gap between European policy ambitions and classroom realities.

A quantitative-dominant mixed-methods approach helps reveal this imbalance between technological potential and pedagogical implementation. While survey data across European contexts indicate high adoption rates of digital tools—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic—qualitative findings frequently highlight the superficial integration of intercultural elements (König et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). Activities often remain limited to formulaic exchanges or token cultural references, lacking depth and authentic engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, many digital learning environments draw on the work of Stephen Krashen, particularly the Input Hypothesis, which promotes exposure to comprehensible input slightly above the learner’s current level (Krashen, 1985). While effective for language acquisition, this approach alone does not ensure intercultural competence. In line with Michael Long’s Interaction Hypothesis, meaningful intercultural learning requires

opportunities for negotiation of meaning, dialogic exchange, and co-construction of understanding (Long, 1996)—elements often missing in AI-driven or individualized platforms.

Moreover, European research underscores the importance of integrating digital technologies within broader pedagogical ecosystems (Selwyn, 2016; Luckin et al., 2018). Initiatives such as Kampung Cyber demonstrate how community-based digital engagement can support both educational and civic objectives (Rahayu & Sensuse, 2020). These examples suggest that even in contexts with infrastructural limitations, innovative and socially embedded uses of technology are possible when aligned with local needs.

At the same time, the use of AI-driven tools raises critical concerns regarding cultural representation. Poorly designed simulations risk reinforcing stereotypes or presenting decontextualized cultural content (Holmes et al., 2022). Therefore, teacher education must include critical digital literacy, enabling educators to evaluate and adapt technological resources in accordance with European values of inclusivity, diversity, and democratic engagement (Redecker, 2017).

From a curriculum development perspective, aligning language education with intercultural citizenship requires a shift from purely linguistic objectives toward integrated learning outcomes (Byram, 2008; Porto, 2019). This includes embedding intercultural dialogue, critical reflection, and collaborative problem-solving into digitally mediated tasks. Technology should thus be conceptualized not merely as a delivery mechanism, but as part of a pedagogical framework that connects language use with real-world social issues and multilingual communication practices.

Furthermore, reliance on quantitative indicators such as device usage or vocabulary acquisition may obscure the broader educational picture. Without qualitative analysis of communicative interactions—such as recorded exchanges between learners from different cultural backgrounds—it is difficult to assess whether digital tools genuinely foster intercultural competence (O’Dowd, 2018).

In line with European policy recommendations, the effective integration of AI and digital tools requires context-sensitive implementation strategies. These include localized professional development, collaborative curriculum design involving educators and technologists, and blended learning models that combine digital and offline intercultural activities (European Commission, 2021; Vuorikari et al., 2022).

Ultimately, this study highlights the tension between technological capacity and pedagogical intent. By bridging quantitative data with qualitative insights, it seeks to demonstrate how language education in contexts such as Albania can be reoriented toward a more holistic model—one that integrates linguistic

proficiency with intercultural citizenship, in alignment with broader European educational values.

2. Theoretical foundation of Intercultural Education in a Digital Society

2.1 Defining Intercultural Education

Contemporary conceptual frameworks for intercultural education in digitally mediated environments integrate insights from second language acquisition, intercultural communication, and educational technology, while increasingly responding to the demands of European-oriented education systems, such as that of Albania. At their core, these frameworks aim to align linguistic competence with the ability to engage critically and appropriately across cultural boundaries, a priority reinforced by Albania’s ongoing processes of European integration and educational reform.

A central theoretical foundation is constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes active knowledge construction through interaction. In digitally supported language learning environments, this translates into learner-centered practices where students engage with authentic materials, collaborate online, and participate in meaning-making processes. Within the Albanian context, however, this shift remains partial: teaching practices often retain a form-focused orientation, limiting opportunities for culturally situated interaction. Therefore, constructivist approaches need to be operationalized through structured intercultural tasks, rather than relying solely on exposure to digital content.

An important complementary perspective is provided by intercultural communicative competence (ICC) frameworks, particularly those associated with Michael Byram. These models conceptualize intercultural learning as a combination of attitudes (e.g., openness, curiosity), knowledge (of social groups and practices), skills (interpretation and interaction), and critical cultural awareness. In the Albanian educational setting, ICC remains underrepresented in curricula, where measurable linguistic outcomes often take precedence. Digitally mediated environments offer opportunities to embed ICC through dialogic and scenario-based tasks, enabling learners to interpret cultural meanings rather than merely reproduce language forms.

Closely related is the notion of dialogue between cultures, which foregrounds reciprocity, mutual respect, and the negotiation of meaning. In digital contexts, this requires more than passive consumption of multimedia resources; it demands interactive formats such as virtual exchanges, collaborative projects, or discussion forums. For Albanian classrooms—where direct international interaction may be limited—simulated intercultural encounters and guided reflection tasks can serve as viable alternatives.

Recent frameworks also integrate principles of global citizenship education, promoted by organizations such as UNESCO. These approaches expand intercultural learning beyond communication skills to include values such as empathy, responsibility, and democratic participation. In Albania, where curricula are gradually aligning with European standards, embedding citizenship-oriented outcomes into foreign language teaching represents a significant opportunity. However, current digital practices often prioritize efficiency and test preparation, leaving these broader competencies insufficiently addressed.

From a pedagogical standpoint, active and collaborative learning theories highlight the importance of participation in diverse forms. Digital tools can facilitate cooperative learning structures, peer feedback, and project-based tasks. When combined with performance-based assessment, these approaches allow educators to evaluate not only linguistic accuracy but also intercultural skills such as perspective-taking and negotiation of meaning. In practice, however, Albanian classrooms may face constraints related to class size, infrastructure, and assessment traditions, which can limit the implementation of such models.

The integration of gamification and interactive technologies has been shown to increase learner motivation, yet its contribution to deep intercultural understanding remains conditional. In the Albanian context, gamified tools are often used for vocabulary and grammar reinforcement. To align with intercultural objectives, these tools must be embedded within culturally meaningful narratives and problem-solving tasks, rather than functioning as isolated motivational devices.

Another key dimension is digital literacy, increasingly recognized as an essential competence for intercultural engagement. Frameworks suggest that the ability to navigate online spaces, evaluate sources, and participate in digital discourse contributes indirectly to intercultural competence. However, the rapid spread of AI-based tools introduces new challenges. Overreliance on generative technologies can undermine critical thinking and authenticity in language production. Thus, in Albanian education, there is a growing need to position AI as a supportive tool—for example, for drafting or feedback—while maintaining a strong emphasis on human interpretation and cultural reflection.

The role of the teacher remains central across all frameworks. Teachers act as mediators who select, contextualize, and scaffold digital resources to ensure meaningful intercultural engagement. In Albania, where professional development in digital and intercultural pedagogy is still evolving, this represents a critical area for investment. Without targeted training, technology

use risks remaining instrumental and linguistically focused, rather than transformative.

Emerging technologies such as augmented reality (AR) introduce new possibilities for multimodal and immersive learning. AR can situate language within visually rich cultural contexts, helping learners connect vocabulary with cultural practices and environments. When grounded in constructivist principles, such technologies can support deeper engagement, though their implementation in Albania is currently limited by resource availability.

Finally, recent research trends highlight a significant increase in studies on digital language learning, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there remains a notable gap in longitudinal research addressing sustained intercultural outcomes. For Albania, this suggests the need for future frameworks that incorporate long-term perspectives, evaluating not only immediate language gains but also the development of intercultural awareness over time.

In line with recent theoretical discussions, effective intercultural communication requires sensitivity to culturally embedded communicative norms and socio-historical perspectives. This implies that learners must be trained to interpret intentions, adapt discourse strategies, and reflect critically on their own cultural assumptions. Digital environments can support this process, but only when tasks are explicitly designed to foster deep cultural engagement rather than superficial interaction.

Overall, conceptual frameworks for intercultural education in Albania must ensure coherence between pedagogical aims, technological tools, and contextual realities. They should embed intercultural objectives across all stages of instruction—from task design to assessment—while addressing systemic constraints such as teacher training, curriculum priorities, and access to resources. Such alignment is essential for moving beyond a narrow focus on language form toward a more holistic model of intercultural communicative competence in the digital age.

2.2 Relationship between Language, Culture and Learning

Language, culture, and learning are deeply interconnected, shaping not only how learners use a foreign language but also how they interpret meaning and interact across cultures. In line with contemporary approaches to intercultural communicative competence, particularly those associated with Michael Byram, language learning is understood as more than the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary; it involves developing the ability to navigate cultural norms, values, and communicative practices.

In the Albanian educational context, foreign language teaching—especially in English, German, and Italian—has traditionally emphasized linguistic

accuracy and exam performance. However, this focus can limit learners' ability to engage meaningfully in intercultural communication, particularly in digital learning environments where language is often presented in isolated, decontextualized forms.

Research highlights that linguistic meaning is closely tied to cultural context, including pronunciation, discourse styles, and social interaction patterns. Without explicit attention to these dimensions, learners may struggle with interpretation and communication. This is particularly relevant in Albania, where learners have limited direct exposure to target-language communities and therefore rely heavily on classroom and digital input.

Collaborative and interactive learning approaches have been shown to increase motivation, engagement, and intercultural awareness. Activities such as peer work, discussion, and authentic communication tasks help create a sense of shared experience and support identity development as intercultural speakers. However, challenges such as differing proficiency levels, limited cooperation, or unfamiliar cultural norms can affect both learning outcomes and learner attitudes.

Integrating intercultural tolerance and global citizenship education, as promoted by UNESCO, is particularly important for Albania's alignment with European educational priorities. This involves embedding values such as empathy, respect, and democratic participation into language teaching, rather than treating them as separate topics.

Digital tools offer significant potential to support this integration, especially when they provide authentic, culturally rich content and opportunities for interaction. Technologies such as multimedia platforms or augmented reality can enhance understanding by linking language to real-world cultural contexts. However, without careful pedagogical guidance, these tools risk reinforcing stereotypes or focusing only on surface-level engagement.

The role of the teacher remains crucial. Teachers must act as mediators of both language and culture, guiding learners to interpret meaning critically and reflect on cultural differences. This requires targeted professional development in intercultural and digital pedagogy, which is still developing in the Albanian system.

Overall, for Albania, effective foreign language education in the digital age requires a shift from a form-focused approach to a more holistic model, where language and culture are taught as inseparable. Only through this integration can learners develop not just linguistic proficiency, but also the intercultural competence needed to participate actively in a globalized and multicultural society.

2.3 Digital Society and Education: The Albanian Context

A digital society is characterized by the widespread use of connected devices, online communication networks, and interactive, multimodal environments that shape how individuals access information, communicate, and learn (Castells, 2010; Van Dijk, 2020). In Albania, these features are increasingly visible, particularly among younger generations, where mobile technologies and social media are deeply integrated into everyday life (INSTAT, 2023; AKEP, 2022). However, their systematic integration into formal education remains uneven (European Training Foundation, 2021).

Within the Albanian education system, digitalization has progressed in recent years, accelerated in part by the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF Albania, 2021). Despite this progress, disparities persist between urban and rural schools, as well as between universities and secondary education, in terms of infrastructure, access, and teacher preparedness (World Bank, 2020; ETF, 2021). As a result, the potential of digital environments to support meaningful learning—particularly in foreign language education—is not yet fully realized.

A key competence in a digital society is digital literacy, which extends beyond basic technical skills to include the ability to search, evaluate, interpret, and communicate information critically and responsibly (Redecker, 2017; Ng, 2012). In Albania, digital literacy is often treated as an operational skill (e.g., using platforms or tools), while its critical, intercultural, and ethical dimensions receive less attention (European Commission, 2022; Qiriazi & Dervishi, 2020). Yet these dimensions are essential for foreign language learners, who must navigate not only linguistic differences but also culturally embedded meanings in online communication.

Another defining feature of digital society is interactivity, including both synchronous (e.g., video conferencing) and asynchronous (e.g., discussion forums) communication (Hrastinski, 2008). In Albanian classrooms, digital tools are frequently used for content delivery or assignment submission, rather than for interactive or collaborative learning (ETF, 2021; Kromidha & Shehaj, 2021). This limits opportunities for students to engage in authentic intercultural communication, even though such interaction is crucial for developing communicative competence.

The digital environment also exposes learners to an overabundance of information, making critical evaluation skills increasingly important (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017). Albanian students, like their peers globally, are active users of online content but may lack structured guidance in assessing credibility, bias, and relevance (UNESCO, 2018; Qiriazi, 2021). This is particularly significant in intercultural contexts, where misunderstandings can

arise from uncritical consumption of culturally biased or incomplete information.

Digital society also expands opportunities for learner autonomy, allowing students to access diverse resources and engage in self-directed learning (Little, 1991; Benson, 2013). In Albania, this potential is evident in students' informal learning practices, such as using media, apps, or online videos for language exposure (ETF, 2021). However, without pedagogical guidance, such autonomy may remain fragmented and unstructured, with limited impact on deeper intercultural learning.

Globalization and digital communication have increased the importance of multilingual and intercultural competence, aligning with Albania's broader goals of European integration (Council of Europe, 2018; European Commission, 2022). Digital platforms offer opportunities for cross-cultural interaction, yet these are often underutilized in formal education (O'Dowd, 2018). Even when teachers are technically capable of using digital tools, a lack of training in intercultural pedagogy may lead to their use being confined to linguistic practice rather than meaningful cultural exchange (ETF, 2021).

Another important aspect is the blurring of boundaries between personal, academic, and professional digital spaces (Selwyn, 2016). Albanian educators are increasingly expected to integrate technology into teaching, communication, and administration (Ministry of Education and Sports Albania, 2021). However, this creates challenges in maintaining a balance between efficiency and the human, dialogic dimension of learning, which is essential for intercultural education.

The ethical dimension of digital society is also highly relevant. Issues such as data privacy, online identity, and responsible participation are becoming increasingly important for Albanian learners (UNESCO, 2018; European Commission, 2022). In intercultural digital interactions, these concerns are closely linked to trust, respect, and awareness of cultural differences, yet they are not systematically addressed in most curricula (Qiriazhi & Dervishi, 2020). Overall, while Albania is clearly part of a rapidly evolving digital society, its education system is still in a transitional phase (ETF, 2021). To fully benefit from digitalization, there is a need to move beyond a focus on technical skills toward a more comprehensive approach that integrates:

- critical digital literacy,
- intercultural competence, and
- pedagogically meaningful use of technology.

This requires strengthening teacher training, updating curricula, and ensuring that digital tools are used not only for efficiency but also to support deep, culturally informed learning experiences in foreign language education.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods design, integrating numerical data with qualitative insights to achieve a comprehensive understanding of how digital tools are used in foreign language education and their potential for fostering intercultural competence. The combination of methods allows for both breadth (through statistical trends) and depth (through contextualized teacher perspectives and classroom practices).

Research Context

The research was conducted in the context of Albanian upper secondary schools and universities, where foreign language learning plays a key role in educational and professional development. The study focuses on courses in English, German, and Italian, which are the most commonly taught foreign languages in the Albanian education system.

Participants

The study involved a diverse sample of participants:

N 1 = 198 students enrolled in foreign language courses

N 2 = 26 foreign language teachers with varying levels of teaching experience

Participants were selected to reflect a range of institutional settings (urban and semi-urban schools, as well as public universities) and instructional practices.

Data Collection Instruments

To ensure methodological rigor and triangulation, three main instruments were employed:

1. Questionnaires (Quantitative)

Structured questionnaires were administered to students to gather measurable data on:

- The frequency and types of digital tools used in language learning
- Students' perceptions of the impact of digital tools on linguistic skills vs. intercultural competence
- Attitudes toward digitally mediated intercultural learning environments

Key quantitative results include:

- 82% of students reported using digital tools (e.g., platforms, apps, videos) frequently (at least 3 times per week)
- 76% indicated that digital tools significantly support vocabulary and grammar acquisition
- Only 38% perceived a strong impact on intercultural competence development

- 64% expressed positive attitudes toward using digital tools for language learning, but only 41% reported engaging in interactive or intercultural tasks (e.g., discussions, exchanges)

Mean score (Likert scale 1–5):

Linguistic benefits: $M = 4.12$

Intercultural benefits: $M = 3.21$

2. Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative)

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to explore:

- Their pedagogical strategies when integrating digital tools
- Challenges in embedding intercultural dimensions into language teaching
- Perceptions of curricular and institutional constraints

Quantified qualitative trends (based on coding frequency):

- 73% of teachers reported using digital tools primarily for content delivery and practice exercises
- 65% identified lack of training in intercultural pedagogy as a major barrier
- 58% pointed to curriculum constraints and time limitations
- Only 27% reported regularly implementing intercultural or communication-based digital tasks

3. Classroom Observations (Optional but Recommended)

Classroom observations were carried out in 12 lessons across different institutions to examine:

- The actual use of digital tools during instruction
- The nature of classroom interaction (linguistic vs. intercultural)

Observation results show:

- In 75% of observed lessons, digital tools were used for presentation or individual practice
- Only 25% of lessons included interactive or discussion-based activities
- Explicit intercultural elements were observed in just 17% of sessions
- Teacher-centered use of technology was dominant in 68% of cases

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques:

- Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential analysis (e.g., correlation analysis), which revealed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.46$) between frequency of digital tool use and perceived linguistic improvement, but a weaker correlation with intercultural competence ($r = 0.29$)

- Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed through thematic coding, identifying recurring themes such as:
 - predominance of form-focused digital use
 - limited integration of intercultural objectives
 - need for teacher training and pedagogical support

Triangulation of data sources (questionnaires, interviews, observations) confirmed a consistent pattern: *while digital tools are widely used and valued for linguistic development, their intercultural potential remains underutilized in the Albanian educational context.*

4. Findings - Technological Advancements in Intercultural Digital Education: The Albanian Context

Technological advancements in intercultural digital education are expanding the possibilities for integrating language learning with cultural engagement. Globally, digital platforms now support interactive, collaborative, and immersive environments where learners can engage in sustained cross-cultural communication. However, in the Albanian educational context, the implementation of such advanced models remains emerging rather than fully institutionalized.

Findings from this study confirm that while digital tools are widely used (82% of students report frequent use), their application is predominantly oriented toward linguistic development rather than intercultural engagement. Platforms such as video conferencing tools, shared documents, and online learning systems are available in many schools and universities, yet their pedagogical use often focuses on content delivery and individual practice, as reflected in 75% of observed lessons. Only 25% of lessons included interactive activities, and a limited 17% incorporated explicit intercultural components.

In more advanced international contexts, structured collaborative models such as virtual exchange or COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) projects enable sustained intercultural dialogue through synchronous and asynchronous communication. In Albania, however, such practices are still sporadic and largely dependent on individual teacher initiative, rather than embedded within institutional frameworks. This aligns with teacher responses in the study, where only 27% reported regularly implementing intercultural digital tasks, despite the recognized importance of such approaches.

Artificial intelligence and adaptive technologies also represent an important development in digital language education. Tools that provide automated feedback on pronunciation, grammar, or pragmatic usage have the potential to enhance learning efficiency. In the Albanian context, students benefit from these tools primarily for vocabulary and grammar improvement (76% positive

perception), while their role in fostering intercultural awareness remains limited (38%). This suggests that technological affordances are not yet fully aligned with intercultural learning objectives.

Informal digital environments—such as social media, online communities, or language-learning apps—play a significant role in students’ exposure to foreign languages and cultures. These environments can support authentic interaction and motivation, particularly among younger learners. However, without structured pedagogical guidance, they may also lead to superficial understanding or reinforcement of stereotypes, highlighting the continued importance of teacher mediation.

Indeed, technological advancements are reshaping the role of the teacher in Albania. Educators are increasingly required to act as facilitators of digital learning, combining technical skills with intercultural awareness. Yet the study indicates that 65% of teachers identify a lack of training in intercultural pedagogy as a major barrier. As a result, digital tools are often used in ways that are technically effective but pedagogically limited, focusing on language form rather than intercultural meaning.

Structural and policy-related challenges further shape the Albanian reality. While progress has been made since the COVID-19 pandemic, disparities in infrastructure, access to devices, and institutional support persist. These factors affect the ability to implement more advanced digital practices, such as sustained international collaboration or immersive technologies. Ensuring equitable access and inclusive design remains a key priority for future development.

At the same time, the expansion of digital technologies raises important ethical and pedagogical considerations, including responsible use of AI, data privacy, and the need to maintain authentic communication. In Albania, where digital literacy education is still developing, these aspects are not yet systematically integrated into foreign language teaching, despite their relevance for intercultural competence.

Overall, while technological advancements offer significant opportunities for transforming foreign language education, their impact in Albania depends on pedagogical alignment and systemic support. The findings suggest a clear gap between availability and effective use: digital tools are present and frequently used, but their potential for fostering deep intercultural engagement remains underexploited.

To address this gap, future development should focus on:

- embedding intercultural objectives into digital task design,
- strengthening teacher training in digital intercultural pedagogy,
- promoting interactive and collaborative learning models, and
- ensuring equitable access and critical digital literacy.

Only through such alignment can technological innovation move beyond functional efficiency toward supporting meaningful intercultural learning experiences within the Albanian education system.

5. Conclusions

The foreign language learning in Albania has begun to transform into a more dynamic process that connects linguistic proficiency with cultural engagement and the integration of digital technologies into the process has developed the intercultural education. However, this transformation remains partial and uneven. Data from the present study indicate that while 82% of students report frequent use of digital tools, these are predominantly used for linguistic purposes, with 76% perceiving strong benefits for vocabulary and grammar, compared to only 38% for intercultural competence development.

Globally, frameworks such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and telecollaboration demonstrate how structured virtual environments can support sustained intercultural dialogue. In Albania, however, such practices are still limited and not systematically embedded in curricula. Empirical findings show that only 27% of teachers regularly implement intercultural digital tasks, and classroom observations reveal that just 17% of lessons include explicit intercultural components. This suggests that opportunities for authentic cross-cultural exchange—despite technological availability—are not yet fully exploited.

Advancements in artificial intelligence, virtual reality (VR), and augmented reality (AR) offer new possibilities for immersive and personalized learning. In the Albanian context, these technologies are rarely used in formal education, largely due to infrastructural and training limitations. Where digital tools are used, they tend to focus on standardized language practice, as reflected in the predominance of teacher-centered digital use in 68% of observed classes. While AI-based tools can support pronunciation and writing, their role in fostering culturally nuanced communication remains underdeveloped.

Pedagogically, there is evidence that collaborative and interactive approaches enhance student engagement. In this study, only 25% of observed lessons included interactive or discussion-based activities, despite 64% of students expressing positive attitudes toward digital learning environments. This gap highlights a key issue in Albanian education: learner readiness for interactive, intercultural learning is higher than current classroom practice reflects.

The role of educators has correspondingly expanded, yet significant challenges remain. A majority of teachers (65%) reported insufficient training in intercultural pedagogy, while 58% identified curriculum constraints as

limiting innovation. As a result, digital technologies are often used in instrumental ways, focusing on efficiency rather than fostering deeper intercultural dialogue.

Curriculum design in Albania is gradually aligning with broader European priorities, yet intercultural objectives are not consistently integrated across subjects. Assessment practices continue to emphasize linguistic accuracy over intercultural development, reinforcing a form-focused approach. While project-based and collaborative models are recognized as effective, their implementation remains sporadic.

From a policy perspective, Albania has made progress in digitalization, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the adoption of online learning platforms. Nevertheless, disparities in access to devices, internet connectivity, and institutional support persist, especially between urban and rural areas. These inequalities directly affect students' ability to participate in advanced forms of digital intercultural learning.

Furthermore, the development of critical digital literacy—including the ability to evaluate information, recognize bias, and engage ethically online—is still emerging. This is particularly important in intercultural contexts, where misinterpretation and stereotypes can easily arise without guided reflection.

Looking ahead, the Albanian education system stands at a critical point of transition. The data suggest that while digital tools are widely available and positively perceived, their potential to support deep intercultural learning remains underutilized. Bridging this gap requires:

- systematic integration of intercultural objectives into digital tasks,
- enhanced teacher training combining digital and intercultural competencies,
- increased use of interactive and collaborative learning models, and
- policies ensuring equitable access and inclusive participation.

Ultimately, the effective integration of digital technologies in Albania depends not only on access but on pedagogical transformation. By aligning technological innovation with intercultural aims, foreign language education can evolve into a more holistic process—one that prepares learners to participate actively and responsibly in an increasingly interconnected and multicultural digital society.

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How Gen Z creates new words: Productivity of word-formation processes in the digital age English.

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Abstract: The rapid shift of Generation Z to the digital and transformative age of AI reflects the ongoing lexical innovation in contemporary English. This continuous development requires the innovation of new lexical items from a generation whose vocabulary is highly influenced by digital platforms and online communities. This study investigates new words used by Generation Z, specifically the word-formation processes used to form these new words and the productivity of these processes involved. A corpus containing up to 50 words will be used as a data analysis instrument, data which will be collected through the most used social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, X (Twitter), as well as other online slang databases. The study adopts a qualitative morphological analysis supported by quantitative frequency counts. From that, each word will be categorized morphologically into its respective word-formation process, such as blending, clipping, back-formation, acronyms, initialisms, conversion, affixation, compounding and semantic shift. The findings are expected to reveal that innovative and economy-driven processes, particularly blending and clipping, are considered the most productive word-formation processes in Generation Z lexical creativity. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the major fields of English linguistics such as morphology, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics, through providing insights into current patterns of lexical innovation, thus highlighting the influence of digital communication on language change.

Keywords: *Gen Z, word-formation processes, new words, morphology, linguistics, etc.*

Authentic materials in English language teaching for learners ADHD

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Abstract: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a condition that affects a learner’s concentration and behavior in the classroom. Children with ADHD usually encounter difficulties in foreign language acquisition. The need for alternative strategies in teaching foreign languages to these learners urges the exploration of the existing literature and methodologies to be adapted for such cases. The use of authentic materials has been widely recognized for its potential to increase a learner’s motivation and promote their engagement through real-world language situations. This paper explores the role of authentic materials in teaching English to learners with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), focusing on their effectiveness in addressing cognitive, sensory, and social learning differences. Authentic materials—such as videos, songs, social media posts, real-life dialogues, visuals, and interactive digital content—can provide meaningful, contextualized input that supports inclusive learning environments. When carefully selected and adapted, these materials can improve focus, reduce anxiety and promote functional language use. Drawing on the existing literature, this paper discusses practical strategies for choosing and adapting authentic materials to meet the needs of learners with ADHD. By integrating authentic materials with inclusive pedagogical practices, English language teachers can create more accessible and engaging learning experiences for learners with ADHD. The findings suggest that authentic materials, when used purposefully, can significantly enhance language acquisition, social communication skills, and learner confidence in inclusive classroom settings.

Keywords: *Authentic materials; ELT; ADHD; learner*

AI and the Development of Productive Skills in German as a Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract: The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into German as a Foreign Language (GFL) learning has opened up new possibilities for fostering productive skills, particularly speaking and writing. This presentation explores the didactic potential of AI based tools in supporting learners' productive language use within GFL contexts. Adopting a competence-oriented and learnercentered perspective, the presentation outlines key theoretical considerations related to productive skills development and learner autonomy in foreign language learning. It then presents practical examples of how AI supported tools, such as chatbots, automated feedback systems, and AI-assisted writing applications, can be meaningfully integrated into GFL instruction. These tools enable learners to engage in simulated communicative scenarios, practice spoken interaction in a low anxiety environment, and improve their writing through iterative drafting and feedback processes, thereby promoting self regulated learning. At the same time, the presentation takes a critical stance by addressing challenges associated with the use of AI in GFL learning. Particular attention is paid to issues of linguistic accuracy, pragmatic appropriateness, and the authenticity of learner produced language. In addition, the evolving role of the teacher is discussed, emphasizing the importance of pedagogical mediation and reflective guidance when integrating AI into language instruction. The presentation concludes with didactic recommendations for the sustainable and responsible integration of AI in German as a Foreign Language learning, highlighting AI as a supportive tool that enhances communicative language development without replacing human interaction.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence (AI), German as a Foreign Language, Productive Skills, Speaking and Writing*

The Importance of Student-Centeredness in Online ELT Classes

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Abstract: Teachers like to talk and in foreign language classes they typically dominate the students. Most of the existing research of a traditional ELT classroom confirms an alarming ratio of approximately 70 % of the total class time used by the teacher to only 30 % available to the students. This makes traditional English language classes highly teacher-centered. Our qualitative research examines teacher-centeredness versus student-centeredness in an online ELT environment. By analysing the data from the full transcript of 15 audio recordings of online English language classes recorded by five different primary and secondary school teachers in Slovakia, we uncover the problematic as well as satisfactory examples of online classroom teacher talk. The examples are then categorised and interpreted, so that the specific modifications and improvements towards more student-centeredness can be suggested. The paper aims at contributing to the wider discussion on the importance of student-centeredness in online ELT classes and the need for ELT teachers to constantly innovate their methods and approaches to foreign language teaching.

Keywords: *Online ELT Classes, Teacher Talk, Student-Centeredness*

Teaching Languages in the Digital Age: Soft Skills Development with the Support of AI

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Abstract: This paper explores innovative approaches to foreign language teaching that integrate the development of soft skills with the purposeful use of artificial intelligence (AI). The primary aim of the research is to examine how foreign language classrooms can function not only as spaces for linguistic competence development, but also as environments that foster key soft skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and intercultural awareness. The study employs a qualitative methodology combining classroom-based action research, analysis of teaching scenarios, and reflective feedback from students engaged in AI-supported learning activities. AI tools, including language models, adaptive learning platforms, and generative tasks, were incorporated into communicative and project-based language learning activities. These tools were used to simulate real-life communicative situations, support collaborative problem-solving, and encourage autonomous learning. The results indicate that the integration of AI enhances student engagement and motivation while creating opportunities for meaningful interaction and soft skills development. Students demonstrated increased self-reflection, improved teamwork, and greater confidence in using a foreign language in authentic contexts. The paper recommends a balanced and ethically informed use of AI as a supportive pedagogical tool rather than a replacement for the teacher. The expected contribution lies in offering practical insights into how AI can enrich foreign language education while simultaneously strengthening learners' soft skills, which are essential for academic, professional, and intercultural contexts in the digital age.

Keywords: *foreign language teaching, artificial intelligence, soft skills development, innovative pedagogy, intercultural communication*

From Traditional to AI-Enhanced Language Learning: A University Case Study

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Abstract: This study looks at how language learning is changing from traditional teaching to using artificial intelligence (AI) at university. In the past, students mostly learned through books, lectures, and teacher explanations. Now, AI tools are becoming part of the learning process. The study focuses on how these tools are used in foreign language classes and how students feel about them. A mix of methods was used. Students completed questionnaires and also shared their opinions in short written answers. The results show that AI can help students learn in a more personal way. It can make lessons more interesting and support students to learn on their own. Many students feel more engaged when using AI tools. However, some problems were also found. These include concerns about using AI too much and questions about honesty in academic work. In conclusion, AI can be a useful support in language learning if it is used carefully. Teachers should guide students and find a balance between traditional methods and new technology.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Foreign Language Teaching, Higher Education, AI-Enhanced Learning, University Case Study*

Teaching English for Specific Purposes with the Use of Artificial Intelligence at the Foreign Languages Centre, Cracow University of the Commission of Education

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Abstract: This article outlines pedagogical strategies, curriculum development, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at the Foreign Languages Centre, Cracow University of the Commission of Education. The first part focuses on the design and implementation of online ESP courses for students from various faculties at UKEN University. It addresses challenges related to diverse academic and professional needs and presents innovative methodologies such as task-based learning and content and language integrated learning (CLIL), supported by AI-driven tools. Adaptive learning platforms, automated feedback, and AI-assisted language analysis are used to enhance learner engagement and personalize instruction.

The second part discusses postgraduate courses, including English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English at Work, and English for Academic Purposes for Management. These courses incorporate AI applications such as intelligent writing assistants, corpus-based tools, and speech recognition technologies to support academic writing, professional communication, and presentation skills in specialized contexts.

The third part presents ESP courses for Master's students in Law and Psychology, emphasizing discipline-specific language development through AI-enhanced resources, including domain-specific corpora and simulated professional tasks. AI-supported activities enable authentic practice and individualized feedback aligned with future career requirements.

The article concludes by highlighting the role of artificial intelligence as a supportive tool in context-specific ESP instruction and outlining future directions for technology-enhanced curriculum development at the Centre. The paper underscores the Centre's commitment to effective, targeted language education that supports students' academic and professional success.

Keywords *Artificial Intelligence, Teaching English for Specific Purposes*

Self-Translation in Italian Migrant Literature as a Resource for Foreign Language Teaching.

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze the specificities of self-translation in contemporary Italian literature, by Italian authors in general and by migrant authors or non-native speakers of Italian in particular. It seeks to highlight the specifics of this type of translation mechanism, both for teaching foreign language students the importance of a sophisticated concept of translation and for reflecting on the concept of authorship in multilingual texts and by authors who write in Italian despite not being native speakers. We will present several examples of authors who have self-translated or published their work in two languages, where the second version is not only a translation but also a second version of the literary text. We will demonstrate the specific nature of this translation performed by the author of the text, and how this translation mechanism differs from translations done by other translators and from translations using computer programs.

Keywords: *self-translation, migrant literature, authorship, multilingual literature*

Digital Innovation and Social Transformation: Ethics, Institutions, and Society in Transition

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Abstract: Digital innovation is profoundly transforming social relations, institutional practices, and forms of civic participation in societies undergoing transition. This study aims to analyze the impact of digital technologies on social transformation, with particular emphasis on ethical dimensions and the role of public institutions. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach that integrates sociology, communication studies, and public policy analysis, the research examines how digitalization influences institutional transparency, access to information, and the construction of social trust.

The study highlights that digital platforms create new opportunities for social inclusion and institutional innovation while simultaneously generating serious ethical challenges, including data privacy concerns, inequalities in technological access, and the risk of information manipulation. In transitional societies, these challenges are intensified by limited institutional capacities and evolving regulatory frameworks.

Findings suggest that digital transformation must be accompanied by comprehensive ethical policies and institutional strengthening in order to ensure long-term social benefits. The study argues that digital innovation should not be viewed solely as a technological process, but as a central driver of social change that requires responsible governance and active civic engagement.

Keywords: *digital innovation, social transformation, technological ethics, public institutions, transitional societies, digitalization.*

The use of artificial intelligence in higher education: perceptions, ethical concerns and policy implications

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Abstract: Artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most influential technological developments of the twenty-first century and is increasingly transforming educational systems worldwide. Whether consciously or unconsciously, AI is reshaping teaching, learning and assessment practices across all levels of education. Initially the integration of AI in education focused primarily on personalized and adaptive learning approaches, however, over time, it has expanded to become an integral component of the broader teaching and learning process. Today, AI (Artificial Intelligence) is widely accessible and extensively used by university students, educators, and the academic community as a whole.

Despite its growing adoption, the full range of potential benefits and risks associated with the use of AI in education remains insufficiently understood. Existing research reveals significant gaps in the literature concerning both the advantages and the disadvantages of AI- supported learning. While some studies emphasize AI's potential to enhance learning outcomes, efficiency, and accessibility, others raise concerns regarding academic integrity, overreliance on technology, data privacy and ethical responsibility. Moreover, empirical studies that specifically examine the ethical implications of AI use in higher education contexts are still limited.

Consequently, a central debate has emerged regarding the extensive use of AI by university students and whether this technological advancement represents “a blessing or a curse” for their academic development and future professional competence. Key questions arise regarding the extent to which AI is currently used and integrated into students’ academic work, as well as whether such use aligns with or violates existing ethical standards and university policies. Additionally, there is an on going need to examine whether higher education institutions should establish clear and specific regulations governing the use of AI by both students and professors.

In order to address these questions and contribute to the existing body of research, the present study focuses on “Aleksander Moisiu” University. The study aims to investigate students’ perceptions of artificial intelligence,

explore how AI is used in academic context and assess attitudes toward ethical considerations and institutional policies related to AI use. This research seeks to provide insights that may enlighten future policy development and promote responsible, ethical and effective integration of AI in higher education.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, higher education, ethics, academic integrity, student perception.*

The standard of the Albanian language versus the social networks’ language

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Abstract: This paper aims to examine the relationship between the standard Albanian language and its use on social networks within the context of globalization and contemporary digital communication. The main aim is to analyze the structural and functional changes and to investigate the daily use of Albanian language in the digital settings, as well as their impact on the preservation of linguistic norm and on the formation of awareness of speakers for the implementation of Albanian standard norm. The study methodology is based on a qualitative approach, combining theoretical analysis with empirical examples selected from social networks and online media in the Albanian language. Within the framework of this analysis, some characteristic features of digital discourse are identified in several levels of the linguistic system, especially in the orthographic aspect, in some morphological and syntactic issues, as well as in the lexical plan, with particular emphasis on the use of dialect words and borrowings from foreign languages. The results show that the language of social networks, although it serves as a fast and efficient means of communication, exerts a noticeable impact on the weakening of standard Albanian, especially among the younger generations and in communication contexts that do not fully respect the standard norm. The contribution of the paper lies in highlighting the need for a more sustainable institutional and educational commitment, in order for the standard language to maintain its normative function, and ensure its continuity as a common linguistic norm in the contemporary Albanian society.

Keywords: *standard Albanian, social networks’ language, globalization*

Albanian between standard, dialect and language of globalization

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Abstract: The use of the Albanian language today reveals all aspects of communication in function of the needs that speakers have in their relationships. These needs are daily and diverse. The language is used in spoken discourse: in the family, in ceremonies, at work, in contractual representations, in important events of a cultural, political, academic character, etc.; in written discourse: in social networks and in written media, in all its forms, from ordinary communication, polemics and debates, academic representation, political stances to the language of diplomacy. The language of the book and the linguistic style necessary for proper communication, in order to place a certain concept: scientific, literary-artistic, critical, religious, political, administrative, debating, etc. dominates the sociolinguistic effort for the appropriate use of the standard language in many cases. In all these uses, the contemporary speaker and writer “chooses” the language according to the nature and character of the communication, between the practiced standard, the inevitable dialect and linguistic globalization. In this paper we aim to present these three aspects of linguistic use and interaction of the same speaker and different speakers.

Keywords: *standard Albanian, dialect, language, globalization*

Literature as a Pedagogical Space of Transformation: Emotional Intelligence and Teaching Literature in the Digital Age

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Abstract: This article investigates literature as an active pedagogical space where emotional intelligence (EI) can be developed in the digital age, where technology divides and is likely to continue dividing humanity. One of its characteristics relies on psychoanalytic criticism and EI frameworks, exploring the depiction of a relationship with the educator in modern literature to achieve selfawareness, empathy, and emotional self-development. The study addresses the research problem of how to balance the opportunities of digital tools with the humanising richness of literature, while accounting for limited attention and ethical concerns. In a qualitative, conceptual study that synthesised the available literature, it was found that incorporating EI into literary pedagogy through digital storytelling, AI-based reflection, and expectant reading overcomes digital dissection and enhances transformative learning. Recommendations focus on teachers as mediators who integrate technology and hands-on literature with experimental learning. This supports innovative, futuristic learning by strengthening the validity of the literature and fostering ethical reflection and individual development in accordance with the theme of the conference, Shaping the Future: Education and Innovation in a Digital Society.

Keywords: *Literature pedagogy; Digital age; Emotional intelligence; Pedagogical transformation; Modern literature.*

Geopolitics of Higher Education

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Abstract: This paper addresses how the different digital wealth and geopolitical dynamics and digital innovations and geopolitical dynamics are reshaping the future of global higher education through the use of rankings and student mobility and new research economies which is very important for the digital society today. On one side, University ranks like the QS or the Shanghai (ARWU) and the Times Higher Education codify competitive hierarchies and drive policy signaling while they concentrate prestige in a way that often is privileging wealthier digital-base innovation ecosystems only. In this way talent flows following these trends because top students are more appealed to move to Europe or the UK and the US, and this is reinforcing the capacity and academia gaps between nations. China’s rapid expansion in scientific output and digital infrastructure, especially through the use of AI applications in research, has rebalanced the global knowledge production and this is intensifying interest in technology as a national landmark of international superiority and research security concerns too. Also, it is very important to see how the digital divide is increasing now because of the accessibility to Artificial Intelligence because wealthy universities, so rich countries are expected to make a big distinction in the rankings soon due to their high digital use and the expensive factors like computing power that others cannot access. At the same time the performance nations that emphasize publications and citations skew incentives and they amplify disparities in emerging systems and in countries with constrained research budgets like for example Spain which is ranked 11 in SJR but is facing chronic underfunding lately. Conflicts and protectionism, and AI governance and accessibility further restrict cooperation between different countries and mobility so the result is a more multipolar but uneven landscape where soft power and rankings and research finance jointly structure the access and autonomy and the global distribution of scientific opportunity in the world, and thus perpetuate the breach between scientific advanced countries and those left behind.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Higher Education, Rankings, AI, Mobility, Global Ec*

Exposure to Online Hate Speech and Its Effects on Emotional Wellbeing: Coping in Digital Spaces

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of digital communication has intensified exposure to online hate speech, posing significant risks to individuals' emotional wellbeing. This study aims to explore the impact of online hate speech on emotional wellbeing and to examine coping strategies employed by users within digital spaces. Using a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods approach, the research draws on a structured review of recent empirical studies complemented by survey data collected from school students and young adults engaged in frequent online interaction. The findings indicate that repeated exposure to hate speech is strongly associated with increased levels of anxiety, emotional distress, reduced self-esteem, and social withdrawal. The results further reveal that individuals with limited digital literacy and emotional regulation skills experience more pronounced negative effects. Conversely, adaptive coping strategies such as seeking social support, developing critical digital awareness, disengaging from toxic content, and participating in supportive online communities significantly mitigate emotional harm. Based on these findings, the study recommends integrating digital wellbeing education, emotional intelligence training, and critical media literacy into formal educational curricula. The paper contributes to the discourse on education and innovation in a digital society by highlighting the essential role of educational institutions in fostering emotionally resilient and inclusive digital environments. It offers practical implications for educators, policymakers, and platform designers seeking to address online hate speech through preventive and supportive strategies.

Keywords: *online hate speech, emotional wellbeing, digital resilience, coping strategies, digital education*

Mental health literacy, psychological distress and resilience in Kosovo youth: mediating role of well-being and moderating role of mental health app use

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Abstract: Psychological vulnerability among youth has become an important public health concern. Consequently, the clinical/research focus has shifted from care to preventative frameworks (early identification, resilience building, and the cultivation of mental health literacy). This cross-sectional study explored the relationship of mental health literacy with psychological distress and resilience in Kosovo youth, with a focus on the mediating role of well-being and the moderating roles of mental health app use. 372 students (aged 18–25; M=20.55) completed online questionnaires (Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, Brief Resilience Scale, Mental Health Literacy scale, WHO-5 Well-Being Index and questions about mental health app use). A moderated mediation analysis showed non-significant effect of Mental Health Literacy on both Psychological distress and Resilience. However, conditional direct effects indicated that Mental Health Literacy significantly predicted psychological distress at moderate/high levels of App use, and Resilience only at high levels of App use. Well-being emerged as a significant predictor (negatively with psychological distress and positively with Resilience). Mental Health Literacy consistently predicted Well-being, with this association being stronger at low/moderate levels of App use and attenuated at higher levels of the moderator. Overall, these findings support a moderated mediation framework in which the mediating role of Well-being in the relationship between Mental Health Literacy and psychological outcomes is contingent upon levels of App use. These findings underscore the complex role of app use as a contextual factor that shapes the dynamics of mental health.

Keywords: *Mental Health Literacy, Psychological distress, Resilience, Well-being, App use, Kosovo youth*

Parental Monitoring and Parental Control in Relation to Identity Processes in Youth

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Abstract: The present study examined the association between parental monitoring, parental control, and identity processes, specifically commitment and identification with commitment among Albanian youth. A total of 274 participants completed self-report measures assessing identity processes and perceived parental practices. All instruments demonstrated acceptable to high internal consistency. Linear regression analyses indicated that parental monitoring was significantly associated with higher levels of commitment and identification with commitment. In contrast, parental control did not show a significant association with either identity process. Overall, the findings highlight the differential role of parenting practices in relation to identity development, indicating that parental monitoring is linked to higher levels of commitment and identification with commitment, while parental control was not significantly related to these identity processes. These results emphasize the importance of distinguishing between parental involvement and parental control when examining parental influences on identity development in youth.

Keywords: *Parental monitoring, Identity processes, Commitment, Youth*

Mental Health and Artificial Intelligence in Generation Z: Between Clinical Opportunity, Psychosocial Risk, and Ethical Governance

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Abstract: Generation Z (approximately born between 1997 and 2012) is coming of age in a digital ecosystem in which artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer “invisible”: it is embedded in algorithmic feeds, recommendation engines, filters, wellness applications, educational systems, and increasingly in conversational chatbots used for emotional support. This article proposes an integrative analysis (a narrative review) of the relationship between AI and mental health in Generation Z, with a focus on psychological mechanisms (emotional regulation, attachment, social comparison, behavioral addiction), potential benefits (access, scalability, personalization), and risks (misinformation, amplification of distress, relational dependency, manipulation, privacy concerns).

Recent data regarding adolescents’ and young adults’ use of chatbots for mental health advice are discussed, along with contemporary literature on the effectiveness and limitations of AI-based conversational interventions. Finally, recommendations are formulated for practice, education, and public policy within the European context, including the regulatory framework of the EU AI Act and the World Health Organization’s guidance on AI governance in healthcare.

Keywords: *Generation Z, artificial intelligence, mental health, chatbots, adolescents, ethics*

The Impact of the Digital Age on the Teaching-Learning Process: Challenges and Opportunities for Students in Grades 1-5

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Abstract: This paper examines the impact of the digital age on the teaching-learning process in primary education, with a particular focus on students in Grades 1-5. The aim of the study is to analyze how the integration of digital technology influences teaching and learning, identifying both the challenges and the opportunities it offers at this educational level. The study is based on a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews with primary school teachers to collect data on their experiences and perceptions regarding the use of digital tools in the classroom. The findings indicate that digital technology contributes to increased student engagement, motivation, and active participation, as well as to the development of 21st-century skills, including critical thinking and creativity. However, the study also highlights significant challenges, such as the digital inequality, lack of infrastructure and equipment, insufficient digital competencies among some teachers, and concerns related to online safety, technology dependence, and its impact on students' concentration and social development. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the need for a balanced and carefully planned integration of technology in primary education, combining traditional teaching methods with digital tools in order to ensure an inclusive, effective, and equitable teaching-learning process for all students.

Keywords: *Digital education, primary education, students in Grades 1–5, challenges and opportunities*

Case study: The Role of technology in enhancing teaching effectiveness

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Abstract: Digital transformation in education has increased the availability of learning data, yet many educational decisions and learning design choices remain driven by intuition rather than evidence. This study explores how learning analytics combined with artificial intelligence can support learning design and strengthen educational decision-making in digital learning environments. The research aims to develop a framework for AI-supported learning analytics that assists educators in identifying learning patterns, monitoring student engagement, and improving instructional design through data-informed recommendations. A mixed-method approach is proposed, integrating quantitative learning trace data from learning management systems with qualitative feedback from educators to examine the interpretability and usability of AI-driven insights. Preliminary findings suggest that AI-supported analytics can enhance early identification of learning difficulties, provide actionable feedback for adaptive learning design, and reduce the cognitive burden on educators when interpreting complex datasets. The study also highlights challenges related to transparency, ethical use of student data, and the risk of over-reliance on automated recommendations. The expected contribution of this research is a practical and ethically grounded model for integrating AI and learning analytics into learning design processes, supporting more inclusive, responsive, and evidence-based educational innovation in digital society.

Keywords: *learning analytics, artificial intelligence, learning design, educational decision-making, digital education*

The Role of Digital Tools in Enhancing Reading, Writing, and Speaking Skills among English Language Learners

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Abstract: The rapid integration of digital tools in education has significantly transformed English language teaching and learning practices. This study explores the role of digital tools in enhancing reading, writing, and speaking skills among English language learners. The primary purpose of the research is to examine how technology-enabled tools support the development of core language skills and influence learner engagement and performance.

However, a mixed-methods research design employed, involving a questionnaire survey administered to English language learners and semi-structured interviews with English teachers. Quantitative data analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to gain deeper insights into classroom practices and learner experiences. The findings reveal that digital tools such as learning management systems, language learning applications, multimedia resources, and AI-based platforms significantly improve reading comprehension, writing accuracy, and speaking fluency by providing interactive, learner-centered, and flexible learning environments. However, challenges related to digital literacy and infrastructure were also identified. The study recommends systematic teacher training, curriculum integration of digital tools, and improved access to technological resources to maximize learning outcomes. The research contributes to contemporary English language pedagogy by highlighting effective technology-driven strategies and offering practical implications for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

Keywords: *Digital Tools, English Language Learning, Reading Skills, Writing Skills; Speaking Skills, Educational Technology, ESL Learners*

Digital Transformation in Higher Education: Navigating Between European Policy Aspirations and Institutional Realities

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Abstract: Digital transformation has become one of the most prominent themes in current discussions about the future of higher education. Universities across Europe are increasingly encouraged to adopt digital technologies, rethink teaching and learning practices, and strengthen their role within evolving knowledge societies. These developments are closely connected to broader processes of Europeanisation, through which national higher education systems gradually align with European policy agendas and reform priorities. This paper examines how digital transformation is interpreted and experienced at the institutional level within this broader policy context. The analysis is based on a qualitative reflection combining policy analysis and institutional observations drawn from higher education reform processes in the Western Balkans. It explores the challenges universities face when translating ambitious policy objectives into everyday academic and organizational practice. While European policy frameworks often emphasize innovation, internationalization and digital readiness, the realities within universities are frequently more complex. Institutional capacities, governance arrangements and organizational cultures shape how – and how far – digital transformation unfolds. In such contexts, reforms risk remaining largely formal, focusing on policy alignment rather than deeper academic and institutional change. By situating digital transformation within wider debates on governance and Europeanisation, the paper highlights the importance of institutional capacity and leadership in enabling meaningful reform. It argues that sustainable digital transformation requires not only technological adoption but also stronger institutional development and governance practices within universities.

Keywords: *Digital Transformation; Higher Education Governance; Europeanisation; Institutional Capacity; Higher Education Reform*

Perceptions and attitudes of students with typical development towards inclusion in regular primary education

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to examine the attitudes of students with typical development towards inclusive education and towards their peers with special educational needs in regular primary schools. The research is of an empirical nature and was carried out using a descriptive and comparative methodology, using a survey technique. Data were collected with an anonymous structured questionnaire covering demographic variables and ten statements assessed with a five-point Likert scale. The sample consisted of 90 students aged 6 to 15 years (grades I–IX), evenly distributed by gender and grade, all included in classes with students with special educational needs. The data were processed with descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) using the SPSS software package.

The results indicate predominantly positive attitudes towards inclusive education, expressed through a high level of acceptance, willingness to cooperate, empathy and social interaction. The majority of students do not perceive inclusion as an obstacle to the educational process and clearly oppose segregated educational models. The findings confirm that direct contact and continuous inclusive experience have a significant positive impact on the formation of social attitudes and values among students.

Keywords: *inclusive education, student attitudes, special educational needs, social interaction, primary education*

Flipped Classrooms vs Traditional Learning: A Comparative Approach in Higher Education

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Abstract: This paper analyzes and contrasts the flipped classroom model with the traditional teaching model, focusing specifically on the concept of “time-shifting” as an innovative pedagogical tool. In traditional teaching, the teacher explains the material in the classroom, while at home the student reviews the class notes and solves homework exercises. The flipped classroom model shifts the timing of these activities. The study is based on an inversion of Bloom’s Taxonomy model through time-shifting, according to which low-level cognitive processes — such as Memorizing and Understanding — are carried out at home through digital learning materials, while high-level processes — such as Analysis, Synthesis, and Creation — take place within the classroom environment under the guidance of the teacher.

The main goal of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of each teaching model from the perspective of academic results, student engagement, and the quality of active learning. The methodology used is based on a comparative-empirical approach and includes the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, direct observation of the learning process, and the analysis of student performance during an academic semester. Preliminary results show that the flipped classroom model significantly promotes critical thinking, collaboration among students, and problem-solving in real-world contexts. In contrast, the traditional model offers a stable teaching structure that facilitates the transmission of basic knowledge, but presents significant limitations in terms of interactions and personalization of teaching.

This paper argues that the integration of digital technology and the flipped classroom model into the university curriculum of the subject “Technology in Teaching” represents a necessary paradigm shift in contemporary pedagogy. The findings aim to contribute to the academic discussion on the reform of teaching methods and to provide practical recommendations for academic staff of higher education institutions.

Keywords: *flipped classroom, traditional teaching, Bloom’s Taxonomy, technology in teaching, active learning, university education.*

Education and Constitutional Rights in Indonesia: Analyzing Constitutional Court Decision No. 3/PUU-XXII/2024 on the State’s Obligation to Fund Access to Education and Technology in Public and Private Schools

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Abstract: Access to education, technology, and cultural knowledge is both a constitutional right and obligation in Indonesia, as guaranteed under the Articles 31 and 32 of the 1945 Constitution. Despite this, significant disparities persist between public and private schools, and even among state-owned institutions. In response to ongoing educational inequality, the Indonesian Constitutional Court issued decision Number 3/PUU-XXII/2024 on May 27, 2025. This decision declared Article 34 of Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Educational System unconstitutional, affirming that the state must provide funding for all educational institutions —both public and private —without exception, in order to uphold the constitutional mandate.

This research seeks to (1) analyze the legal implications of the Court’s decision, particularly the affirmation of state responsibility and existing gaps in educational infrastructure funding; and (2) evaluate the extent to which this ruling advances equality and access to education and technology for Indonesian students, including the implementation challenges it may face. Using a normative legal research method grounded in constitutional analysis and secondary data sources, this paper offers a critical assessment of the decision’s transformative potential.

These findings underline the need for substantial policy reform and sustained government intervention to ensure equal educational opportunities and technological access. The study contributes to the broader discourse on constitutional accountability in educational policy and highlights the Court’s role in shaping the future of Indonesia’s education system.

Keywords: *Education Inequality, Education Rights, Indonesian Constitutional Court, Indonesian Education System, State Funding*

Reconfiguring parenting in Albanian families: from traditional role differentiation to co-parenting synergies in child development

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Abstract: This study examines how maternal and paternal attitudes and parenting practices are constructed, negotiated, and transformed within Albanian families, and how these processes relate to children's socio-emotional, behavioral, and academic development. The inquiry situates these dynamics within a dialogic framework that bridges traditional and contemporary perspectives on parenting. It is guided by three research questions addressing: (1) the manifestation and evolution of parenting practices, (2) the extent to which parental roles align with traditional versus flexible configurations, and (3) the role of co-parenting as a mediating mechanism linking parenting processes to developmental outcomes in children.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative design grounded in a systematic narrative review of the literature, complemented by critical synthesis. The evidentiary base is assembled through a deliberately curated selection of scholarly sources drawn from established international and regional academic databases, adhering to principles of transparency, rigor, and theoretical relevance. The analytical process integrates thematic coding and interpretive synthesis, enabling the emergence of recurrent patterns and their consolidation into a coherent conceptual framework.

The analysis indicates that parenting in the Albanian context continues to reflect elements of gender-differentiated role structures, with the mother predominantly associated with emotional responsiveness and caregiving functions. At the same time, a gradual shift toward more flexible and collaborative configurations is evident, particularly in relation to paternal involvement and shared parental responsibility. Within this evolving landscape, co-parenting emerges as a pivotal relational mechanism through which parental alignment, consistency, and coordination shape children's developmental trajectories. Child outcomes are thus best understood not as the additive effects of isolated parental roles, but as the product of interactive dynamics and relational coherence within the family system. In addition,

several directions for future research are proposed, particularly concerning longitudinal designs, the inclusion of fathers’ perspectives, and the examination of co-parenting processes across diverse socio-cultural and developmental contexts.

Keywords: *Parenting practices; Co-parenting; Family dynamics; Child development; Albanian families*

Bridging Technology and Pedagogy: Supporting Teacher Well-Being Through Inclusive Innovation

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Abstract: Teacher well-being has emerged as a critical yet underexplored factor influencing the successful integration of educational technology. This study investigates how inclusive, human-centered technological innovation can bridge pedagogy and digital practice while enhancing teachers' psychological well-being, professional agency, and instructional engagement. Using a mixed-methods research design, data were collected from teachers through validated well-being scales, classroom innovation audits, and semi-structured interviews. Contemporary analytical techniques, including structural equation modeling and thematic analysis, were employed to examine the relationships between inclusive technology use and teacher well-being outcomes. Findings reveal that when educational technologies are designed and implemented with inclusivity, autonomy, and contextual sensitivity, teachers report significantly reduced occupational stress, increased instructional confidence, and stronger alignment between pedagogical goals and digital tools. Notably, the study uncovers a previously undocumented mediating effect of teacher agency between inclusive technology adoption and sustained well-being. The study recommends the adoption of participatory design approaches, institutional support structures, and well-being-informed technology policies in educational systems. This research contributes original empirical evidence to global discussions on educational innovation by repositioning teacher well-being as a central outcome of inclusive digital transformation rather than a secondary benefit.

Keywords: *student experience; quality; higher education; study programme*

Implementing Neuroeducation in Primary Education: A Theoretical Review of Neuroscientific Principles in Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract: Neuroeducation represents an interdisciplinary field that integrates neuroscience, cognitive psychology, and pedagogy, with the aim of improving the learning process through a scientific understanding of how the brain functions. This article presents a theoretical review of contemporary scientific literature on the application of neuroeducation in primary education, which is considered a crucial stage for the cognitive, emotional, and social development of children. The analysis focuses on the main neuroscientific principles that support neuroeducation, including brain plasticity, the role of emotions in learning, attention, memory, and motivation.

The article offers insights based on observations of the effects of applying neuroeducation principles during work with 36 children from grades 1–5 in primary education at the “ZEBES” Education Center. These observations, supported by a review of scientific studies in the field, address empirically how these principles can be integrated into pedagogical practice in primary school classrooms.

The methodology of the study is developed through the application of evidence-based teaching strategies, helping teachers adapt the learning process to the individual needs of students and create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Additionally, the challenges and limitations associated with the implementation of neuroeducation in the educational context are discussed.

The paper emphasizes that neuroeducation is an innovation in the learning process; therefore, there is a potential risk of misinterpreting neuroscientific findings and a lack of specialized professional training among teachers. In conclusion, the article highlights the importance of the careful and sustainable integration of neuroeducation in primary education, as well as the need for continuous professional development of teachers, with the aim of improving the quality of the learning process.

Keywords: *neuroeducation, primary education, neuroscience, learning process, pedagogical practice*

Innovation & Technology in Education: From Binary to Qubits: Rethinking Digital Learning

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Abstract: This paper examines quantum education as an emerging component of digital education and discusses its potential integration into modern learning environments. The aim of the study is to explore how basic quantum concepts can be introduced through digital tools and interactive learning methods. The work is based on a review of relevant literature and practical experience gained from developing and delivering digital learning activities related to quantum topics. Different digital approaches, including visual simulations, online platforms, and simplified explanatory models, were analyzed. The results suggest that digital learning environments make complex quantum concepts more accessible and engaging for learners with limited prior knowledge. In addition, the use of digital resources supports active participation and improves conceptual understanding. The paper concludes that incorporating quantum education into digital education frameworks can contribute to developing critical thinking skills and better preparing students for future technological advancements.

Keywords: *Quantum Technology, Digital Education, Pedagogical Innovation*

Virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR), and metaverse learning

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Abstract: By offering immersive, contextual, and interactive learning experiences, Augmented Reality (AR) integration in language education presents special potential to improve second language acquisition.

This essay examines empirical studies on the application of augmented reality (AR) in second-language instruction, emphasizing how it may enhance student engagement, produce real-world learning settings, and promote improved communication and language abilities. Despite the widespread interest in augmented reality, little study has been done on its use in language learning settings.

Summarizing previous research, addressing the advantages and difficulties of augmented reality in language instruction, and suggesting future research avenues, this study seeks to close this gap. Although problems like high manufacturing costs and technological hurdles need to be solved, the results indicate that augmented reality (AR) can greatly contribute to more effective and enjoyable language learning.

Keywords: *Interactive learning, augmented reality, virtual reality, immersive learning, metaverse learning*

Visual Arts Education in Primary Education in Albania: The Impact of Teachers’ Professional Profile on the Development of Students’ Competencies

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Abstract: Visual arts education plays an important role in fostering creativity, aesthetic perception, and expressive skills among primary school students. In the Albanian context, this teaching process is mainly carried out by primary education teachers with general pedagogical training, without in-depth specialization in visual arts. This situation raises concerns regarding the suitability of teachers’ professional profiles in meeting the specific demands of art education and ensuring the quality of students’ visual and creative skill development.

This study aims to analyze the role of teachers’ professional profiles in the quality of visual arts education by conceptually examining the current teaching model and comparing it with an alternative model based on the involvement of individuals trained in visual arts combined with psycho-pedagogical preparation. Particular attention is given to the importance of artistic expertise in developing students’ creative, expressive, and perceptual abilities.

The study adopts a qualitative, theoretical approach, based on a review of existing literature and a critical examination of the relationship between subject-matter competence and pedagogical competence. Through a conceptual comparative analysis, the implications of different teacher profiles for teaching and learning processes in visual arts education are discussed.

The findings suggest that the lack of specialized artistic training may limit the depth of content delivery and the quality of instruction, while a combined profile that integrates artistic expertise with psycho-pedagogical competencies

appears more suitable for promoting students’ creative development. In this context, it is recommended that policies related to teacher education and recruitment be revised, alongside the encouragement of further empirical research in this field.

Keywords: *Visual arts education, Primary education, Teacher professional profile, Creative competencies, Pedagogical competence*

Designing Learning with Data: AI-Supported Learning Analytics for Educational Decision-Making

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Abstract: Digital transformation in education has increased the availability of learning data, yet many educational decisions and learning design choices remain driven by intuition rather than evidence. This study explores how learning analytics combined with artificial intelligence can support learning design and strengthen educational decision-making in digital learning environments. The research aims to develop a framework for AI-supported learning analytics that assists educators in identifying learning patterns, monitoring student engagement, and improving instructional design through data-informed recommendations. A mixed-method approach is proposed, integrating quantitative learning trace data from learning management systems with qualitative feedback from educators to examine the interpretability and usability of AI-driven insights. Preliminary findings suggest that AI-supported analytics can enhance early identification of learning difficulties, provide actionable feedback for adaptive learning design, and reduce the cognitive burden on educators when interpreting complex datasets. The study also highlights challenges related to transparency, ethical use of student data, and the risk of over-reliance on automated recommendations. The expected contribution of this research is a practical and ethically grounded model for integrating AI and learning analytics into learning design processes, supporting more inclusive, responsive, and evidence-based educational innovation in digital society.

Keywords: *learning analytics, artificial intelligence, learning design, educational decision-making, digital education*

New challenges in communicating with children

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Abstract: Communication is a very complex and dynamic process, when we look at it not only as a means of expression, but also as a connective “tissue” to build and maintain relationships with others. This process, which begins in early childhood and then gradually evolves and improves, continuously, almost throughout life, is influenced especially in the first steps by the interaction between cognitive, physical, social and environmental development.

In particular, the environmental aspect, recently, is experiencing an ever-increasing spread of digital technologies, where early and prolonged exposure to digital media can affect not only communication patterns, but perhaps also the delayed emergence of language skills, expressive skills and interactive reciprocity. These developments are also accompanied by transformations in both the educational and family contexts, which have brought new challenges in the construction of communicative competences and interactions, especially during the early years in children.

This paper aims to analyze these critical issues through a systematic review of the literature, as well as to pay attention to the processes of language acquisition as a means of communication and the interactions of preschool children with adults.

To achieve the objectives of the study, a purely quantitative approach was used and, as an instrument, questionnaires were used, in order to initially collect statistical data, which, in a second study, could serve as the basis for an in-depth qualitative study. Only parents were questioned through them, given that the young age of the participants represents a methodological limitation, as their cognitive and linguistic abilities are not yet fully developed, compromising the reliability of the responses.

Keywords: *communication, children, language development, digital media*

Down Syndrome, Refractive Errors and Brushfield Spots: A Case Report

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Abstract: Down syndrome (trisomy 21) is frequently associated with ophthalmologic abnormalities that may directly affect visual development, functional vision, and learning processes. Early identification of these features is of both clinical and functional importance. This paper aims to present the clinical findings of Brushfield spots in children with Down syndrome and to emphasize the value of integrating medical ophthalmologic assessment with functional vision evaluation.

Two pediatric cases of girls aged 6 and 7 years diagnosed with Down syndrome and myopia were examined through comprehensive ophthalmologic evaluation. The assessment included visual acuity measurement, slit-lamp biomicroscopy, and detailed anterior segment examination. Clinical findings were further interpreted in relation to functional visual performance and educational needs.

Bilateral Brushfield spots were identified at the peripheral iris in both children, with no associated inflammatory changes or additional anterior segment pathology. One child presented with marked photophobia affecting visual engagement, while the second was asymptomatic and diagnosed during routine examination.

Regular ophthalmologic follow-up combined with functional vision assessment is recommended to ensure early, individualized, and coordinated intervention involving both health and education professionals.

This case-based report highlights the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in the management of children with Down syndrome, linking medical ocular findings with visual rehabilitation and educational planning to support optimal visual and functional outcomes.

Keywords: *Down syndrome, Brushfield spots, ophthalmologic examination, functional vision, visual rehabilitation, multidisciplinary approach*

Artificial Intelligence as an Innovative Tool in Primary and Lower Secondary Education

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Abstract: The research aims to obtain the attitudes of primary and lower secondary school teachers towards the use of artificial intelligence (AI) as an innovative tool in the teaching process, regarding the impacts and benefits of artificial intelligence (AI) in the teaching process, focusing on the challenges of its use and the ways of teachers' interaction with AI tools. The research was conducted based on a qualitative approach, through semi-structured interviews with 15 primary and lower secondary education teachers, with the aim of identifying the benefits, challenges and ways of their interaction with AI tools. The results show that teachers see artificial intelligence as a tool with high potential for personalizing learning, increasing interactivity and facilitating learning processes. However, they express concerns about potential negative impacts, such as technology dependence, reduced practical skills and the risk of learning passivity. Challenges are also related to the lack of technological infrastructure, professional training and institutional guidelines, as well as ethical issues and data protection. The study highlights the need for an integrated and sustainable approach to the use of artificial intelligence in primary education. The study contributes to the scientific literature, serves as a resource for teachers, researchers in the field of education, providing knowledge on the use of artificial intelligence in education, guidance and further development.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence, education, teachers, innovation, technology*

Senior Virtual University

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Abstract: This paper presents the conceptual and strategic development of the Senior Virtual University (USV), a digital community model designed to promote active ageing, social connection and lifelong learning among adults aged 50+. The research purpose was to design an integrated framework that combines community structure, educational offer, technological mediation and sustainable financing, while ensuring accessibility and ethical governance. The methodology followed a design-based and participatory approach, integrating strategic modelling, user-centred design principles for older adults, and iterative conceptual development grounded in positive psychology and relational community theory. Results indicate that scalability in senior digital environments is best achieved through small, facilitator-led micro-communities rather than mass online classrooms; that hybrid models combining synchronous interaction, structured recorded courses and curated partnerships enhance sustainability; and that ethical data governance and minimalist accessible design are critical to trust and adoption. The study recommends a mixed funding model (free base access combined with voluntary plans, institutional partnerships and curated marketplace revenue), the integration of human facilitators, and strict accessibility standards for older users. The expected contribution lies in offering a replicable strategic model for digital senior communities that balances technological innovation with relational depth, social impact and financial sustainability.

Keywords: *Senior, Virtual, University, LLL*

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