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Athens Journal of Education

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The current issue is the second of the eleventh volume of the *Athens Journal of Education (AJE)*, published by the [Education Unit](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
ATINER



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- Abstract Submission: **DEADLINE CLOSED**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **22 April 2024**

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- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
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Acceleration and Enrichment for Gifted Students – From the Perspective of Swedish Principals

*By Lena Ivarsson**

This study identified and discussed principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment for gifted students. These areas have proven significant for the teaching of the gifted. The research questions included questions about perceptions of giftedness and how principals organize to allow gifted students to develop and learn based on their conditions and needs. The empirical material consisted of open questions where the informants freely could describe their knowledge and perceptions about gifted students and their education. The principals' mission statement formed the theoretical basis for analysis. The method used was content analysis. Previous research has shown that acceleration and enrichment are significant for teaching and learning for gifted students. It is therefore of importance that principals, responsible for the activities of the schools they are responsible for, are aware of these and enable the teachers to work with acceleration and enrichment based on the different needs of the gifted students. The results showed that the principals in the study believed that (a) acceleration should primarily take place in the gifted students' age-appropriate class, (b) second by studying subjects or courses with higher classes, (c) third, that the teachers enable enrichment for gifted students in their age-appropriate class, (d) fourth, grade skipping is complicated and should be avoided.

Keywords: acceleration, differentiation, enrichment, gifted students, inclusion, principals

Introduction

This paper concerns principals' perceptions of adaptations in teaching gifted students in a Swedish context. The Swedish compulsory school consists of K-9 and is divided into an autumn and spring term. In Sweden, the state governs the school through laws, regulations, curricula, and syllabuses that set goals and guidelines for the work. The principals design the education and are responsible for the students reaching the goals. The government decides what students should learn at school. They set goals and frameworks for education in various laws and regulations. The School Act is the backbone of the rules surrounding the education field. Today's education system faces significant challenges, not least when adapting teaching and learning based on the variety of students in the classroom. The inclusive classroom means that instruction must be differentiated to enable good education for all students. In the case of gifted students, acceleration and enrichment have been shown to be critical to their development and learning. Gifted students are described in this paper as students who "continuously amaze both in knowledge and application through their unusual ability in one or more behaviors"

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(Persson, 1997, p. 25). In short, acceleration means that the student is allowed to work faster within one or more subjects, where this is considered appropriate, to meet the student's need for challenges. Enrichment refers to the opportunity for the student to explore a subject or subject area broadly or in-depth to meet the demand for challenges in learning. In Swedish schools, the principal is responsible for the activities in the school in that the principal is responsible for how the finances are distributed and leads and distributes the work at his school. This means that the principal needs to have knowledge of the different needs of students and how these can best be met for the most favorable development and learning possible for all students. In the inclusive classroom, there are many students, and each student has unique needs. The principal, who is responsible for the activities, needs to have knowledge of the students' various conditions in order to make the correct decisions possible. The inclusive classroom includes many students with different needs, and gifted students are among them. However, they have not always been seen as a group with needs but rather as a group of students who can manage their learning independently. The present study identifies and discusses principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment as tools for differentiating teaching for gifted students based on their mission as defined in the Swedish Educational Act (Skollagen, 2010).

The following section deals with a literature review and a description of essential concepts for the study. Section three discusses the methodology, and section four discusses the results. Section five provides a general discussion with didactical implications, followed by limitations, future directions, and concluding remarks.

Literature Review

Inclusion

Inclusive education implies the right to education for all students, independent of their needs. This means that all students are in the same classrooms and schools. Student differences should be seen as an asset rather than a problem, and teaching and learning should be adapted to students' different conditions and needs (Nilholm & Göransson, 2014; Thomas, 2013).

The learning environment in the inclusive classroom should strive to create conditions for all students' participation and thereby make education accessible to all students, regardless of conditions and needs. This means a learning environment where everyone does not have to do the same thing, in the same way, at the same time. It means a learning environment where students learn from and with each other and where differences are seen as entirely natural and as an asset (Gerland, 2014).

To make this possible, the quality of education in the classrooms needs to be developed so that all students can benefit from inclusive teaching. Here both principals' and teachers' competence in teaching, learning, and organization of activities is decisive (Haug, 2017; Skott, 2014).

For gifted students, inclusion means that students who easily reach their goals should receive support to develop further in the regular classroom (Skolverket, 2023). Teaching and learning for gifted students have often focused on cognitive abilities and omitted social and emotional abilities (Versteynen, 2001). These areas have received greater attention in contemporary Swedish research on giftedness (Sims, 2021). Principals' ability to create social relationships and build community in school becomes essential for an inclusive school (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013).

Differentiation

In order to meet students in the inclusive school, teaching and learning need to be differentiated. Differentiation in learning refers to the practice of tailoring instruction and support to meet the individual needs, interests, and abilities of each learner in a group. This approach acknowledges that learners have different backgrounds, experiences, learning styles, strengths, and challenges and, therefore, require different types and levels of assistance to achieve their learning goals. Teaching should be adjusted to each student, and teachers must have expectations of and believe in their students (Håkansson & Sundberg, 2016; Kreger Silverman, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017).

The school's governing documents, such as the school law, curricula, and course- and subject plans, allow the principal and teachers to organize teaching based on different conditions. To meet the needs of gifted students, cooperation between several teachers and several different professions and school forms is often required (Jahnke, 2023).

A distinction is made between organizational and educational differentiation. One type of organizational differentiation is that the gifted students form their own class followed throughout an entire upper secondary education, so-called advanced education. Another example of organizational differentiation is tracking, which means that the gifted students follow their regular class but meet each other and a teacher with special responsibility for these students only when teaching the specific subject. Further examples of organizational differentiation are to offer deepening and breadth or to offer extra stimulation through leisure activities. Another way is for students to be supported by a mentor with competence and interest in the subject (Jahnke, 2023; Håkansson & Sundberg, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017).

Two main concepts in educational differentiation are acceleration and enrichment. Acceleration means that the pace of study is adapted to the student's needs. This can be done in part by allowing the student in his class to work with tasks from higher grades, in part by allowing the student in specific subjects to read together with students in higher grades, but also by allowing the student to move up to a higher grade than is appropriate for his age. Acceleration, in the form of the student being allowed to move up to a higher class, usually has a good effect on the student's knowledge development. The promotion should occur as early as possible and requires acceptance to mix different ages in the class. The students also appreciate promotion to a higher class, although the promotion can quickly become insufficient in many cases (Kreger Silverman, 2016; Liljedahl, 2017;

Sims, 2021). The student should be offered teaching at the grade level he/she needs. A partial movement where one retains one's class affiliation can be significant. Full promotion may also be relevant upon careful consideration and is strengthened by the School Act, where it is clearly stated that the student's knowledge forms the basis for grades, not the scheduled length of the course or the student's age (Liljedahl, 2017). A thorough impact analysis must form the basis of the decision whether a child should be moved up entirely because it can easily result in a performance requirement for the student but also entail social or emotional difficulties (Kreger Silverman, 2016; Liljedahl, 2017; Sims, 2021). Adaptations in the original teaching environment should be tested before promotion to a higher grade (Liljedahl, 2017).

Enrichment is a strategy to diversify educational opportunities and curriculum and extend education beyond general education content. Thus, enrichment will help meet the needs of specially gifted students. Enrichment means the student can broaden and deepen within one or more subjects. The student must feel that the learning is meaningful, significant, influential, and enjoyable. Various enrichment models and programs have been developed and implemented to facilitate and reinforce gifted students' academic, social, creative, and thinking skills (Van Tassel-Baska & Brown, 2007).

Difficulty, Depth, Diversity, and Density are examples of enrichment which means that the student gets the opportunity to work with more complex material, go deeper into details, do something outside the course or subject plan, or compress the course content to avoid unnecessary repetition of content which the student has already consolidated. Compression frees up time for other knowledge content and is a way to prevent the student from becoming bored. This way, enrichment can occur within regular teaching or in groups outside school hours (Sims, 2021).

For gifted students, it has been shown that, among other things, acceleration and enrichment are differentiations that work well for their social and cognitive development and learning (Kreger Silverman, 2016).

Gifted Education

In Sweden, research on teaching and learning for gifted students has been challenging to conduct because giftedness, in principle, has been a taboo area in Swedish pedagogical research. It was not until 2015 that the Swedish National Agency for Education drew attention to teaching and learning for gifted students on its national website (Skolverket, 2023). On the other hand, the national curricula for Swedish schools through the ages contain writings that have made it possible to focus on gifted students in school, even if other concepts were used. The latest revision of the Swedish Education Act (Skollagen, 2010) states that students who easily meet the grade criteria should be given opportunities through guidance and stimulation to develop their knowledge further.

Research on attitudes toward gifted education shows a significant variation, ranging from strong support for gifted education to strong opposition (Cross et al., 2013; Cross et al., 2018). The system for identifying gifted students in Sweden is

neither uniform nor well-defined, which can affect the attitudes towards gifted students and adaptations for them. A common way to measure giftedness is via results on standardized IQ tests. Swedish researchers, for example, Sims, suggest that instead of IQ tests, we should observe how students tackle complex tasks. These observations need to take place over a more extended period of time. Many gifted students have become accustomed to underachieving to fit in, and some have lost confidence in school. Therefore, it is not a given that they get top results on exams or tests (Sims, 2021).

Purpose and Research Questions

The present study aims to identify and analyze principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment as possible tools for differentiation to meet the instructional needs of gifted students. The research questions are the following:

- What perceptions do principals express regarding acceleration for gifted students?
- What perceptions do principals express regarding enrichment for gifted students?
- How do the principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment for gifted students correspond to their task according to the School Act (2010)?

Theory

The empirical data will be analyzed and discussed based on the principals' mission description in the national educational act (Skollagen, 2010). Inclusion and differentiation for gifted students are comprehensive, focusing on acceleration and enrichment.

In Sweden, the principal organizes and coordinates the pedagogical work at schools, decides how to manage the school, and distributes resources according to the students' various conditions and needs (Skollagen, 2010). The school's activities must be developed to align with the goals in the national curriculum (Lgr22, 2022); here, the principal has a special responsibility. The principal's pedagogical management of the school and the teachers' professional responsibility are prerequisites for the effective development of the school's activities. Therefore, school activities are a significant responsibility of the principals. Teaching must adapt to each student's conditions and needs and promote learning and knowledge development based on their background, experiences, language, and knowledge. The work in the school should take place in such a way that the students are stimulated to acquire and develop understanding and strive to be a living social community that creates security and the will and desire to learn. Every student has the right to develop in school according to their conditions. Their goal fulfillment is clearly stated in the Education Act (Skollagen, 2010), and it is stated that principals must work towards goal fulfillment and determine how this work is to be carried out. Goal-oriented work involves all levels of command and is part of the systematic, quality work, which is of great importance for school development and quality (Skollagen, 2010; Skott, 2014).

Principals are responsible for their schools and for achieving the goals they and the state set. While principals have great demand for themselves, they also have ample maneuvering space based on the allocated budget. The power chain between the state, the principal, and the various governing documents leads to various conditions and challenges for the principals and is subject to multiple interpretations and priorities. This affects, among other things, the adaptations that are decided on for gifted students and students who easily achieve the goals for passing (Jervik Steen, 2014; Lgr22, 2015).

Methodology

Data for this study was gathered through a web-based survey with open questions to identify and analyze principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment as possible tools for differentiation to meet the instructional needs of gifted students, as stated in the Swedish Educational Act, Skollagen (2010).

Informants

The informants consisted of 71 principals in preschool, elementary school, and high school in a region in the northern part of Sweden. The informants participated in the national principal education program, at one specific university, during the implementation of the study. Of the 71 informants, 52 were women, 16 were men, two did not state their gender, and one chose not to answer the question. The informants fell into the following age groups: 12 were 31–40 years old, 35 were 41–50 years old, 21 were 51–60 years old, and three were over 60 years old. The number of years in the profession varied from less than one year to 25 years. Of the 71 principals, 57 (80 percent) had a teacher's education as a basic education. The idea of choosing informants from the principal national program was twofold. Firstly, the principal's program is mandatory for principals, which means that all principals undergo the program. Secondly, it was a convenient way to contact many principals of varying ages, years in the profession, and basic education. Informants were not asked if they had particular knowledge about giftedness or their understanding of research in the field. However, the primary responsibility for the gifted students in the school rests with the principal. However, it can be assumed that the principals' knowledge of gifted students and their education was shallow since gifted education is rarely discussed in a Swedish context. However, principals' overall understanding of inclusion, differentiation, acceleration, and enrichment is also unknown. As the principals in the present study have different educational backgrounds and proven experiences, one can assume that their knowledge varies. This, in turn, enriches the study's results as the informants were not specifically selected for their knowledge about gifted students and gifted education.

Survey

The web-based survey contained four background questions about gender, age, primary education, and years in the profession, as well as six open questions (Table 1) with a focus on inclusion and differentiation and adjustments for gifted students. The questionnaire was constructed in the tool called “Form.” This article discusses and analyzes the descriptive empirical data based on the principal's assignment outlined in the Swedish School Act (2010).

Table 1. Examples of Open-Ended Questions and Responses

Examples of open-ended questions	Examples of responses
Describe how you, as a principal, work to ensure gifted students develop based on their different conditions and needs!	We try to normalize all talents and talk openly about obstacles, opportunities, similarities, and differences between us people/students.
	We make adjustments in the existing class and, if necessary, make contact with teachers at other stages to give the gifted students more challenges.
How do you define giftedness?	I cannot define this further, but a student who quickly assimilates new areas and is far ahead of the expected level of knowledge in relation to his age.
	Those who do not need to read their homework but learn everything during the lesson, but the problem may be that they are lacking in other things, eg the social aspect which is also an important part of the education.
How do teachers, in the schools you are responsible for work with teaching for gifted students?	We include all students in school, regardless of their needs. We meet all students regardless of conditions.
	We do not carry out special work for gifted students.

The informants were informed orally and in writing about the study. The web-based survey was distributed digitally to all 230 National Principal Education Program participants at a specific Swedish university. A reminder was sent to the participants digitally to increase the response rate. Of the 230 principals invited to participate in the study, 71 responses were received, giving a response rate of 31 percent, sufficient as the survey was distributed digitally.

Analyze

The data from the survey have been read through several times, and statements that describe the informant's perceptions of inclusion and differentiation with a focus on acceleration and enrichment have been noted, compared, and analyzed based on the rector's assignment.

Ethical Considerations

The informants have been promised anonymity in such a way that the results are reported at the group level, and quotes are of such a nature that they cannot be traced to a single individual. The informants were also informed that they could cancel their participation in the study.

Results

The findings describe principals' perceptions of acceleration for gifted students, followed by their perceptions of enrichment as part of differentiated instruction for gifted students. Finally, principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment for exceptionally talented students are described and analyzed in relation to their duties as principals.

Acceleration

The principals in the present study express different perceptions regarding the possibility of acceleration for specially gifted students. There are both opinions that students should be allowed to skip a class or more, where it is possible and where the need exists. At the same time, the principals express various concerns concerning grade acceleration, such as that it may become problematic for the student to adapt to the older students socially. Several principals also believe that problems can arise if a student skips one class and it soon turns out that more is needed, and the student would therefore have to skip one or more classes again. It could cause significant problems both in teaching and learning, but also socially and relationally for the student. Instead, many of the principals propose acceleration within their class through differentiation. The type of acceleration suggested is the division into different groups according to the subject and the student's needs, but not fixed groups, so-called level grouping, but more based on the need at the time. Investigating and surveying the student, thereby identifying conditions and needs as a basis for acceleration in one's class, is also highlighted as significant. The principals who mention investigation and mapping believe it is a prerequisite for adequate support and stimulation. This aligns well with the principal's mission and the school law, which advocates inclusion. Many principals express that the starting point should be that the student should be in his class and that teaching should be adapted to all students, even the gifted. Finally, acceleration is also proposed in the form of gifted students being allowed to study certain subjects or specific courses with higher grade levels in order thus to have the opportunity for meaningful and developmental learning. Here, the principals highlight the advantage that the gifted student can belong to his regular class with age-appropriate peers. At the same time, they get the opportunity for adequate teaching and learning in the area(s) where the student performs at a significantly higher level than their age-appropriate peers. Since many principals have expressed concern regarding social adaptation if a student skips one or more classes, they believe this is an

advantageous way to give the gifted student access to peers and higher-level teaching.

Enrichment

The principals express great confidence in the teachers' skills regarding the concrete work in the classroom. Based on that, the principals describe how the teachers work with differentiation rather than their perception of enrichment as part of differentiation. The principals describe themselves as having a supportive role and are naturally also the ones who distribute personal and financial resources based on identified needs. About enrichment, the principals highlight differentiated teaching and the opportunities, but also challenges, that exist with differentiation in particular. Education must be adapted to the needs of all students, including the gifted. This is done, among other things, through challenges and stimulation in different ways in the regular class. However, several principals believe that it is difficult to stimulate gifted students. They learn quickly and constantly want to progress, which can sometimes be challenging to manage in a class with many students with different individual needs. Other principals believe it is easy to challenge gifted students but considerably more difficult to limit. It is, of course, fantastic to have students who want to learn a lot in one area, while at the same time, the principals express a concern that these students risk working way too much and thus feel bad because of it. Therefore, they believe it is essential to map needs and adapt teaching and learning for gifted and all students in the class.

The Principal's Assignment

Based on the above description and analysis of the principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment for gifted students, it is interesting to reason how these perceptions correspond to the principals' task according to the School Act (2010).

From the principals' perceptions of acceleration and enrichment and how that work is carried out at their schools, it appears that the inclusive school with differentiated teaching provides suitable conditions for gifted students to develop and learn in their class, i.e., together with children of the same age. The principals believe that their mission includes including all students of the same age in a class and then adapting, or differentiating, teaching based on the students. The principals express great confidence in the teachers regarding inclusion and differentiation, as well as adaptations for specially gifted students in the form of, among other things, acceleration and enrichment.

Discussion

The principals show great faith in the teachers' ability to include all students in a class and to differentiate the teaching for them. Previous research (Kreger Silverman, 2016; Liljedahl, 2017; Sims, 2021) shows that grade skipping has a good effect on gifted students' knowledge development but also shows the importance of thorough preparatory work and impact analysis as a basis for a possible promotion. The principals in the present study express concern about grade skipping and indicate difficulties in social adjustment. That is the only reason for being restrained with grade skipping that the principals raise. They instead agree that the best thing for gifted students is to remain in the regular class with peers of the same age, where acceleration is offered in the form of a faster pace of study and reading relevant subjects with higher grade levels and enrichment. Liljedahl (2017) believes that adaptations in one's class should be tested before promotion to a higher grade. This fits well with the principals' expression that inclusion is preferable to acceleration, meaning grade skipping. My interpretation is that the principals in the present study harbor an uncertainty, perhaps ignorance, about gifted education and thus need more experience with grade skipping. By advocating that gifted students should remain in the class where peers go, many principals believe that social development is beneficial; at the same time, research (Kreger Silverman, 2016; Liljedahl, 2017; Sims, 2021) shows that knowledge development benefited by grade skipping. This pits knowledge development against social development and is a problem that has yet to be discussed but identified in the present study as relevant empirical evidence for such a discussion is not available. The principals in the study relate to gifted students in the same way as they relate to other students. They believe their needs should and can be met in the regular class through differentiated teaching through enrichment and other needs-based individual adaptations. This aligns well with the principal's duties as described in the Swedish School Act, Skollagen (2010).

It is essential to highlight that the results from this study are based on survey responses from 71 principals, which means that the results cannot be generalized but can only say something about these respondents' perceptions. A study with many more informants is needed to give a broader picture of principals' perceptions of and knowledge about gifted students. However, this study indicates that the principals could benefit from professional learning in gifted education research as their role is essential for influencing teachers' attitudes in their schools. Somehow, some of the answers appear to be naïve, and it seems as if the principals do not fully know the specific challenges gifted students face. These are specific challenges that the principal and the teachers must know about to offer adequate support and stimulation (Kreger Silverman, 2016; Liljedahl, 2017). I also want to highlight that the field of research on giftedness is emerging in Sweden and that, therefore, at the moment, there are few studies to relate to. That makes this study essential even if it is not generalizable.

Didactic Implications

This study contributes knowledge about 71 Swedish principals' perceptions of gifted students and teaching and learning for them. The principals believe gifted students should primarily be offered teaching in their class with peers of the same age. This aligns with the guidelines within the Swedish school, namely that it should be inclusive. Suppose offering adequate instruction for gifted students in the regular class is impossible. In that case, attempts should be made, in the first instance, to offer the student to study certain subjects or courses with higher grade levels, and secondarily, promotion to a higher class should be considered. The principals express great confidence in the teachers' skills in differentiating teaching, not only for the gifted students but for all students in the class. However, it still needs to be determined, and also not something that the present study studied, whether the teachers possess sufficient knowledge of giftedness to differentiate the teaching for these students.

In summary, the principals in the study believe that (a) acceleration should primarily take place in the gifted students' age-appropriate class, (b) second by studying subjects or courses with higher classes, (c) third, that the teachers enable enrichment for gifted students in their age-appropriate class, (d) fourth, grade skipping is complicated and should be avoided.

Limitations

It is essential to highlight that the results from this study are based on survey responses from 71 principals, which means that the results cannot be generalized but can only say something about these respondents' perceptions. A study with many more informants is needed to give a broader picture of principals' perceptions of and knowledge about gifted students. However, this study indicates that the principals could benefit from professional learning in gifted education research as their role is essential for influencing teachers' attitudes in their schools. Somehow, some of the answers appear to be naïve, and it seems as if the principals do not fully know the specific challenges gifted students face. These are specific challenges that both principal and teacher must know to offer adequate support and stimulation (Kreger Silverman, 2016; Liljedahl, 2017). I also want to highlight that the field of research on giftedness is emerging in Sweden and that, therefore, at the moment, there are few studies to relate to. That makes this study essential even if it is not generalizable.

Overall, the respondents in the study were primarily optimistic about gifted students and their education. However, their answers gave a picture of uncertainty and lack of knowledge, which shows the need to bring Swedish research about gifted students and their education to the forefront.

Future Directions

Based on the results from this study, the following recommendations for future studies are proposed: (a) a larger sample is necessary to enable generalizations; (b)

a similar study with other actors, such as school managers, administrators, and teachers, would allow for exciting and valuable comparisons of various actors' perceptions; and (c) in-depth studies on inclusion and differentiation with a focus on specially gifted students.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, the principals in the study believe that (a) acceleration should primarily take place in the gifted students' age-appropriate class, (b) second by studying subjects or courses with higher classes, (c) third, that the teachers enable enrichment for gifted students in their age-appropriate class, (d) fourth, grade skipping is complicated and should be avoided.

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Inclusive Education during Pandemic Crisis of COVID-19

By Constantia Charalambous & Christos Papademetriou[‡]*

The recent expansion of the COVID-19 outbreak has drastically altered the educational landscape, causing certain schools to operate on a distance education basis. The goal of this study is to investigate this phenomenon in depth, focusing on the elements that may contribute to the marginalization of students with learning disabilities and their immigration biography. At the same time, it attempts to investigate the perspectives of a group of students, teachers, and parents on how to avoid marginalization as a result of distance education. We employed a mixed research style to study the aforementioned problem. A total of 132 secondary school students, 52 secondary school teachers, and 49 secondary school parents were included in the study. As research tools, questionnaires, focus groups, observations and interviews were used. The data analysis reveals that the elements which may contribute to marginalization in remote education are primarily related to attention challenges, but also to technical difficulties. According to the participants, a closer collaboration between the Ministry of Education, school administrations and teachers, as well as revisions to the substance of teaching subjects, may be the solution to the problem.

Keywords: COVID-19, distance learning, inclusive education

Introduction

The widespread of COVID-19 has resulted in the creation of new educational data (Huang, et al. 2020), as well as the potential for the educational community to highlight the importance of online platforms for interaction in the educational process (Dhawan, 2020). The ability to provide remote education has effectively supplanted traditional face-to-face instruction, assuming, of course, that technology equipment and knowledge are available to support this method of instruction. Simultaneously, it provided students and teachers with the opportunity to experience a new type of education (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021), which had a number of benefits, including the development of students' creativity and increased collaboration between teachers (Doucet, Netolicky, Timmers, & Tuscano, 2020). Microsoft Teams is the main platform utilized in the Cypriot educational field for distance learning (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, 2020).

The new era created in the provision of education due to the pandemic have also created new data in matters concerning the quality of the education provided. The issue is not simply the coverage of the teaching material per subject, something from which only excellent students benefit, but at the same time the

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inclusion of all students. During distance education, teachers must provide equal learning opportunities to students who tend to be marginalized, such as student with learning disabilities and students with an immigrant background (Nosek, 2023).

Literature Review

Inclusive Education

In recent decades, there has been a major emphasis on the implementation of inclusive education in order to create an effective school culture on a global scale (Papademetriou, 2012). It is a method of education that attempts to integrate all students in the educational process, while also taking into account their educational and social requirements, as well as their diversity (Charalampous & Papademetriou, 2019). As a result, it encompasses all children, regardless of their educational backgrounds, any form of dysfunction, behavioral issues, sexual preferences, or cultural, religious, or linguistic differences (Charalampous, 2022).

The phenomenon of marginalization of students who are classified as people with special needs is visible in present Cypriot educational data, so, the content of the inclusive theory must be implemented. As a result, in Cyprus, efforts to integrate kids in their neighborhood's schools have been maximized (Charalampous & Papademetriou, 2018).

It's worth mentioning at this point that "students with learning difficulties" refers to kids who have been identified as having learning problems by the Provincial Committee on Special Education. They frequently attend supporting teaching courses with a customized timetable for one or two teaching sessions each day that differs from the standard class schedule (Charalampous & Papademetriou, 2021). They take supportive teaching courses in the examined courses during these times. The term "immigrant students" refers to school-age students who have immigrated from their home country (either themselves or their parents) for whatever reason (European Commission, 2019).

Distance Learning During a Pandemic

Immediately following the pandemic's outbreak, school units as well as the Ministries of Education worldwide were called to take measures to create the appropriate conditions for the implementation of distance teaching, but unfortunately there was no adequate planning to cover the educational needs of the students with special educational needs and immigrant background (Jia & Santi, 2021). This fact has created a lot of psychological pressure on both students and teachers (Perdana & Sutarsyah, 2021).

Due to the expansion of the coronavirus epidemic and forced confinement at home, online education has become an unavoidable phenomenon in the previous two years. Of course, effective distance education implementation necessitates more than the availability of a computer and an Internet connection (Butnaru, Nita,

Anichiti, & Brînza, 2021), technological competence among teachers and students, and parental support (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

Vlassopoulos, et al. (2021) propose financial aid to students for the purchase of appropriate technological equipment and the organization of seminars with distance learning teaching as approaches toward the optimal provision of distance education (Charalampous & Karava, 2022).

The Application of Inclusive Theory in Distance Education

The segregation policy generally followed by the Cypriot educational system unfortunately also exists in the distance education of students with special needs (Symeonidou, 2022) and also in the education of students with an immigrant background.

Students with learning difficulties, according to Ayda, et al. (2020), may not gain much from distance education, resulting in marginalization. Petretto, Masala, and Masala (2020) bolster this argument by pointing out that students with learning disabilities are more likely to require additional assistance from a family member during distance education, such as parents (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, & Cook, 2020). Toseeb et al. (2020) pointed out that there are no clear guidelines for avoiding marginalization in distance education, while the degree of socialization of adolescent students appears to decrease (Scarpellini et al., 2021), which is a necessary component for the inclusion of students with learning disabilities and immigrant biographies.

Chinaza, Ijeoma and Mofoluwake (2021) emphasize that it is now necessary in every school organization to have the appropriate logistical infrastructure that will be provided to both teachers and students in order for the education system to respond adequately in case of a shift to distance education due to a new pandemic crisis. This equipment should explicitly cover any potential challenges that kids may face owing to special learning difficulties or difficulties that students with an immigrant background may face.

Specific Problem

We projected that a part of Secondary Education pupils in Cyprus may be marginalized based on the aforementioned.

The current study looked into the influence that the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as mandatory home confinement, had on high school students.

Research Questions

The following were the primary research questions of this research:

- In distance learning courses, are students with learning difficulties and immigrant biographies marginalized?
- In times of pandemics and distance learning, what variables influence the inclusion of students with learning difficulties and immigrant biographies?

- What are some strategies for avoiding probable marginalization in distance learning?

Methods

The study as mentioned earlier, was carried out in March of 2021. The research was conducted using a mixed research methodology.

Research Design

The study was based on Creswell's (2014) recommended follow-up exploratory technique. The collection of qualitative data comes first in this research, followed by the analysis. The researchers are then directed to gather and analyze quantitative data in order to explore the same issues that have already been investigated using the qualitative method, hence increasing the research process' validity.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The combination of these methods can highlight various parameters related to the opinions of the participants on the subject under investigation (Creswell, 2014). Mixed methodology draws data from a variety of research tools, such as interviews, observations, and questionnaires. It allows the combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology and also data triangulation (Rendani Sipho, 2012). Furthermore, it can generalize the findings to ensure a clear and deep understanding of the research topic, resulting in greater validity and reliability. According to Klette (2012), mixed methodology limits not only the criticisms leveled at the qualitative method for subjectivity, but also the deviation that can occur in a quantitative study due to possibly incorrect handling of numerical results.

At the same time, grounded theory was used to analyze data. Grounded theory is especially useful in this situation because it considers participants' impressions, environment, behavior, and nonverbal parameters (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Qualitative methodology collects data through verbal and visual stimuli (Devetak, Hajzeri, Glažar, & Vogrinc, 2010). According to Yin (2011), it is based on five basic parameters: a) meaning of human life under normal conditions, b) research participants' opinions, c) conditions under which the research participants live, d) views that are likely to help explain human behaviors, and e) various sources to prove something. Data was gathered using qualitative methods such as observation, interviews, focus groups, biographical narratives, evidence collection and analysis.

Grounded theory is an interpretive, constructivist method that allows researchers to combine their point of view with data derived from interviews and observations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The research data could be analyzed using

three different types of design based on grounded theory (systematic, emerging and constructivist design) (Hutchinson, 1998). We used a systematic design in the current research.

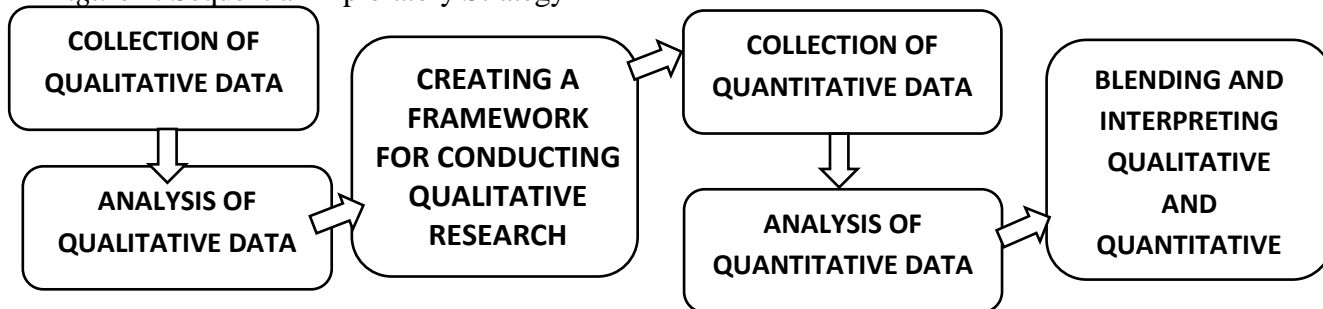
Although grounded theory is typically used to analyze qualitative data. Johnson (2008) claims that it can also be used to analyze quantitative data. So we quantified the qualitative data and qualitatively quantified the quantitative data to achieve an overall analysis of the mixed data. This effort entailed reading, coding, presenting, and interpreting qualitative data from words or images into numbers. Furthermore, quantitative data were correlated with data from interviews and observations.

We followed the following stages of grounded theory: open coding, categorization of the data into initial themes retrieved from the participants' words, axial coding, selective coding, grouping of themes into key themes and subthemes, and construction of descriptions and theoretical insights of studies studied.

The methodology of the present research led us to choose the "sequential exploratory strategy" model, which gives priority to qualitative research, then integrating both methods. The research goes through the stages of data collection and analysis sequentially.

The "sequential exploratory strategy" model is primarily used to explain interpersonal relationships. It is used when the researcher wants to expand on the findings of a mixed research or collect data for quantitative. In this context, the researcher goes through three stages: data collection, qualitative data analysis, and using the analysis to develop an instrument for a sample population. Furthermore, this model is appropriate for use in the field of educational research (Creswell, 2014). Figure 1 depicts the "sequential exploratory strategy" in greater detail:

Figure 1. Sequential Exploratory Strategy



It is also worth noting that we used grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) for qualitative data analysis, an interpretive, constructivist method that allows participants to present their point of view and then combine it with the point of view of researchers (Hutchinson, 1998). We chose systematic design, one of three types of design proposed by grounded theory (systematic, emerging, and constructivist design), which consists of three stages: coding, nominal open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Creswell, 2014).

Materials

As qualitative tools in this research, semi-structured interviews were used, which included general predetermined questions, participatory remote observations (teachers participated, who also functioned as researchers) and focus groups, which aim in the interaction between participants by during the group interview.

The questionnaire was used as a quantitative tool. The researchers devised and employed a three-part questionnaire, which is as follows: Part A is about demographic characteristics, Part B is about distance education in practice, and Part D is about improving distance education service. Parts B and contain closed-ended questions with responses based on the Likert scale, which provides a choice of five basic alternatives (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree / Neither Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Completely agree).

Participants

Two secondary schools in Cyprus participated in the research process. One was in Limassol and the other one was in Paphos. A total of 132 secondary school students, including 61 students with learning difficulties and 71 students with immigrant history, 52 secondary school teachers, and 49 secondary school parents (28 parents of students with learning difficulties and 71 parents of students with immigrant history), took part in the specific study. The sample utilized to conduct the qualitative part of the research was randomly selected. All of the 132 students filled out the questionnaire. In contrast, sample selection in qualitative research was purposeful. Participants are selected who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of marginalization. All of the 52 secondary school teachers, and 49 secondary school parents and also 68 of the 132 students took part in interviews, focus groups and observations.

Procedures

Prior to the start of the research process 12 specific teachers had noted that a portion of students tended to be marginalized throughout online courses. For this reason, the researchers suggested to the teachers to record their observations regarding the specific subject.

Subsequently, the participants were informed about the research's findings by the researchers. They were also explained that the questionnaire would take roughly 10 minutes to complete, each interview would take 10 minutes, and finally that the focus groups would take about 20 minutes. The questionnaire was completed electronically using Google Forms by the participants. The interviews and focus groups were done using both the camera and microphone on the Microsoft Teams online platform. After obtaining written agreement from the participants, the data from the focus groups and interviews were recorded. The results were disclosed to the participants before being published.

At this point we must note how Microsoft Teams aided us, as face-to-face communication was almost impossible during the pandemic. However, the face-

to-face interview cannot be replaced by participating in a research through the use of a camera. In particular, the use of Microsoft Teams might not have contributed to the thorough analysis of the non-verbal communication and in general the body language of the participants (the screen size was quite small), which would probably have revealed more information regarding the opinions of the participants.

It is also worth noting that a portion of the participants did not want the camera to remain on throughout the interviews and focus groups, something which did not allow us to study the participants' reactions in detail.

The results of the research are characterized by a high degree of validity and reliability, given that the qualitative data were collected using audio recordings as well as careful note-taking. The researcher had the opportunity to collect data based on the verbal and non-verbal behavior of the participants. In addition, all participants as well as the guardians of the students who took part in the research signed the Consent Form for participation in the research". Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, so all the names attributed to the quotes in this paper are pseudonyms. We also used password-protected files (interviews, observations, focus groups, which were carried out through Microsoft Team).

The above procedures were done on purpose to avoid the possibility of having vulnerable groups, since some participants and mainly students possibly felt forced to take part in the research by the school management or the researchers. Additionally, students with an immigrant biography possibly gave their consent to participate in the research because without understanding the exact topic of the research due to their difficulty in language communication, since the consent form was given in only available in two languages, Greek and English.

Results

As previously stated, the current study is led by a follow-up exploratory strategy. As a result, the qualitative methodology was used to begin the study, which looked into the impact of home restrictions imposed by the coronavirus epidemic on Cyprus Secondary School students. At this point, the primary research instruments were observations, focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

The research process was initiated by teachers' observations, who realized that some students were marginalized during distance learning. The following observation could be characterized as representative:

The online lesson had started. Eventually, nearly all pupils engage. The last student to enter the classroom had learning disabilities. I attempted to incorporate him in the educational process, but I was unsuccessful. The next day exactly the same phenomenon was observed. So, I decided to message the student and ask for a personal online meeting. My student told me that he didn't want to join the online course because despite his best efforts, he didn't understand the course content. He told me specifically: "I got used to attend a face to face lesson, watching his movements, talking to us in a friendly way... I can't concentrate like that. No one turns on the camera. You just see a black screen and sometimes some slides. There is no communication with either students or teachers. The lesson is very boring and I

don't understand anything". Despite my personal conversation with the student, nothing changed. After a few days, the kid informed me that he will not engage in the lesson until we return to our classroom. (teacher 1).

Analyzing the preceding observation, we discovered that this particular student, who was having learning issues, was unable to concentrate throughout the online lessons. Students with learning disabilities appear to be more interested in a session conducted in the actual presence of students and teachers. The physical presence of those involved in the educational process allows all students, but especially students with learning difficulties, to interact with the teacher and their classmates more easily and effectively. Image, movement, and body language appear to improve lesson quality, which is not reached during distance teaching.

The conclusions drawn from this observation are reinforced by another observation, which is related to the distance education of students with an immigrant background. A Greek teacher narrates:

My class contains three Syrian pupils. I was apprehensive during the first distance class because I didn't know how to help them understand the subject. During face to face lessons I used to translate some words into English and explain in simpler words or using movements but I realized they didn't understand the lesson. During the first online course I noticed that they were not participating at all. So, in the following days, I often corrupted the lesson to simplify it and also help them understand through my movements or style. In a few days, however, a student reacted because, as he claimed, in this way we could not cover our teaching material. The kid also expressed frustration since he, like many others, was preparing to take university entrance tests and did not feel adequately prepared. I've ceased stopping the lesson for clarifications since then. Following this, I found that the three students did not even register for the online course.

The researchers suggest that students with learning difficulties and immigrant backgrounds may be stigmatized during online lessons based on these specific representative observations. This assumption prompted us to look into the matter further utilizing qualitative study data.

The following are representative extracts from a focus group that looked into the general feelings of students, teachers, and parents, as well as the overall consequences of the pandemic's predicament. The following are specific statements made by the students who took part in the study:

The truth is that the coronavirus crisis has caused us a trouble. Since we are high school students this year, the last two years have been the most crucial of our lives. Despite the fact that we did not miss many physical classes this year in particular, we were really felt uncertainty.

According to the student, the pandemic and its consequences in the educational sector, led the students to feelings of uncertainty. This uncertainty is also confirmed by another student, who points out the following:

"It merely came to our attention at the time. They altered every aspect of our existence."
"Assume we couldn't even visit a tutoring center in person. I'm one of those students who struggles in class and requires a lot of assistance to understand what's being taught. I was utterly befuddled."

According to this student, students with learning disabilities find it even more difficult to perform during distance learning.

"Our parents were worried about the whole situation. Consider how they tried for so many years to offer us everything they could, so that we may be educated and study what we wanted. Eventually everything changed the last two years".

But the concerns regarding the problems that have been created in the field of education seem to worry the parents of the students as well.

According to the data acquired from the current focus group, the students who participated in this research believed that their confinement at home has an impact on both their daily life and their learning performance. They emphasized, in particular, that the overriding sense for them during the pandemic was uncertainty about the future.

The teachers' perspectives appear to be similar, as evidenced by the following observations made during the course of focus group:

"During the pandemic, it was extremely difficult for all of our students." Of course, students with learning difficulties and an immigrant background faced too many problems. These students require one-on-one assistance at school on a daily basis. You understand the lack of personalized assistance from a computer or a mobile phone does not function well with distance learning.

Digging deeper into the data we find that the reason why students with learning difficulties are burdened is because during distance learning the quality of distance education delivery is not as high as during live classes.

"During the pandemic, distance education is unquestionably essential. Nothing, however, can substitute in-class sessions. A smile, a grimace, a movement, or a sound might assist a student become more interested in the subject and, as a result, he/she better understand the lesson."

In addition through distance learning, students do not monitor the body language of their teacher and classmates to understand the lesson better.

"Let us not forget that there are students with attention problems who struggle to concentrate under normal conditions. This problem increases when students are not in the classroom but at home where there are numerous distractions."

At the same time, according to the participants' opinions, students' attention is easily distracted when they are not in the classroom environment.

"It merely came to our attention at the time. There are also students who have vision and hearing issues. It is difficult for them to attend and understand the distance class as well as they would if they were physically present in the class".

The problem of understanding the lesson becomes more intense in the case of students who face sensory problems.

"We had the same compassion with students whose parents were immigrants. In order to learn the language better, they need more than just the lesson. They also need everyday interaction with their classmates and teachers."

Analyzing teachers' past perspectives, we discovered that teachers believe that distance learning was a parameter that produced additional complications in the process of inclusion education for those students with learning disabilities and immigrant students. The difficulties in giving efficient tailored aid, which becomes even more difficult due to the lack of human contact, and the establishment of a connection of trust and interaction between teacher and student, but also between students, were the key factors in the formation of this viewpoint. Furthermore, according to the teachers, children with visual, hearing, and focus issues had difficulties attending and understanding the lesson.

According to the impact of the pandemic on secondary school students, the parent group highlighted the following:

"Personally, I believe that a lack of rivalry among students has had a bad impact on students. It is difficult for a child to desire to study and become a better student if he/she is not driven to achieve the level of his/her classmates, does not listen to other children's inquiries, and does not talk to them. He simply relaxes and does not strive..."

According to the parent-participant, another factor that burdens learning performance is reduced competition.

"Yes, I agree... Children become isolated as a result of distance learning teaching. Let us not forget that some of them are already isolated due to problems in learning process or communicating in a foreign language. They are much more isolated from their peers and teachers since they do not interact with them."

However, students who do not know the language of instruction face a greater difficulty.

"Teachers are unable to intervene. Typically, students do not attend distance learning properly. They are distracted or do something else and simply inform the teachers that they are there in order to avoid being absent."

Analyzing the data from the current focus group, we concluded that parents of students with learning difficulties and immigrant histories believed that remote education has a detrimental impact on learning since it does not increase rivalry among students, which normally improves learning outcomes. Furthermore, students with learning difficulties and immigrants may be driven to social isolation as a result of remote learning, which may pose extra challenges in both learning and socialization. Furthermore, both parents and teachers agree that pupils are distracted during distance learning.

Focusing on the elements that may influence the inclusion of students with immigrant backgrounds or learning difficulties, the following participants' perspectives, gleaned from interviews with teachers, parents, and students, are worth considering:

"Neither we nor our students were used earlier to remote education. Even after a year, we are still looking for ways to improve our performance. Even the distance learning programs we utilized caused us problems. This is unprecedented for all of us. We all tried until we identified the best technique to convey knowledge and the best manner for students to learn" (teacher)

According to a teacher, despite everyone's continuous efforts, unfortunately the best technique for providing distance education has not yet been identified.

"As parents, we were unable to help our children. We did not have the necessary knowledge" (father)

"Many of us had no idea how to switch on the computer." We had no idea what the lesson was. How can we assist the youngster in this situation? (mother)

Parents felt that they were leaving their children helpless, possibly because they did not have enough computer knowledge.

"I don't have access to a computer. I'm having trouble seeing the lesson on my mobile phone. When you have myopia, you find it difficult to understand what the teacher is demonstrating in the lecture" (student)

"I feel that I cannot interrupt all the time the lesson in order to make a question. When we are in a normal class I can wait to do that during the break. Nevertheless, the physical contact and the face expression can lead the teacher to the conclusion that we have a question." (student)

At this point, the concerns of students with special needs and the difficulty of understanding the lesson come to the surface again simply because they cannot follow the teacher's movements and expressions.

"We had a problem evaluating children who had learning disabilities. Everything was completed in a hurried manner. The pupils had to follow our directions and do their homework, which we graded. Eventually, there was hardly no personalisation for these kids. We couldn't approach them like we could during the normal lesson in class. As a result, we didn't get to know the kids very well, and we may never have recognized their true struggles." (teacher)

"During the lessons of the distance supporting teaching I felt that I could not be so supportive for the students. I had difficulties in checking their progress. I told them to take a picture of their notebook and email it to me, but they didn't always do so" (teacher).

"When we had supporting distance learning, the kids usually wanted to talk to me about their worries and have an online discussion. It was their chance to talk, because they were too embarrassed to express themselves in front of the entire class." (teacher).

Participants list as a difficulty in distance learning the fact that they cannot personalize the teaching, discuss outside the curriculum, nor evaluate the progress of their students.

The data analysis showed that according to the teachers, the following factors may affect the inclusion of kids with immigrant backgrounds or learning difficulties. First factor is the difficulty of the teachers to use properly the computer programs for distance learning. Second factor is the difficulty of the teachers to discover the educational needs of each student. Last, the focus on the psychological aspect of the support leads to neglecting the educational and learning parts of the teaching. Similarly, parents said that the fact that they do not have the appropriate technological knowledge, nor do they have the necessary technological equipment, to assist their children in matters of distance learning lead to the marginalization. The students also believe that the lack of proper technological equipment is a

source of marginalization, and they stated that the lack of visual contact with the teacher creates problems in following the lecture.

According to the theory of sequential exploratory strategy, when the collection and analysis of qualitative data is done, we continue with the collection and analysis of quantitative data. Analyzing the data resulting from the analysis of the questionnaire, we come to the following conclusions.

Table 1. Difficulties in Understanding

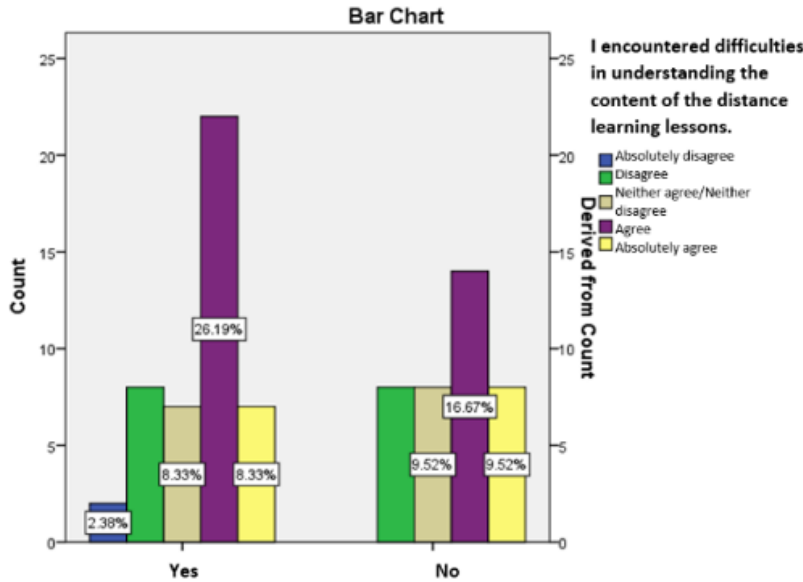
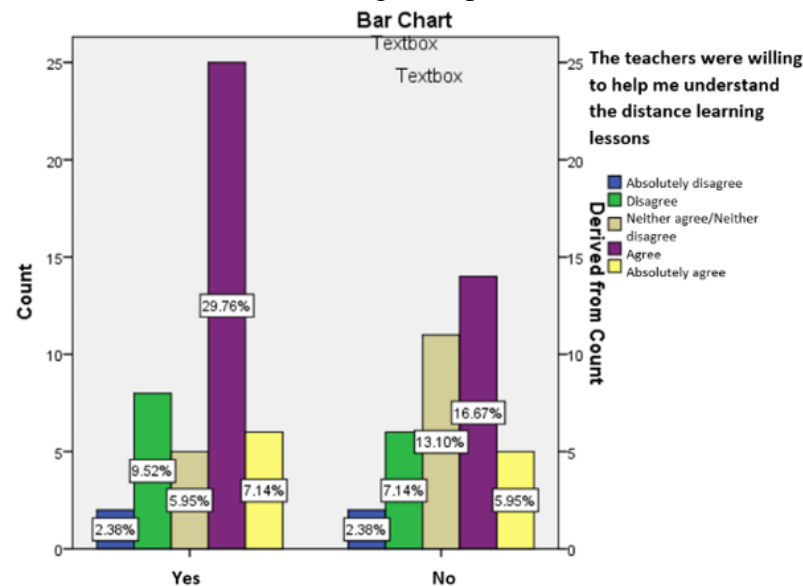


Table 2. Teachers were willing to help Students Understand the Lesson



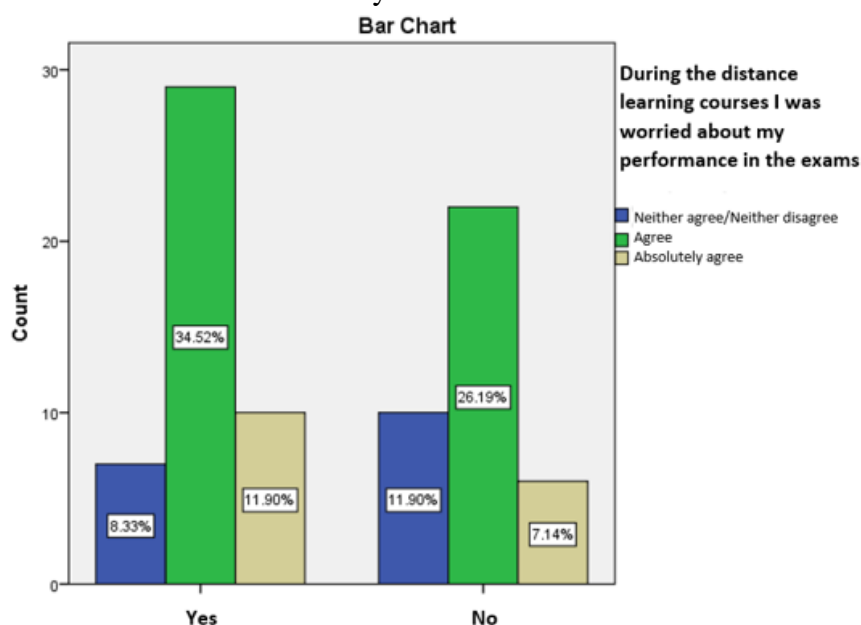
In Table 1, we can see that students with learning difficulties had more difficulty in understanding distance teaching than students who were not categorized as having learning difficulties. This is supported by the 26.9 percent of

children with learning difficulties, while it is completely supported by 8.33 percent. At the same time, a lesser proportion of 16.67 percent of students who were not categorized as having learning difficulties agree with the statement that they have had difficulty understanding distance learning, while 9.52 percent absolutely agree.

According to the students' perspectives, as shown in Table 2, the teachers were willing to assist the students in effectively understanding distance learning. As you can see 29.76 percent of students with learning difficulties agreed with this statement. At the same time, 16.67 percent of students without learning disabilities agree with the above statement.

Combining the findings from the preceding data, we discover that students believe that teachers wish and, at the same time, undertake many steps to assist their students in responding to distance learning. Nonetheless, students continue to confront a number of challenges when it comes to comprehending distant education courses.

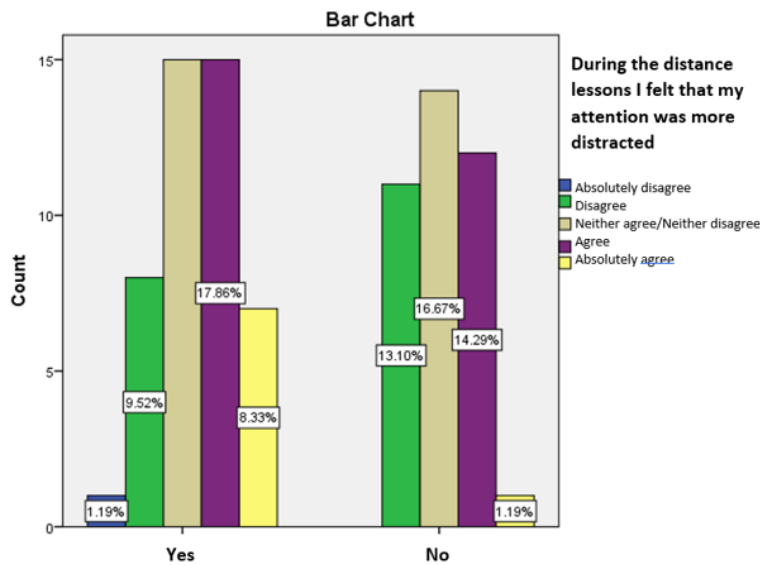
Table 3. I was worried about my Exams



It is also worth noting that an important proportion (34.52 percent agree and 11.90 percent strongly agree) of students with learning disabilities were worried about their performance in final Cypriot exams during the pandemic (Table 3). On the other hand, the proportion of students without learning difficulties who were worried about their performance in the final Cypriot exams, (26.19 percent agree and 7.14 percent completely agree) is much lower.

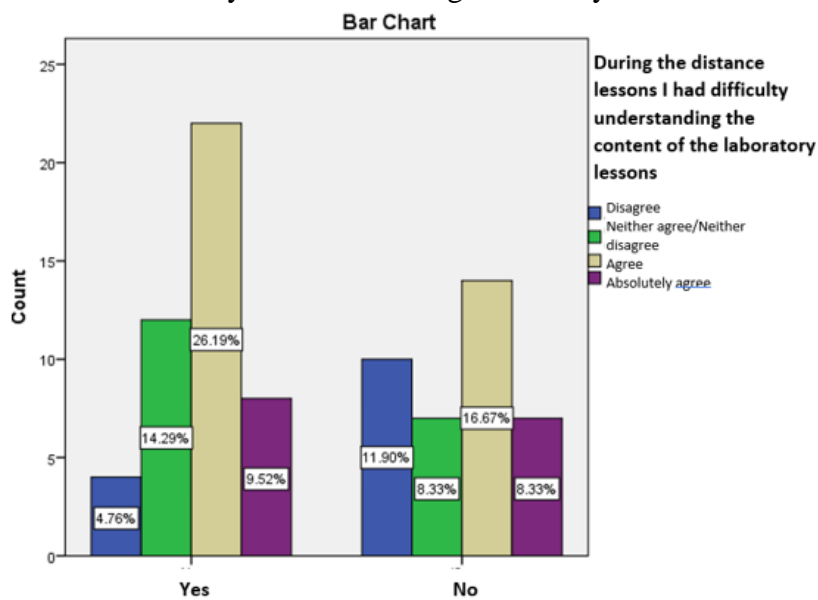
Therefore, it seems that the pandemic and the forced implementation of distance education are having a negative effect on the effort of final year students to succeed in university entrance exams.

Table 4. Distraction during Distance Learning



Furthermore, when we examined the research data, we discovered that students with learning difficulties feel more strongly that their attention is diverted during distance learning than students without learning disabilities (Table 4). We see that 17.86 percent of students with learning disabilities agree and 8.33 percent absolutely agree with this statement. Students without learning difficulties had a split opinion on this, with 14.29 percent agreeing and 1.19 percent strongly agreeing.

Table 5. Difficulty in Understanding Laboratory Lessons



Furthermore, the percentage of students with learning difficulties appears to be rather high, which supports the idea that the material of the laboratory courses was difficult to understand during the remote learning courses (Table 5). According

to our data, 26.19 percent of students with learning difficulties agree with this statement. A considerably smaller percentage of those who do not have learning issues, 16.67 percent, agrees with the aforementioned statement.

In addition, studying the statement "Covid-19 pandemic affected student performance", it was observed in the general population of participating-parents that there is a positive correlation between the questions "They had difficulty understanding the lesson because they did not know the language of instruction well" ($r=0.043$, $p\text{-value}=0.261$), "They could not practice enough at home" ($r=0.000$, $p\text{-value} = 0.310$), "I did not attend the lesson because I could not concentrate" ($r=0.047$, $p\text{-value}=0.235$), "The lesson was not interesting because they were not close to their classmates" ($r=0.000$, $p\text{-value}=0.198$).

As a result, we conclude that the primary factors that may contribute to lower learning outcomes during distance education are not so much related to instructor quality as they are to student distraction during distance education.

Furthermore, in our research we tried to investigate the participants' perspectives on treatment of the aforementioned problems, as well as their possible prevention. We quoted the following data gathered by interviews.

"Teachers must attend workshops/seminars on how to teach distance learning, how to use distance learning programs, how to assist students with learning difficulties, and how to assist students with immigration biography in distance learning" (parent)

"The Ministry of Education must provide direction to teachers and school principals of how to use the distance learning. The instructions must be very clear and explicit in order for the implementation of distance education to go smoothly." (teacher)

According to the participants, the effective provision of distance education can be improved by organizing seminars for teachers, mainly by the Ministry of Education.

"Teachers must organize all of their lessons in digital form so that they are prepared if they are forced to use distance education owing to the pandemic's new spread." (teacher)

"Certainly, school administrations must be well-organized in order to be able to work effectively with distance learning education. In times of epidemic, they must maintain continual communication with teachers and direct them, not only to ensure that tailored instruction is successful, but also to assist students who are having difficulty understanding the lesson and not being segregated from the other students." (parent)

Through the study of the aforementioned, the opinion emerges that both teachers and school principals must be prepared at all times for the provision of distance education.

"To succeed, the endeavor to effectively implement distance education without marginalizing some students, either because they do not have a computer, do not know how to use it, or are simply embarrassed to talk in distance learning mode, requires the assistance of parents. As a result, extensive collaboration between teachers and parents is required." (parent)

The above point of view leads us to the conclusion that parents understand the difficulties faced by teachers in their attempt to teach remotely without marginalizing a portion of students. They also understand the staff's difficulties and lack of knowledge and skills.

"I believe that what we want as students is the best communication with the teachers. The pandemic causes many issues to us. Many students need to talk to an adult about this. Many students are comfortable to discuss any of their concern with their teachers. Children enjoy using social media. So, I believe that connection between students and their teachers (by using social media) is essential so that some students are not isolated" (student)

Participants also point to the need for extensive collaboration and better communication between urban teachers and students.

"I recommend that courses be changed to make them more accessible to students during any crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic. The greatest answer is to minimize the amount of material so that the students must have more time for actual study." (student)

Also, according to a student, the teaching material should be reduced so that students can absorb it during distance learning,

"When we have distance education, we need the support of expert technicians who will have access to our computers at all times to fix any problems that may arise." We will never be able to know everything. Such assistance is required. (teacher)

The following are some of the participants' proposals for possible solutions to difficulties that have developed throughout the implementation of distance education: 1) teacher training in the use of electronic tools and teaching methods that promote the provision of effective distance learning for students with learning disabilities and immigrant biographies, 2) effective management of teachers and school principals by the Ministry of Education, 3) Curriculum modification and reduction, 4) increased organization and stronger communication between school administrations and teachers, 5) modern support of distance learning by specialized technicians, 6) close cooperation between teachers and parents, 7) pre-digitization of teaching materials, and 8) increased communication between teachers and students with the help of social media.

At this stage, extra emphasis should be placed on teacher education in relation to distance education difficulties. Of course, this is not as easy as it appears. To be effective, teacher training must focus on particular concerns that can be clearly understood by studying the aforementioned research findings. Teacher training could therefore include topics such as the following: training in the use of electronic online teaching programs, in motivating students during online teaching, designing, which enhances the interaction between students with their classmates, but also between students and teachers. However, special emphasis must be placed during training on avoiding marginalization of students with an immigrant background and learning difficulties.

We next examined the quantitative data from the current study, which led us to the conclusion that there is a positive relationship between the belief that

"Teachers can contribute to the inclusion of all students through distance education" and the following statements: "creation groups-e-classrooms on social media "($r=0.043$, $p\text{-value}=0.226$)," cultivating understanding and cooperation among classmates "($r=0.000$, $p\text{-value}=0.480$)," assigning group work "($R=0.047$, $p\text{-value}=0.222$)," creation of electronic activities with different levels (easy, moderate, difficult) ($r=0.000$, $p\text{-value}=0.578$), "allocation of time for free discussion between to students and teachers "($r=0.021$, $p\text{-value}=0.256$). The above statements are at the same time ways in which teachers can improve the quality of the distance education provided.

Finally, there is a strong relationship between the statement "the Ministry of Education can reduce student marginalization during distance education" and the following points of view: "The Ministry of Education should organize an action plan for distance learning before start of the school year"($r=0.019$, $p\text{-value}=0.311$)," The Ministry of Education must organize sample electronic videotaped lessons for each specialty, in order to guide teachers "($r=0.041$, $p\text{-value}=0.228$) and "The Ministry of Education must create sample educational material to which all teachers will have access" ($r=0.000$, $p\text{-value}=0.396$).

As a result, the Ministry of Education may make a good contribution to the endeavor to improve distance teaching by developing an annual plan that would be implemented in the event of a forced shift to distance education. This planning must incorporate teacher guidance in both instructional matters and educational material.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on our daily life (Azorin, 2020). Strict controls are in place around the world to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Harris & Jones, 2020). This reality has had an impact on many sectors of human life, including schools, which are being called upon to restructure their educational roles as well as instructional methods (Zhao, 2020).

We find that the COVID-19 pandemic has considerably differed both educational and daily life, as well as the psychological status of secondary school students, based on the perspectives of participating students with learning difficulties and immigrant backgrounds, teachers, and parents (Kritzer & Smith, 2020).

The present study showed that the current situation was impacted by the difficulties in individual teaching, a result that Lindner, Letzel, Tarini, and Schwab (2021) also support it. Moreover, the limited interaction between the students, but also between teachers and students, was a factor that lead to the aforementioned situation. Additionally, difficulties in concentrating, understanding the Greek language, using electronic means and electronic devices, were some extra factors.

Despite the presence of various aspects that appear to cause problems in the provision of distance education, as well as in the active engagement of students in it, the current research suggests that there may be factors that can help to solve these problems. Participants suggest that the Ministry of Education (Ferri, Grifoni,

& Guzzo, 2020) and school principals (Charalampous et al., 2021) provide teacher training and guidance on distance learning and inclusive education, as well as the adaptation of teaching objects and teaching methods to pandemic conditions, and finally, as well as the emphasis on communication between students and their teachers.

Simultaneously, teachers must be kept up to date on emerging trends in the use of remote education, with the explicit goal of avoiding the marginalization of students with unique learning needs or an immigrant background. Finally, students with learning difficulties or an immigrant background must be sufficiently encouraged by the teachers, but also by the education system in general, so that they have the motivation for adequate learning through distance education (Chinaza, Ijeoma & Mofoluwake, 2021)

Limitations

The main limitation of the present research is related to the research tools on which the research was based. We might have had clearer results if we had used observation as a research tool. Observation would better inform us regarding the attitudes, opinions and reactions of teachers and students during distance learning.

Future Research

At this point, we could suggest some key points where future research could be aimed in order to deepen the subject of this research. Initially, both school principals and representatives of the Ministry of Education could be involved in the research process. These participants could enrich the research with their opinions about the problems that have been created in the educational process, as well as with possible proposals to deal with these problems.

In addition, the research could provide even more information regarding the effect of distance education on the learning of children with learning disabilities if it were enriched with the action research process. In such a case teachers could act as researchers during their own distance teaching. Thus, they could reflect on their own practices and at the same time revise them, extracting important results.

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Engaging Children in Philosophical Inquiry through Picturebooks

By Margaret Gichuru^{}, Rhiannon Maton[±], Mechthild Nagel[°]
& Lin Lin[•]*

Children’s picturebooks present meaningful opportunities for thinking through life’s important questions. In this article, the authors outline the process and benefits of using picturebooks to support philosophical inquiry amongst preschool and elementary aged children. We discuss how philosophical inquiry can promote critical thinking in children, considerations in the use of culturally responsive and abolitionist feminist curriculum and pedagogy in teaching philosophy, and we highlight the utility of multiple stakeholder collaboration for successful philosophical inquiry projects in schools. The article closes by discussing key recommendations for the implementation of philosophical inquiry programs in preschool and elementary schools.

Keywords: philosophical inquiry, picturebooks, philosophy, critical thinking, multiculturalism, abolition feminism

Reflection Questions for Practitioners

- What picturebooks can I use in my classroom that support philosophical inquiry?
- How can I encourage my students to be critical, humanistic, and justice-oriented thinkers through using picturebooks?
- How can undergraduate and graduate students support young readers in developing their cultural awareness, self-identity, and confidence?
- What collaborative skills are required for creating and implementing a curriculum that encourages philosophical discussions in early childhood programs and schools?

Children are innately curious and seek answers to many of life’s big questions. They regularly ask adults questions such as “Where did we come from?” and “What is fair and just?” Previous scholars have shown that children reap significant educational benefits from prioritizing such philosophical inquiry at a young age, including strengthened problem-solving skills and increased school engagement (Lipman, 2008; Wartenberg, 2014, 2009). In order to respond to such questions in ways that encourage continued philosophical inquiry, educators must reflect upon the ethical nature of such questions and have the skills to guide

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children in learning to ask thoughtful and probing questions (Wartenberg, 2014, 2009).

Thomas Wartenberg (2014), a leading scholar of teaching philosophy in preK-12 schooling, discusses the significance of *philosophy* as follows: At its most basic level, philosophy attempts to solve fundamental puzzles about our lives and the world in which we find ourselves (p. 4). Children are philosophical thinkers and are capable of confronting philosophical issues influenced by their childhood experiences in solving problems (Matthews, 1994, 1980). Children who are able to identify and inquire into personal, social, and economic complexities exhibit important critical thinking skills that can allow them to engage in democratic society in personally and politically meaningful ways. Critical thinking is central to questions of social and political democracy, and one of the functions of schooling is to develop citizens who think deeply about ethical concerns affecting a range of communities and public constituents (Portelli, 1994). Thus, it is important for educators to learn how to guide students in critical and philosophical thinking.

Philosophy is not a required subject and is missing in most elementary schools in the United States and Canada. And yet, children's picturebooks are commonly employed in a range of geographic spaces within schools, including school libraries and classrooms, and are used for a range of purposes, including for teaching English Language Arts, Social Studies, and other subjects. Picturebooks are an excellent entry-point to discussing ethical and philosophical questions, and thus we assert that picturebooks may be mobilized in a range of school spaces and subjects in order to present a culturally responsive curriculum (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2014; Murriss 1992) that responds to a range of identity-based experiences in a pluralistic society while advancing issues of equity and justice (for more studies of mobilizing picturebooks for social justice see: Maton et al., 2022; Skrlac Lo, 2019; Wargo & Coleman, 2021; Wiseman, Vehabovic, & Jones, 2019). Educators can hone children's critical thinking skills through mobilizing philosophical inquiry, and this article provides an image of how such programs can and have been implemented in the preK-6 classroom.

This article is structured as follows. First, we discuss the design of the philosophical inquiry program on which this article is based, and the research that we conducted on this program. Next, we outline, in turn, three curriculum design factors that preK-6 educators should consider when teaching philosophical thinking through children's picturebooks: the significance of philosophical inquiry in promoting critical thinking in children; the impact of culturally responsive discussion on raising student engagement; and the benefits of educator collaboration in philosophical inquiry projects. Following this, we offer some final thoughts summarizing how preK-6 teachers might mobilize critical and philosophical thinking through integrating philosophical read-aloud and discussions of picturebooks in their own classrooms. The article closes by discussing key recommendations for the implementation of philosophical inquiry programs in preschool and elementary schools.

Philosophical Inquiry for Children: Research and Theory

Philosophy for Children¹ has been practiced in many countries since the 1980s. However, mainstream schooling has generally engaged this subject with limited interest, and philosophy has not generally been embedded within public school curriculum policy (Millett & Tapper, 2012). Philosophy for Children is mainly focused on children's cognitive, moral, and aesthetic growth through shared inquiry into philosophical issues (Reznitskaya, 2008; Lipman, 1988). Millett and Tapper (2012) emphasize the importance of integrating philosophy into education because it plays a critical role in the study of cognitive (epistemology) and argument (critical thinking) skills. Scholars support guiding children in philosophical discussions because it can promote their philosophical participation in both formal school environments along with informal settings extending beyond the classroom (Murris, 2000; Haynes, 2001; Matthews, 1994). Alongside the values ascribed to socialization in critical thinking skills, engaging in a dialogic collective environment encourages children to identify and pursue thought-provoking questions. For children to express their ideas, philosophical inquiry encourages them to provide reasons for their stance and participate in dialogic conversations with peers and adults where they can exhibit skill in justifying their viewpoints. Therefore, practices that encourage dialogic discussion, such as creating and challenging each other's reasoning promote psychological tools (Vygotsky, 1962) that enhance critical thinking skills. Philosophy for Children pedagogy provides an environment that promotes future philosophical discussions founded on the transfer of argumentative debate.

Liou and Rojas (2021) argued that students reposition themselves as generators of knowledge when culturally affirming practices are nurtured and when they participate in their own educational experience established on a humanistic and justice-oriented foundation. Previous studies have shown that culturally responsive curriculum supports young children in building self-confidence and self-acceptance (Gunn, Brice, & Peterson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2014; Compton-Lilly, 2006). Additionally, Copple and Bredekamp (2009) noted that early childhood educators' effectiveness in supporting a child's learning is primarily predicated upon understanding a child's family and community. Nevertheless, to implement culturally responsive practice involves educators focusing not only on learning about family and community, but also on having a more complete understanding of every child's ethnicity and cultural identity (Gay, 2018).

Davis, Dent, Meiners, and Richie (2022) point to the necessity of an abolition feminist framework in change-making work. An abolitionist feminist framework bridges the feminist commitment to enhanced dialectic and relationality with a decarceral logic. Here, state, and individual violence are considered inextricably bound, and thus this framework involves the —ability to look both inward and outward, to meet both immediate demands and confront broad systems of injustice² (Davis, Dent, Meiners, & Richie, 2022, p. 4). When teaching picturebooks through an abolitionist feminist lens, children are guided to examine the relationality amongst book characters, ponder the significance and impact of violence on

people and communities broadly, and consider how to nurture a collective sense of enhanced safety, support and resources for people and communities. An abolition feminist lens encourages the classroom community to engage in dialectical and relational sense-making processes while honing skill in, and commitment to, working through challenging conflict together (Davis, Dent, Meiners, & Richie, 2022; Love, 2019). This framework presents a useful mechanism for assessing the quality and criticality of curriculum and pedagogy when teaching philosophical inquiry through picturebooks.

What Did the Project Look Like?

The University of Northeast is a state university well-known across one state for its K-12 teacher preparation programs. The Philosophy department located in the University of Northeast has instituted a program called Children's Philosophy Program. The program seeks to support preservice teachers in both identifying a direct relevance of philosophical thinking and coursework to their future professional work as educators, as well as providing opportunity for preservice teachers to gain experience teaching philosophical thinking.

Embedded within a foundational Philosophy course, the Children's Philosophy Program places preservice teachers in local schools, childcare centers, and community-based schools to facilitate 30-minute to one-hour long philosophical inquiry sessions for eight consecutive weeks. Here, preservice teachers draw upon and apply their foundational philosophical training when reading and discussing children's picturebooks with school children in preschool to sixth grade (preK-6). The college students' task is to carry out interactive reading sessions with the school children while encouraging the children to ask philosophical questions, guiding children to construct thoughtful answers, and expanding the children's understanding of broader questions surrounding issues of sociopolitical and environmental ethics. After they gain one year of experience as volunteers in this program, some preservice teachers are chosen to serve as teaching assistants in the Children's Philosophy Program initiative, where they mentor volunteers and model teaching philosophical inquiry for their peers.

The Children's Philosophy Program initiative encourages its teaching assistants who mainly consists of preservice teachers to collaborate with one another, critically examine children's picturebooks, and critically reflect upon their classroom presentations for future planning purposes. The program faculty provides the teaching assistants with guidance on how to carry out interactive reading sessions, how to ask philosophical questions, and how to guide thoughtful conversations about issues of broader philosophical significance.

The research study informing this paper draws upon data from a focus group study of how five teaching assistants in the Children's Philosophy Program reflect upon their learning and engagement in the program. According to Creswell (2002), focus groups involve collection of extensive data based on the group's collective understanding of an experience. Therefore, focus groups are useful

when the participants have similar experiences, are asked open ended questions, and are prompted to respond.

In this study, all five teaching assistants had completed the foundation course in Philosophy that prepared them to teach philosophical inquiry to students using children's literature and volunteered to be interviewed about their experiences in the Children's Philosophy Program initiative. In the focus groups, they were invited to share their experiences, perceptions, and reflections in the Children's Philosophy Program. They then met with study investigators, Authors 1, 3 and 4, who are faculty at University of Northeast, and interviewed the teaching assistants using open-ended questions during the interviews. Focus groups were conducted through Webex teleconferencing software and were held three times for a period of one hour each. All teaching assistants were given the opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences in promoting philosophical inquiry using picturebooks.

The research study used purposeful sample of the participants (i.e., the teaching assistants) because of their similar experiences (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1996). During the three sessions, the investigators probed and restated the group responses to elicit longer and more comprehensive responses. At the end of each interview session, the participants were asked to clarify or add information. Data was analyzed by the investigators using a field notes-based analysis with transcripts of video tapes (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Using the questions from the protocol, words and phrases that were meaningful to the study were identified with description of the main themes. Data was recursively analyzed through culturally responsive pedagogy and abolitionist feminist frames, derived from the scholarly literature. To validate the results and increase credibility of the focus group study, findings were shared with the participants through a process of participant validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The findings discussed in this article are based on a study of how teaching assistants reflect upon their participation in teaching philosophical inquiry through children's picturebooks in the Children's Philosophy Program. Note that pseudonyms are used in this article to represent the study's participants, philosophy program, and university. We, the authors, assert that our findings hold important lessons and implications that can guide both preservice and in-service teachers in designing effective philosophical inquiry curriculum for preschool through sixth grade students.

Findings

Critical Thinking and Philosophical Inquiry

The teaching assistants led interactive reading sessions with children through reading picturebooks aloud and asking the children open-ended questions to trigger discussion of philosophical themes. One teaching assistant noted, "all the kids are very attentive and love the stories. They love seeing us come." Philosophical inquiry activities were a popular weekly activity amongst children in the school.

The Children's Philosophy Program intended to provide opportunity for philosophical discussions through asking questions designed to provoke children's thinking and actively engage them in the learning process. One teaching assistant stated, "I approach teaching in the program by asking a lot of thought-provoking questions with my end goal, and the thought in the back of my mind of leading a discussion." The teaching assistant further clarified that they would follow this up by questioning what they [i.e., the students] have been thinking about... and approaching it from a different angle. The teaching assistants sought to construct questions that would encourage children to look at philosophical issues from multiple perspectives and angles.

Discussions of concepts such as empathy, respect, courage, compassion, and other important human values were common in the philosophical inquiry lessons. These ethical and dispositional concepts also frequently emerged in the teaching assistants' reflections upon the lessons that they taught. For example, the teaching assistant read out loud the picture book, *The Name Jar*, and asked children about their individual experiences of having experienced put-downs due to diversity in skin color, name/s, or elements of physical appearance, and the children impatiently recalled and shared many such occurrences. In addition, the teaching assistants led further discussions that provoked conversation amongst the children about how they felt and expressed courage when facing significant challenges or when defending others who experienced put-downs connected to their identity-based differences. Here, children enthusiastically discussed issues of social worth connected to outer appearance rather than the inner person. The teaching assistants found that children were eager to discuss concepts exemplifying moral values, including issues of conformity, courage, self-identity, beauty, social pressure, and empathy.

The teaching assistants also asked students to think deeply about relationships and connections in their own lives. In reading and then discussing the book, *Will You Be My Friend?*, authored by Sam McBratney and illustrated by Anita Jeram, one teaching assistant drew attention to new vocabulary words while guiding discussions about the meaning of friendship, how to interact with friends, how to show affection to friends, and different ways to show love to family members of a friend. Another teaching assistant stated that it is critical to think deeply about the questions to ask students about important matters such as friendship, because friendship may be defined differently based on the diverse racial and linguistic backgrounds of friends. She pointed out: "Friendship... is accepting people that are different, accepting that you can have a best friend that looks completely different than you, maybe their family speaks a different language, and having that acceptance is part of friendships." Here, the teaching assistant draws attention to the importance of having an open mind, while reducing prejudices, biases and stereotypes in order to support students in learning to strengthen their socioemotional skills connected with friendship.

We find that critical thinking skills were important for shaping how children interpreted their environment and their orientation toward issues of equity and social justice. The teaching assistants in our study stressed that children are philosophical thinkers and pushed back on the prevailing notion that philosophy is

too hard for children. Rather, they articulated that open-ended questions are useful for placing agency in the hands of children, as they become increasingly empowered to think and talk for themselves.

Culturally Responsive and Abolition Feminist Curriculum

The Children's Philosophy Program prioritizes the use of culturally responsive and abolitionist feminist picturebooks and strives to create an environment that encourages children to openly share their thoughts about cultural issues that directly connect to their backgrounds and experiences while building relationships with one another. Thus, teaching assistants are encouraged to ask questions that allow students to bring their cultural and other identity-related backgrounds into the classroom and hone their pedagogical skill in designing and implementing culturally responsive curriculum.

Children learned about cultures different from their own through picturebook read-alouds and discussions. In our study, several teaching assistants discussed reading picturebooks that portrayed cultures that diverged from the heritages and experiences of the children they taught. The picturebook *The Arabic Quilt: An Immigrant Story*, authored by Aya Khalil and illustrated by Anait Semirdzhyan, features a young child who has newly immigrated from Egypt to the U.S. and experiences teasing in school. After reading this book, the children became immensely interested in Arab culture and Arabic language. The teaching assistant guiding discussion of this book, Stephanie, encouraged children to look up their names in Arabic, and share empathetic feelings for the protagonist. Another teaching assistant, Valentina, read children the picturebook *The Name Jar*, which is authored and illustrated by Yangsook Choi, and portrays a young Korean girl who is new to school in the U.S. and explores questions of whether or not to change her name to one that is Americanized in order to make her classmates and teachers more comfortable, and ends with the young girl choosing to keep her real name. The teaching assistant sought to nurture empathy and understanding for the protagonist of this story amongst children and did so both through asking probing questions as well as personalizing the story.

When discussing their experiences teaching culturally diverse curriculum, both Stephanie and Valentina shared personal stories with the children in order to build enhanced empathy and connection with the texts. Stephanie and Valentina disclosed bicultural perspectives and told the children about their experiences learning to adapt to the American classroom when they first came to study in the U.S. In our study's focus group, Valentina described how her personal narrative kept the children captivated, and especially when she revealed that she had experienced teasing due to her name and had been bullied because she did not speak English fluently. Valentina also described to the children how she had been forced to change her name multiple times in order to accommodate teachers who found it difficult to correctly pronounce her name. Both Valentina and Stephanie expressed appreciation that Children's Philosophy Program classroom placed

them together, because it allowed them to collaborate, connect and share common experiences.

Teaching assistants sought to center questions about racial, cultural and citizenship diversity in their discussions with students. One teaching assistant spoke about discussing the book *Same, Same, but Different*, authored and illustrated by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw. This book features two boys that live in different countries and maintained connection through writing to one another as pen pals. The teaching assistant described how discussions about this book led students to an understanding that despite the boys having different lifestyles and experiences, they still had similarities that should be embraced.

The teaching assistants in this program stated that they prioritized children's mental health over academic needs and practiced culturally responsive teaching through making adaptations to support children who needed assistance. One teaching assistant explained how she sought to first understand students' interests and hobbies prior to engaging them in a philosophical inquiry session. Another teaching assistant acknowledged that the teaching experience of philosophy led her to self-reflect on subconscious stereotyping and critically reflect upon her experience of growing up in an environment populated by people with similar cultures. Overall, our study finds that young children responded positively to such culturally responsive resources and discussions.

The researchers would like to note that while the teaching assistants seemed to have some awareness of the significance and impact of culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, that there was little discussion of the use of picturebooks in pushing back upon broader systems of structural and systemic domination and oppression. Thus, in this sense, we believe that our project holds room to continue to grow in order to take up core principles of abolition feminism in our work with children and undergraduate and graduate students.

Collaboration Strengthens Philosophical Programming

Our study finds that multiple stakeholder collaboration promotes enhanced relationality, empathy, and learning. The teaching assistants, university faculty, classroom teachers and children worked together as a team in order to ask thoughtful questions and gain insights into the backgrounds and experiences of others. The teaching assistants explained that they frequently worked together to design curriculum and that they sought to share leadership roles in the classroom. They planned their reading sessions as a team and would follow up each teaching session with a debrief session afterward. The teaching assistants learned from one another and honed their skills through witnessing the pedagogical decisions of others and reflecting upon their teaching experiences.

Team collaboration led to the development of a creative range of solutions when pedagogical difficulties arose. For example, the shift from in-person to remote instruction during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic created some logistical problems for the Children's Philosophy Program. Subsequently, key organizers in the Children's Philosophy Program team met (i.e., the teaching

assistants and the program director), and collectively developed interactive methods for using virtual instructional tools. Their collaborative problem-solving allowed the program to meet their goals. Success was evident even amidst several technical mishaps during virtual reading sessions because the team worked together to address glitches and plan ahead to predict and mitigate technological difficulties.

Continuing collaboration amongst volunteers and TAs was critical for productive teaching experiences. Collaboration was wrapped into all stages of the curriculum planning process, including when teaching assistants would help volunteers identify a topic, choose a picturebook, and prepare the lesson presentation. One teaching assistant suggested, I think going forward, that our college students that are volunteering for this program [should] understand that the more collaboration between them and the teaching assistants, the better the experience everyone is going to have in the meetings [with children]. Collaboration was positioned as necessary for enhancing relationships and pedagogical strength, in order to create a rigorous classroom teaching experience.

Concluding Thoughts

Philosophical inquiry through reading and discussing children's picturebooks holds significant potential for strengthening children's critical thinking skills. Further, such inquiry allows for a process of humanizing literacy pedagogies through creating a literacy learning environment that fosters students' critical thinking and promotes social justice education (Schutz, Woodard, Diaz, & Peek, 2019). The process of asking, and seeking to answer, creative and probing questions helps children and adults alike to sharpen their analytic skill and probe into deeper ethical questions connected to social, economic, and political issues. Children should be involved in discussions that foster philosophical inquiry at a young age (Lipman, 2008), and teachers can improve their skill in asking questions and mobilizing philosophical inquiry in the preschool and elementary classroom through concerted self-study and collaboration with colleagues who are similarly committed to boosting children's critical thinking skills through philosophical curriculum and pedagogy. Our study finds that multiple stakeholder engagement in the design and implementation of philosophical curriculum and pedagogy helps strengthen the quality of classroom activities, the philosophical questions that are asked of children, and other challenges that arise in the classroom.

The integration of culturally responsive curriculum that reflects a range of identities amongst student and educator populations opens doors to making and sharing meaningful connections between philosophical questions and personal experiences. Simultaneously, abolition feminist curriculum can encourage students to think in complicated, layered, and dialectical ways about justice while creating opportunities for children to recognize and consider methods for interrupting domination in their real and imaginary lives. In our critical reflection upon this study and project, we determine that we have further to grow in training our

undergraduate and graduate teaching assistants to deeply engage with the tenets of abolition feminist and apply its focus on recognizing and dismantling systems of domination to their work in guiding philosophical discussions with children. We believe that together, culturally responsive and abolitionist feminist curriculum and pedagogy can boost children's engagement in school, assist in establishing a collaborative and caring classroom environment, and support children in the development of their critical thinking and relationality skills. We suggest that classroom teachers reflect upon how they are presenting and discussing picturebooks with preschool- and elementary school-aged children and consider implementing components of a philosophical curriculum and pedagogy into their classroom teaching.

Recommendations

Teaching children to ask and respond to thoughtful philosophical questions requires incorporating a diverse range of pedagogical and dispositional tools. Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations when preparing students to support philosophical inquiry in early childhood and elementary programs and schools:

- **Choose picturebooks that support culturally responsive and abolitionist feminist goals.** Educators should ensure that picturebooks reflect a diverse range of identities (i.e., racial, gender, cultural, social class, disability, and other forms of diversity), while simultaneously supporting student learning about how to recognize and combat interpersonal domination in all its forms.
- **Ask thoughtful questions.** Strong philosophical questions are clear, openended, thought-provoking, and connect the curriculum to children's interests and cultural experiences. Such questions will promote positive self-identity, self-acceptance, and self-confidence amongst the student body.
- **Engage in ongoing assessment of student knowledge and comprehension.** Throughout philosophical discussions, educators should continually assess children's viewpoints, strengths, and gaps in knowledge about the topic. This information will help educators determine which questions are relevant and responsive to the learning needs of their students. Further, it will assist educators in documenting children's progress in meeting the educational goals of interactive reading sessions.
- **Encourage children to take multiple perspectives.** When children are able to view a topic through multiple perspectives, they are better able to learn and practice empathy. Such questions promote learning about diversity and fairness at a young age and foster deeper critical thinking practices.
- **Educators should model strong interpersonal skills.** Educators will be more effective in teaching philosophical inquiry when they can provide

care, patience, understanding, passion for the subject matter, commitment, and flexibility in guiding philosophical discussions.

- **Plan multiple opportunities for children to practice philosophical thinking.** Rather than planning stand-alone events, we suggest regularly integrating philosophical curriculum into the classroom. This will allow children to become acquainted with a range of approaches to critical thinking and will allow them to hone their skills in asking and responding to philosophical questions over time.
- **Educator collaboration strengthens philosophical curriculum and outcomes.** Educators tend to develop stronger curricular and pedagogical skills when they develop curriculum in partnership with other professionals. Teamwork fosters acquisition of collaborative skill in resolving problems that arise in the implementation of philosophical inquiry activities.

APPLICATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS:

Practitioners may consider adoption and application of the following key concepts when designing philosophical lessons for children:

- Careful selection of children's picturebooks
- Creating thought-provoking open-ended question
- Preparing a philosophical lesson plan
- Highlighting salient aspects of philosophy in the stories
- Ask children questions to help them understand the book.
- Identify concepts that arise in your discussion.
- Discuss how to apply these concepts to the U.S. classroom context. (Examples of concepts that may arise when reading picturebooks include fear, danger, stealing, bravery, bullying, fairness, colorism, self-identity, beauty, social pressure, conformity, courage, bravery, etc.)

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Perception of the University Students on Entrepreneurship Education

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This study focused on the perception of the students on entrepreneurship education. Entrepreneurship education is considered an effective tool for influencing students' learning orientation and expression. This study examined the effects of entrepreneurship education and learning on the entrepreneurial implementation intentions of students at the Universities. This study employed an explanatory method. For the study, 600 questionnaires were collected from north Indian university students. Multiple regression was used for the analysis of the study. The results showed that teaching methods significantly impact entrepreneurship stimulate students' interest and enhance students' knowledge innovation for business start-ups. The findings of the analysis also revealed that practical activities are mainly based on vocational skill activities, the teaching methods should contain extensive attention to critical thinking and idea generation activities as graded mechanisms of the degree program. It was also recommended that engagement of students with entrepreneurial development initiatives provided by institutions should involve students across all degree levels. Therefore, to increase the prospect of assignation in entrepreneurial activities after graduation students should generate viable business ideas, identify market gaps, engage in business startups, and practical business plans, and engage in invention and innovations.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, education, teaching, perceptions, university, students

Introduction

India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, and entrepreneurship has been identified as a key driver of economic growth. Entrepreneurial activity can help create jobs, generate wealth, and stimulate innovation. India has a large and growing youth population, which is expected to be a major contributor to the country's economic development (Arun Kumar & Shekhar, 2020). Entrepreneurship education can help unlock the potential of this demographic dividend by equipping young people with the skills and knowledge needed to start and run successful businesses. With the changing nature of the job market, traditional employment is no longer a reliable option for many people. Entrepreneurship provides an alternative path to employment and economic independence. The Indian government has launched several initiatives to promote entrepreneurship, such as the Startup India program, which aims to create a startup

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ecosystem in the country. Entrepreneurship education is a key component of these initiatives. There has been a cultural shift in India towards entrepreneurship, with more and more people viewing it as a viable career option (Todd & Javalgi, 2007). This has led to an increased demand for entrepreneurship education among university students. In light of these factors, understanding the perception of university students on entrepreneurship education in India can help identify gaps in the current system and provide insights into how to improve the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs. It can also help in designing policies and programs that are better aligned with the needs and aspirations of young entrepreneurs in India. Understanding the perception of university students on entrepreneurship education can help identify gaps in the current system. It can provide insights into the effectiveness of existing entrepreneurship education programs and identify areas where improvements can be made. The perception of university students on entrepreneurship education can help in designing programs that are better aligned with their needs and aspirations (Muhammed & Deepak, 2018). This can enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs and improve their impact on students.

Developing countries and populous countries face several issues when it comes to unemployment. A lack of skills and education is a significant barrier to employment in many developing and populous countries. Many people lack the necessary skills to compete in the job market, and the education system may not be adequately preparing them for the workforce. In many developing and developed countries, the informal economy is a significant employer, but these jobs are often low-paying and insecure. Many people work in the informal economy out of necessity, rather than choice (Abdul Rahim, & Mukhtar, 2021).

Starting a business requires capital, and many people in developing and populous countries lack access to capital. This makes it difficult for them to start their own businesses and create jobs. Many developing and populous countries lack the investment needed to create jobs and stimulate economic growth. This can result in a stagnant job market, with few opportunities for employment. High population growth can put pressure on the job market, making it difficult to create enough jobs to keep pace with the growing population (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). Technological change can have a significant impact on employment, particularly in developing countries. Automation and outsourcing can lead to job losses, particularly in low-skilled occupations. To address the issue of unemployment in developing and populous countries, several measures can be taken. These include investing in education and skills training, promoting entrepreneurship and small business development, increasing access to capital, and attracting investment. Governments can also implement policies that promote job creation, such as infrastructure development, and provide social safety nets to support those who are unemployed (Peng, Lu, & Kang, 2012).

The perception of university students on entrepreneurship education can help encourage more students to consider entrepreneurship as a viable career option. If students have a positive perception of entrepreneurship education, they are more likely to consider starting their own businesses and contributing to the growth of the economy. The perception of university students on entrepreneurship education

can help in supporting government initiatives aimed at promoting entrepreneurship. By understanding the needs and aspirations of students, policymakers can design programs and policies that are better aligned with the interests of young entrepreneurs (Othman Mwasalwiba, 2010).

Entrepreneurship education can help in enhancing the employability of students, even if they choose not to start their own businesses. The skills and knowledge acquired through entrepreneurship education can be applied in other areas of work, making students more competitive in the job market. The perception of university students on entrepreneurship education in India is important for identifying gaps in the current system, enhancing program effectiveness, encouraging entrepreneurship, supporting government initiatives, and enhancing employability. By understanding the needs and aspirations of students, policymakers, and educators can design programs that better meet the demands of young entrepreneurs and contribute to the economic growth of the country. Thus, the main objective of the study conducted to how teaching methods in entrepreneurship education affect students' interest in entrepreneurship and enhance their knowledge for starting a business and to what extent the university support systems assist students with innovative business startup ideas.

Literature Review

Several studies have explored the perception of university students on entrepreneurship education in India. A study by Trivedi (2016) found that students who received an entrepreneurship education were more likely to consider entrepreneurship as a career option. The study also found that students who received entrepreneurship education had higher levels of self-efficacy and perceived entrepreneurial skills. Li (2011) found that entrepreneurship education had a positive impact on the entrepreneurial intentions of students. The study also found that students who received entrepreneurship education had higher levels of perceived social support for entrepreneurship. According to Rastogi and Narendran (2018), students who received entrepreneurship education had a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurship. The study also found that entrepreneurship education had a positive impact on the perceived feasibility of starting a business. The entrepreneurship education had a positive impact on the perceived desirability and feasibility of starting a business. The study also found that students who received entrepreneurship education had higher levels of perceived entrepreneurial skills and self-efficacy (Kumar & Balaji, 2017; Bodnar et al., 2015). A study by Raghavendra and Raghavendra (2018) found that entrepreneurship education had a positive impact on the entrepreneurial intentions of students. The study also found that students who received entrepreneurship education had higher levels of perceived social support for entrepreneurship. As per the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), there are currently nearly 31 million unemployed Indians looking for a job. The only solution to overcome this issue is self-employment. Another study aimed to contribute to understanding the perception of B school students towards entrepreneurship education. The data reflects that students perceive moderately to entrepreneurial education. Even though the University has

made efforts to build entrepreneurial habits among the management students, the study reveals that all those efforts have not achieved the desired objective. Inadequate qualified teachers and interest in paid employment are perceived to be problems with entrepreneurial skill acquisition (Muhammed & Deepak, 2018; Tailor 2018). Entrepreneurship is not only an important driver of economic growth, productivity, innovation, and employment. It also is a key player in the life cycle of businesses, giving rise to new firms to take the place of those whose influence and relevance are waning. But as anyone who has started a business knows well, being an entrepreneur is not easy. Entrepreneurs often must fight an uphill battle to get their new ventures off the ground, and many never succeed (Mansi, 2016; Maxwell Ayodele Olokundun, 2017). The students agreed that entrepreneurship education was beneficial to them in very offsets. Through this type of education, an individual can easily make for their survival and have a positive attitude towards what they are learning through this type of education as there are lots of opportunities for them to become self-sufficient and compete in this phase of the world (Vivek & Gupta, 2016). In a study by Santha (2016), it was found that most of the respondents preferred to start a partnership form of business and would like to become the manager of the business. The major source of finance for the proposed business for the respondents was their own funds, and the major reason for becoming an entrepreneur was the desire to start their own business. The major personality traits and skills that the respondents possessed to be successful entrepreneurs were honesty and confidence. However, most of the respondents had a low probability of becoming entrepreneurs after graduation. In another study by Vivek and Murugan (2018), it was found that although most students have a positive perception of entrepreneurship as a career, only a small percentage of them actually choose entrepreneurship as a career option. Lack of awareness was identified as a major hindrance to entrepreneurship, and pre-existing inspiration about successful entrepreneurs was found to be strongly associated with the intent to start a new business (Maxwell Ayodele Olokundun, 2017). The study suggests that collaboration between the government and educational institutions to provide more professional courses in entrepreneurship could act as a catalyst for promoting entrepreneurship. A study by Basu (2014) attempted to develop a working framework for an entrepreneurship education ecosystem in India, with preliminary inputs and evidence. The study proposes future research ideas to facilitate the adoption and further development of the framework, which will aid policymakers of a developing nation.

Overall, the literature suggests that entrepreneurship education has a positive impact on the perception of university students of entrepreneurship education in India. It enhances their entrepreneurial intentions, perceived feasibility, and perceived entrepreneurial skills. Moreover, the literature also highlights the importance of social support and self-efficacy in promoting entrepreneurship among university students in India. Based on existing literature and an understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship, the researcher has formulated the following hypothesis.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between teaching methods in entrepreneurship stimulating students' interest and enhancing students' knowledge of business startups.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between College/University support systems and support to students on innovation for business startups.

This hypothesis suggests that there is a direct and positive association between the teaching methods in entrepreneurship stimulating students' interest and enhancing students' knowledge of business start-ups and College/University support systems and support to students on innovation for business startups.

Methodology

In this cross-sectional study, students from North Indian universities were requested to participate. The study was partitioned into two distinct sections. The initial segment centered on demographical data and was based on structured questionnaire responses. The data collected in this section included the rate of response, copies of the questionnaire administered, and cross-tabulation tables of frequency for categorical data such as gender, age, and educational qualification. Simple random sampling was chosen and randomly 600 students were selected. The prior confirmation was taken from the respondents. Based on consent distributed and requested for participation in the study. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity of the data. Both male and female students from North Indian universities students participated in the study. A self-administered questionnaire was used for the study. In total 700 questionnaires were distributed and only 623 were accepted. Based on data cleaning considered 600 samples for the study. The response rate was 89% for the study. All participants were students in north Indian universities who pursuing their graduation and post-graduation. The data was collected from June to December 2021. For the present study primary data, as well as secondary data were collected. The second section involved hypothesis testing and aimed to present the data with the aid of statistical software tools such as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and MS Excel.

Results and Discussion

The study finds out the interest in doing the job or doing business or another activity. Around 46.10% were interested in doing a business (Family + Own) out of that 28.55% showed interest in doing their own business and 17.55% of students wanted to expand their family/relative business and 50.35% wanted to do a job (Private as well as Government). Around 33.33% of students are interested in a government job (See Table 1).

Table 1. Respondent's Response Toward the Interest of

Interest of	Female	Male	Grand Total	Percentage (%)
Doing Government Job	148	40	188	33.33
Doing Private Job	73	23	96	17.02
Doing for Society (Sewa)	14	6	20	3.55
Doing Own Business	35	126	161	28.55
Expand my Family/relative Business	14	85	99	17.55
Grand Total	284	280	564	100.00

Source: Field Study Result (June 2021).

The data for this study were collected from male and female respondents. There were 284 male respondents, representing 50.4%, and 280 female respondents, representing 49.6%, indicating an equal gender distribution. In terms of age, 261 respondents (46.5%) were between 15 and 19 years old, 270 (47.9%) were between 20 and 24 years old, and 33 (5.6%) were above 25 years old. This indicates that the majority of respondents, 270 (47.9%), were in the 20-24 age group, which suggests that the majority of respondents were young and capable of responding independently. Regarding academic discipline, 397 respondents (70.4%) were from commerce, 129 (22.9%) were from arts, and 38 (6.7%) were from education, science, and other fields. However, considering the distribution of respondents across different disciplines, it can be inferred that the views of respondents from various academic backgrounds were taken into account in this study (See Table 2).

Table 2. Biographical Data of the Respondents

Demographic Distribution		Total	Percentage %
Gender	F	284	50.4
	M	280	49.6
Age	15-19	261	46.5
	20-24	270	47.9
	Above 25years	33	5.6
Degree Programme (Educational Qualification)	Commerce	397	70.4
	Arts	129	22.9
	Education and Science, Others	38	6.7

Source: Field Study Result (June 2021).

The second section involved hypothesis testing on how teaching methods in entrepreneurship education affect students' interest in entrepreneurship and enhance their knowledge for starting a business and to what extent the university support systems assist students with innovative business startup ideas. The majority of students responded positively to the statement regarding the use of new and innovative teaching methods in entrepreneurship education. This indicates that creative approaches are being employed in the delivery of such courses. The analysis reveals that the mean score of the respondents was 3.99, suggesting that the students were generally in agreement with this statement. Additionally, most of the students agreed that the courses provided them with the necessary skills to handle ambiguity in the real world, thereby overcoming perceived fears associated with entrepreneurship. The mean score of the respondents for this statement was 3.93, indicating a positive response from the students regarding the teaching methods used. According to the study conducted by Yolleand Gailly (2008), entrepreneurs possess distinct values and attributes that cannot be effectively

taught in a classroom environment. This study highlights the importance of experiential learning and practical training in entrepreneurship education, as opposed to solely theoretical instruction. It also emphasizes the need for aspiring entrepreneurs to seek out mentorship, networking opportunities, and real-world experiences to develop the necessary skills and mindset for success (Agarwal, 2013). While entrepreneurship education can provide a foundation of knowledge and basic skills, it is ultimately the individual's personal drive, determination, and unique qualities that will determine their success as an entrepreneur.

Most respondents affirmed that the method of teaching provided an opportunity to learn by doing project/assignment work. The analysis revealed that the mean score of 4.017 suggests that more respondents view the teaching approaches engaged in entrepreneurship education as experiential. Abdul Karim (2016) found that there is a strong correlation between the curriculum method and the entrepreneurial intentions of students. This suggests that the approach to curriculum design in entrepreneurship education can greatly influence the development of students' entrepreneurial intentions. This study highlights the importance of an effective and well-designed entrepreneurship curriculum that is tailored to foster students' creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills (Agarwal, 2014a). By adopting a curriculum that is experiential, practical, and relevant to the real-world challenges faced by entrepreneurs, students are more likely to develop a keen interest in entrepreneurship and pursue entrepreneurial opportunities in the future.

The mean score of 3.984925 for the statement indicates that the respondents generally hold a positive view of the institution's efforts to promote entrepreneurship. The highest mean score is for the statement about the institution promoting students' entrepreneurship ideas, which suggests that many students may have innovative ideas that are being supported by the institution. The positive response to the statement about business incubation initiatives indicates that the institution is providing support to students beyond just promoting their ideas. The mean score 3.912625 for this statement is slightly lower than for the statement about promoting students' entrepreneurship ideas, but still relatively high, indicating that many students are aware of the institution's incubation initiatives and may have benefited from them. The positive response to the statement about seed funding suggests that the institution is providing financial support to students who are developing their products or business ideas. The lower mean score for this statement compared to the previous two may indicate that not all students are aware of this particular initiative, or that not all students have benefited from it. According to the study conducted by Mod Asri, Ahmad, and Ismail (2019), a significant and positive correlation exists between the environment and entrepreneurial support with entrepreneurial intentions among students. This suggests that the environment in which students are exposed, as well as the support they receive from various stakeholders, can greatly influence their inclination towards entrepreneurship (Agarwal, 2014b; Sodha, 2020). This includes providing students with access to resources such as mentorship, networking opportunities, and funding, as well as creating an ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurship and innovation. By creating an environment that is supportive of entrepreneurship,

students are more likely to pursue entrepreneurial opportunities and succeed in their ventures. Overall, the information provided suggests that the institution is actively promoting entrepreneurship among its students through various initiatives and that many students are aware of and benefiting from these initiatives (See Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Item Measuring Teaching Method

Statement	Mean Score
The teaching methods provided a new and different experience	3.99115
The course taught us to deal with ambiguity in the real world	3.933275
The approach to teaching provided an opportunity to learn by doing project/ assignment	4.017
The institution promotes Students entrepreneurship idea	3.984925
The institution foster entrepreneurship through business incubator Initiatives	3.912625
Seed funding is an institutional policy for promoting entrepreneurship	3.84495

Source: Field Study Result (June 2021).

The test was to examine the effects of teaching methods in entrepreneurship on students’ interest and enhance students’ knowledge of business start-ups. In the first step, the effect of teaching methods of entrepreneurship on students’ interest and enhancing students’ knowledge for business start-ups was assessed. The R-Square value is the degree of variation of the dependent variable, which can be predicted by the independent variable. Consequently, the analysis revealed that teaching methods in entrepreneurship explained 19% variance in students’ business startups ($R^2 = 0.19$, $F(2, 563) = 131.58$, $p < 0.05$). In the second step, the mediating role of students’ interests was examined. The analysis showed that interest was able to predict 39% variance in students’ business startups over and beyond the effects of teaching methods in entrepreneurship ($R^2 = 0.388$, $F(1, 562) = 181.75$, $p < 0.05$).

In the second step, the effect of College/University support systems to students on innovation for the business start-up was examined. The R-Square value is the dependent variable is degree of variation, which can be expected by the independent variable. Consequently, the analysis that university support systems predicted 5.2% variance in students’ innovations ($R^2 = 0.052$, $F(2, 563) = 30.97$, $p < 0.05$). The facilitating role of sharing knowledge was examined. The analysis showed that knowledge sharing was able to predict 9.7% variance in students’ innovations, over and beyond the effects of College/University support systems ($R^2 = 0.097$, $F(1, 562) = 27.67$, $p < 0.05$) (See Table 4).

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	Df1	Df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.435a	0.19	0.19	0.52972	0.19	131.58	1	563	0.000
2	0.623b	0.388	0.39	0.46088	0.2	181.75	1	562	0.000
3	0.228a	0.052	0.05	0.81	0.05	30.96	1	563	0.000
4	0.311b	0.097	0.09	0.79	0.04	27.67	1	562	0.000

Predictors: (Constant), entrepreneurship teaching methods. Source: Field Study Result (June 2021).
 Predictors: (Constant), Teaching Methods, Students’ Interest and enhancing students’ knowledge for business startup; Predictors: (Constant), university support systems; Predictors: (Constant), university support systems, on innovation for business startup

The significance of the F-change was assessed and it was significant (0.000) and yielded. The effect of teaching methods of entrepreneurship on students' interest and enhance students' knowledge for business startups. The F-value is calculated as the Regression (Sum of Squares =36.92) divided by the Residual (Mean Square =0.28), yielding $F=131.60$ is significant level (Sig =0.000). The F-value is calculated as the Mean Square Regression (37.77) divided by the Mean Square Residual (0.21), yielding $F=177.79$ at an acceptable significant level of 0.000. The results showed the effect of university support systems support to students on innovation for business start-up. The F-value is calculated (20.37) divided by the Residual (0.66), yielding $F=30.97$. The significance was examined university support systems and support to students on innovation for business start-up. The F-value is calculated as the Mean Square Regression (18.87) divided by the Mean Square Residual (0.63), yielding $F=30.05$ at an acceptable significant level of 0.000. Since the results of the ANOVA shows a significant level of 0.000, which states that College/University support systems significantly support to students on innovation for business start-up is therefore accepted. Since the results of the ANOVA significant (See Table 5), the alternate hypothesis which states that teaching methods in entrepreneurship stimulates students' interest and enhance students' knowledge for business startups (H_1) is accepted.

Table 5. ANOVA: Teaching Methods, Students' Interests and Business Startup (1, 2) and College/University Support Systems and Students on Innovation for Business Startup (3, 4)

	Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.92	1	36.92	131.58	0.000a
	Residual	157.98	563	0.281		
	Total	194.91	564			
2	Regression	75.529	2	37.77	177.79	0.000b
	Residual	119.38	562	0.21		
	Total	194.91	564			
3	Regression	20.37	1	20.37	30.97	0.000a
	Residual	370.28	563	0.66		
	Total	390.64	564			
4	Regression	37.74	2	18.87	30.05	0.000b
	Residual	352.90	562	0.63		
	Total	390.64	564			

Predictors: (Constant), entrepreneurship teaching methods. *Source*: Field Study Result (June 2021).

Predictors: (Constant), entrepreneurship teaching methods, students' interest

Dependent Variable: enhance students' knowledge of business startups

Predictors: (Constant), Support Systems

Predictors: (Constant), Support Systems, students on innovation for business startup

Dependent Variable: on innovation for business startup

The results revealed the contributions of teaching methods and students' interest and enhance students' knowledge of business start-ups and their levels are significant. (Teaching methods; $\beta = 0.21$; $t=6.08$; $p<0.001$, interest; $\beta = 0.58$; $t=13.49$; $p<0.05$). The contributions of College/University support systems and support to students' innovation for business start-ups and their levels of significance. (College /University support systems; $\beta = 0.150$; $t=4.40$; $p<0.01$, business start-

ups; $\beta = 0.26$; $t=5.26$; $p<0.05$). Based on the results, the significance levels of the variables are less than 0.05 and the level of significance of F change is also less than 0.05 (0.000). It can be concluded that College/University support systems significantly support to students on innovation for business start-up (See Table 6). Hence, H_2 is accepted.

Table 6. Coefficients_a: Teaching Methods and Students’ Interest and Enhance Students’ Knowledge of Business Startups

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero - order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.32	0.15	0.44	15.92	0.000	0.44	0.43	0.44	1.00	1.00
	Teaching methods in entrepreneurship	0.416	0.07		11.47	0.000					
2	(Constant)	0.85	0.17	0.22	5.04	0.000	0.44	0.25	0.20	0.81	1.23
	Teaching methods in entrepreneurship	0.21	0.04		6.08	0.000					
	Students’ Interest	0.58	0.04	0.49	13.48	0.000	0.59	0.49	0.45	0.81	1.23
3	(Constant)	3.19	0.138	0.23	23.13	0.000	0.23	0.23	0.23	1.00	1.00
	Support Systems	0.19	0.034		5.57	0.000					
	(Constant) Support Systems	2.37	0.207	0.18	11.45	0.000	0.23	0.19	0.18	0.95	1.05
	Innovation	0.15	0.034		4.40	0.000					
	Business Startups	0.26	0.049	0.22	5.26	0.000	0.26	0.22	0.21	0.95	1.05

Dependent Variable: Students’ Interest and enhance students’ knowledge of business startups^a

Dependent Variable: Innovation^b

Source: Field Study Result (June 2021).

Limitations and Future Scope of the Study

The current study utilized a survey method for collecting quantitative data, which may result in respondents providing inaccurate answers. Additionally, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data, which could impact the adequacy of the data collected. It is important to note that the study only focused on students from north India and not the entire country, which may limit the quality of information gathered. Furthermore, the sample size was only around 600 students, which may not be adequate or appropriate for the entire population. Lastly, the study was conducted in 2021, and the current situation may have affected the routine work of the respondents. There is significant future scope for exploring the perceptions of university students on entrepreneurship education. Conducting longitudinal studies to track the perceptions of university students on entrepreneurship education over an extended period. This will help to identify changes in attitudes and perceptions over time. Comparing the perceptions of university students on entrepreneurship education across different universities, courses, and disciplines. This will help to identify the factors that influence student perceptions and how they vary across different contexts.

Implications of the Study

This study is important to policy makers and stakeholders in India regarding the design of an entrepreneurship curriculum that can enhance the development of viable business ideas by students of universities. The result of this study will may help for managements of universities on the formulation and implementation of policies, reliable in innovative activities and entrepreneurship education development of undergraduate's programme in the universities. Universities should develop an entrepreneurship education curriculum that focuses on equipping students with practical skills and knowledge that they can apply in the real world. Universities should collaborate with industry leaders to develop entrepreneurship education programs that are relevant to the needs of the industry. The findings of this study will guide the development of entrepreneurial skills and aptitudes in university students, which in turn will motivate the tendency for job creation and reduction in graduate unemployment. There should be regular monitoring and evaluation of entrepreneurship education programs to determine their effectiveness in equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the business world. This research will contribute to existing knowledge in literature of entrepreneurship education and Skill, by developing an intention that will be useful for researchers in further research on related areas of study.

Practical Implications

Universities should encourage entrepreneurship among students by providing opportunities for them to start and run their own businesses. This can include incubator programs, mentorship, and networking opportunities. Entrepreneurship education should involve experiential learning, such as internships and projects, to help students apply their skills in real-world settings. Entrepreneurship education should incorporate technology and innovation, which are critical elements of successful startups in today's business environment. Entrepreneurship education should be cross-disciplinary, involving students from different fields of study. This can help students develop a broader perspective on business and entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

The perceptions of university students on entrepreneurship education play a significant role in their entrepreneurial intentions and the success of their future businesses. The study found that the contents of the entrepreneurship curriculum have a highly significant effect on students' open-mindedness to generate business ideas, and the design of the curriculum largely affects the extent to which entrepreneurship students develop critical thinking abilities. It was also noted that the experience and skill of entrepreneurship educators within the curriculum are essential for the effective delivery of entrepreneurship courses. While some challenges were identified, such as the difficulty in defining practical activities in

entrepreneurship education and the lack of early introduction of initiatives that can enhance students' abilities to develop business initiatives, there is significant future scope for exploring the perceptions of university students on entrepreneurship education. Further research can be conducted on longitudinal studies, comparative studies, cross-cultural studies, impact studies, and pedagogical studies to identify the factors that influence student perceptions and how they vary across different contexts, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in developing students' entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of university students on entrepreneurship education and highlights the need for continuous improvement in the design and delivery of entrepreneurship courses.

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African Academics in Norway: Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion and Impact on Mental Wellbeing

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This study explored the experiences of inclusion and exclusion of African academics in Norway in various sectors of the society and their participation in these sectors. Using a mixed method research approach, 166 African academics completed a 20-item questionnaire entitled Perceived Exclusion Scale (PES) and two open-ended questions about their mental effects and coping mechanisms of exclusion. Descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis procedures were used to analyze the data. The results showed that the participants experienced exclusion in almost all the sectors of the Norwegian society with concomitant effects of depression and insomnia for most of the participants. Participants mentioned acceptance, confrontational strategy, avoidance strategy, theological group discussion and positive attitudes as key coping mechanisms to exclusion and discrimination. This study could be used as a baseline for future research on the psychological and mental health effects of discrimination of Africans and African-Norwegians. The study is a pointer to the public discourses on the positive sides of immigration in general and the role of migrants' contribution to the Norwegian society.

Keywords: Norway, African academics, inclusion and exclusion, mental wellbeing, minorities

Introduction

Social exclusion and discrimination of minorities in different markets is well documented across many countries (Andersson & Rye, 2023; Andersson & Midtbøen, 2022; Andersson, 2022). Social inclusion on the other hand is a process intended to respond to the rights and needs of the diversity of all people in society by increasing their participation, reducing social exclusion from sectors of society including education and employment UNESCO (2013). The opposite of inclusion, social exclusion is characterized by systems and measures that exclude and/or limit participation. And Raaum, Rogstad, Røed, and Westlie (2009) state that social exclusion occurs when a person is outside the structured arenas of social settings such as employment, school, peer group, or is denied access to the essential structures due to being considered “outsider” or marked as different. Social exclusion takes several forms and occurs in different arenas of life-education, labor market, housing, access to health and social welfare services, etc.

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From a human's rights perspective, exclusion is unacceptable, and governments and societies ought to pursue measures that enhance social inclusion in line with the equality principles of the UN Convention on Political and Civil Rights, and UN Convention on Social Economic and Cultural rights. In this regard, Berry and Sam (2016) called for governmental actions that built values for social inclusion, a measure that supports diversity and multiculturalism (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006, Berry & Sam, 2016).

Context and Issue of Study

Norway is a country built on values of egalitarianism, equity, and acceptance of diversity. Egalitarianism is embedded in the laws and institutions to make it more inclusive for all people. These values and actions allude to the need to entrench human rights and collectively they should lead to the creation of conditions that ensure all citizens, irrespective of racial and cultural backgrounds are able to participate fully in society. However, in practice people from minority backgrounds (minorities) experience exclusion, discrimination and racism which is at odds with the egalitarian foundations of many institutions (Andersson & Rye, 2023; Andersson & Midtbøen, 2022; Andersson, 2022). Statistical trends and research show that some groups experience exclusion and discrimination because of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation across the world. Exclusion experiences are reported anecdotally and, in some research, to occur in contexts such as work, schools, health care/hospitals, in the transport, among others (Ombud, 2018). People of African descent also experience discrimination and exclusion based on their skin color (Gullestad, 2005; Ibrahim, 2019; Kunst & Phillibert, 2018), which suggests that African people experience more exclusion and discrimination in Norway. Discrimination and exclusion have severe impact on people's wellbeing (Moody, Brown, Mathews & Bromberger, 2014; Lee, Kim, & Neblett 2017). Despite this, there is little research on the exclusion experiences of Africans and their impact in different fields of social engagement. Most of the studies conducted about Africans are generic with no nuances (Fangen, 2006; Fangen, 2010; Ombud, 2018; Svendsen, 2014), usually limited to Somalis in Norway, which is the largest immigrant group from Africa (Statistics Norway, 2018, 2021), and barely covers other African populations. In essence, existing research is limited in exploring the diversity of African experiences and more work is needed in this area, including the impact on wellbeing. This study which focused on the higher education (university) sector is one attempt at closing this knowledge gap. We assumed that as contexts of intellectualism, universities are likely to offer positively different experiences for immigrants from African backgrounds. The study therefore adds to the diverse African voices about the discourse of exclusion and inclusion in Norway and provides information critical to formulating better policies that combat discrimination and exclusion.

Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the inclusion and exclusion experiences of Africans in the higher education sector in Norway, the impact of exclusion on mental wellbeing and their strategies to cope with social exclusion.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

- What are African Norwegians' experiences of exclusion?
- What are the effects of exclusion on their mental wellbeing?
- What strategies are employed to cope with exclusion?

Literature Review

Exclusion and/or Discrimination in Norway

Africans in Norway generally form a minority group and contribute to the multicultural diversity of the country. However, exclusion of minorities and immigrants is apparent in the Norwegian society, and 90% of the exclusion occurs in employment. Other areas of exclusion include education, healthcare, and housing sectors (Ibrahim, 2019). In Norway, national statistics trends show labor market exclusion is high at 78% among immigrant populations, with African immigrants alone recording the highest exclusion rate compared with Asian, South and Central Americans (Ombud, 2018). The studies concluded that exclusion is predominant in government agencies where a candidate from the majority background stands a bigger chance of getting jobs with lesser qualification than a person with higher qualification from minority background (Ombud, 2018; Andersson, 2022).

Exclusion occurs also in the education and health sectors. The Universal Declaration and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognize the right to education and health irrespective of background. Access to education and health care is important for all citizens and broad social development. Health care is human right and nation states should achieve, respect, and protect these rights for their citizens (Cohen & Ezer, 2013).

While this is the principle in Norway, research shows that access is unequal for some groups, including first and second-generation migrant groups or minorities. For example, Ombud (2018) reported that even though the school performance of descendants of migrant has improved, including their involvement in higher education, some are still marginalized. Furthermore, most immigrant groups and people of color still have higher school dropout rates, face difficulties with higher education and employment as they score low points in secondary school and have least chance of getting housing or accommodation (Ombud, 2018).

Housing is another sector of exclusion in national trends. The right to housing is an integral part of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that everyone one has the right to housing irrespective of his or her background. Immigrants from Asia, Africa, South and Central America make up a small

percentage of the Norwegian population, yet they are the most economically disadvantaged when it comes to the housing sector (Ombud, 2018). Many experience difficulties renting or buying a house in a competitive market due to negative attitudes and economic disadvantage (Ombud, 2018). According to Brekke, Fladmoe, and Wollebæk (2020) lack of integration is due to not only cultural differences but also exclusion. The same authors believed that discrimination against immigrants causes integration problems, and that education, language and work are necessary for integration (Eimhjellen, Bentsen, & Wollebæk, 2020; Brekke, Fladmoe, & Wollebæk, 2020).

Impact of Exclusion on Mental Wellbeing

Social exclusion can induce a range of negative effects on those feeling excluded. The effects range from economic marginalization, psychological distress to feeling of being unwanted (Moody, Brown, Mathews, & Bromberger, 2014). Being unable to meet survival needs, not realizing one's life goals and feeling unwanted are ingredients for the onset of a range of psychological and mental health issues including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and anti-social behavior (Lee, Kim, & Neblett, 2017).

Research conducted by Andersson and Midtbøen (2022) showed that some races or ethnicities are more valued than others in Norway irrespective of their educational levels and in that same research 39% said Somalians could never be full Norwegians, due to experiences of being excluded in social and economic settings. Immigrants from Asia, Latin America and Africa are victims of discrimination and exclusion within sectors of employment, education, health care, transportation, and housing (Ombud, 2018). The reality of the matter has become a big un-healing sore for Africans in diaspora who migrated to these advanced countries for a better life. Africans in diaspora are struggling to deal with social stressors of discrimination and exclusion daily.

The impact of a sense of rejection, not wanted, can lead to feelings of less self-worth, depression, anxiety about engaging with others in the immediate environment, workplace, and broader society. These can then lead to isolation and deterioration of wellbeing. When the person feels that he/she has skills, competencies, they feel discrimination, cheated and this can lead to anger, and possible engagement in anti-social behaviors.

Strategies for Coping with Exclusion

Social exclusion of people with its psychological and physical effects on its victims has forced these victims to develop different coping strategies to survive or reduce the side effects of the feeling of not being wanted. Coping strategies as explained by researchers involve the mental effort to reduce damaging effects of exclusion such as low self-esteem and sense of loss and helplessness (Brondolo et al., 2009).

The purpose of this study was to understand Africans and African-Norwegian academics experiences of exclusion/discrimination and exclusion within the

various sectors of the society, the effects on their mental health and their coping mechanisms to reduce the adverse psychological effects. The examination of the targeted group in this study is done in the contextual settings of their rights to live in dignity and participation.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of human rights is used in this study to provide an analytical view of how Africans and African Norwegians enjoy their basic human rights. In the conceptual framework of United Nations universal human rights perspective this theory was employed to understand and explain the experiences of Africans and African Norwegians inclusion/social exclusion based on how equality and fairness are reflected in the areas of social settings and services. This right embodied in the Universal Declaration included social (or “welfare”) rights that address matters such as education, food, health services, and employment (Nickel, 2018, 2021).

The idea of human rights stemming from natural rights is that each one of us, no matter who we are and where we are born is entitled to the same basic rights and freedom. The declaration is based on the principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. It lists 30 articles with the principles of non-discrimination and the right to life and liberty. Many countries in the world including Norway are signatories to the Universal declaration of human rights and makes it important to be used in determining how these countries educate their citizens about social inclusion and to treat ethnic minorities including Africans and people of different culture and religion who live in these countries accordingly. The theory of human rights is employed in this paper because Norway is a democratic egalitarian and welfare state, which believes in human rights and universalism. This encompasses basic civil and political rights, socio-cultural and economic rights. For example, the right to employment, education, health care, housing, and fair treatment in favor of inclusiveness (Nagel, 1995). In view of this it is expected that Norwegians treat and relate with people from different ethnic groups, cultures and minorities on the principles of equality and respect.

Methods

Design

This study employed quantitative and qualitative procedures to explore experiences of social exclusion, its effects of mental health/wellbeing and strategies employed to cope with experiences of social exclusion. Individual and group interviews were employed to generate qualitative data.

Participants

The participants were drawn from minorities of African Norwegians working or studying in higher education institutions in Norway. This population is unique in that they are highly educated and/or high-income earners. Since they work in intellectual and more “enlightened” environments, it was assumed that people in these environments act differently and that the study population is likely to provide a uniquely different picture of social exclusion than what operates in the broader Norwegian society.

Participants were recruited by open invitation to participate in an online survey questionnaire, which also included open-ended questions. Consent was assumed if participants completed the online questionnaire. Table 1 provides participants’ background information.

Table 1. Participants Background Information

Participants Background Information	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender: Male=1Female = 2	166	1	2	1.40	0.491
Work Experience (1=0-5 years, 2=5-10 years, 3=10 -15 + years)	166	1	3	2.19	0.783
Qualification Bachelor=1, masters=2, PhD = 3	166	1	3	1.53	0.676
Post doc (No = 1, Yes =2)	166	1	2	1.04	0.202
Valid N (Listwise)	166				

In total 166 participants of African background working in various Norwegian institutions completed the survey. There were 100 males and 66 females aged between 35-64 years of age. The participants were all legal immigrants with either permanent residence and or Norwegian citizenship from Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, Mali and South Africa. Their qualifications range from Bachelors, Masters and PhD and some pursuing postdoctoral work. Majority of participants had been living in Norway for more than five years or longer and working as lecturers, researchers, medical doctors, and psychologists.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Two sets of questionnaires generating quantitative data and two open-ended questions yielding qualitative data were used to collect data from the participants. The questionnaires generating quantitative data focused on perceived exclusion and discrimination. The two open-ended questions asked participants about exclusion type, experience, reasons for exclusion and coping strategies.

In qualitative method we employed general reliability criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) (Shenton, 2004; Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007) to ensure validity and reliability in both data collection and

analysis. Normally, it is difficult to reach dependability criteria in qualitative research, but sufficient data was provided (see Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007).

Three strategies were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data: 1. Triangulation using both individual interviews, document analysis and focus group interviews. 2 Member checking whereby findings were shared with participants for comments and feedback. This allowed the participants to interpret their own reality of exclusion as they experienced it. In other words, participants constructed their own meanings about exclusion. 3 Peer discussion with co-authors to identify potential biases. The study focused on the following themes: employment, housing, education, health care and transportation. Other themes focusing on coping mechanisms of participants were theological discussions, confrontations, avoidance, and awareness of the existence of discrimination. Each of the five themes had at least three statements. For example, under employment statements or questions were as follows: I have ever been turned down for a job applied for, I Got feedback why I did not get the job. I was always invited for meetings at work. My contributions at meetings were considered. Theme under housing had statements such as; I was turned down for accommodation. I got feedback I did not get the accommodation. I used other channels used to get accommodation. Education: It was easy to get admission into the university for my studies, getting membership in group work was easy for me at the university. My contribution in group discussion was considered by members in the group. I felt isolated. Health care: The health care system treats me fairly; my doctor takes my illness seriously. My doctor has time for me, and I get quick response in case of emergencies. I get the treatment I need anytime I visit the hospital. Transportation: I get access to public transport anytime I need. Train and bus conductors treat me with dignity and respect. I sit anywhere I like on public transport. Other passengers sit by me when there is an empty seat. The statements centered on experiences of inclusion and exclusion within the five main themes.

Data for this study was collected from Viken and Møre and Romsdal counties of Norway in December 2021 by open invitation to people whose addresses were available on university webpages and those already known to the researchers. Using a snowball sampling approach, those who responded, were then asked to identify other people they knew who were likely to respond to the survey. Data collection strategy was to collect a variety of experiences, and consciously search for participants with different backgrounds and who have different positions within the so-called high-status jobs or education in the Norwegian society.

Data Analysis

The quantitative survey data were analyzed using IBM SPSS software version 27. The data was firstly recorded into excel and then transferred to SPSS. Different statistical tests such as descriptive statistics and t-test and ANOVA were run to answer research questions 1 and 2. The data from open-ended question was thematically analyzed to answer research question 3. The questionnaires were numbered, and those number codes are used in reporting the data. Later, we substituted the numbers with names. The names used in the analysis, therefore, are

imaginary. The quantitative data were presented first followed by the qualitative data.

Findings and Discussion

Quantitative and Qualitative Results

We present quantitative results.

The survey showed that people experienced exclusion. Overall, they experienced exclusion in health care, education, employment, and housing (see Table 2).

Table 2. Perceptions of Participation & Exclusion Experiences

Participants' Perceptions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q4 Health Care	166	2	5	3.84	0.836
Q4 Education	166	2	5	3.72	0.769
Q3 Transportation	166	1	5	3.63	1.124
Q1 Labor market	166	2	5	3.25	0.790
Q2 Housing	166	1	4	2.42	0.986
Valid N (Listwise)	166				

Overall the results (Table 2) show that the participants report more experiences of exclusion in relation with health care (M=3.84, SD=0.83), followed by Labor market and education are modest. There is lower experience of exclusion in housing (M=2.42, SD=0.98) (suggesting that with higher income, they are more likely to afford housing. Students in higher education also access student accommodation and so unlikely to face experiences of housing exclusion.

Employment

In Table 3, upwards of 44.6% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with labor market exclusion which indicates a mixed bag of experiences. However, 38% of respondents indicated they experienced exclusion (with 33.7% agreeing and 4.2% strongly agreeing), which shows that exclusion is prevalent (see Table 3).

Table 3. Labor Market Exclusion

Q1 (labor market)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	7	4.2	4.2	4.2
	Agree	56	33.7	33.7	38.0
	Neither Agree or Disagree	74	44.6	44.6	82.5
	Disagree	29	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Access to employment of Africans is often based on the emphasis on what the individual lacks. When the individual has the qualifications required, then experience

and or proficiency and knowledge of how the system works is always another issue. It is evident that factors like experience, language proficiency, knowing the Norwegian system and having the right networks, which is probably what immigrants in general lack when they are looking for jobs.

These factors packed in skin color constitute a double barrier for Africans. Many African PhD holders with foreign names have voiced out their frustrations of attending several interviews before getting jobs they sometimes are over qualified for. This finding support the report made by (CERD, 2019), that 25% of job applicants with foreign names stand a lower chance of being invited for a job interview, and so end up in jobs they are over qualified for.

Housing

More than 59% of respondents disagreed with housing sector exclusion which indicates a mixed bag of experiences. This figure, however, represents participants who have been able to buy their own houses, with only 18.7% reporting that they had experienced housing exclusion (see Table 4).

Table 4. Housing Exclusion

Q2 (Housing)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	31	18.7	18.7	18.7
	Neither Agree or Disagree	37	22.3	22.3	41.0
	Disagree	69	41.6	41.6	82.5
	Strongly Disagree	29	17.5	17.5	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

The issue of getting accommodation in Norway was a problem for most participants especially those who were renting. According to the participants buying a house was better than renting due to a lot of rejections they have had from house owners. It was also found in this study that most Africans live in poor communities, perhaps due to their low economic power. This supports the Ombud 2018 report, which stated that the background of an immigrant mostly determines their chances of owning a house, as houses were cheaper in those areas.

Health Care

Most respondents (74%) reported exclusion in the health sector, with only 9% reporting that they had not experienced health exclusion as shown in Table 5. Most of the respondents find health care to be slow and ineffective.

Table 5. Health Care Exclusion

Q4 (Health Care)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	32	19.3	19.3	19.3
	Agree	91	54.8	54.8	74.1
	Neither Agree or Disagree	28	16.9	16.9	91.0
	Disagree	15	9.0	9.0	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Norway has one of the best health care systems in the world, and when participants were asked about their experiences of the health care system and services, almost all of them had positive experiences of health care services in Norway. Benkert and Peters (2005) however, postulated that, there is evidence of discrimination by health care practitioners which leads to different treatment for the minority.

Education

Table 6 from the descriptive statistics showed that many respondents (65.7%) reported exclusion in the education sector. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed were (n=46, 27.7%). With 6.6% reporting that they had not experienced educational exclusion. The qualitative responses showed that the reported experiences of exclusion were around the following: group work and group discussion involving the use of the Norwegian language.

Table 6. Education Exclusion

Q5 (Education)		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Agree	21	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Agree	88	53.0	53.0	65.7
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	46	27.7	27.7	93.4
	Disagree	11	6.6	6.0	100.0
	Total	166	100.0	100.0	

Participants suggest that could do better in reducing discrimination in schools. They are key agents in the creation of discrimination awareness to avoid rejection of a particular group of people.

Transportation Exclusion

Participants reported bad treatment and experiencing exclusion in the public transport system in terms of lack of engagement with mainstream travelers. This perception stems from experiences of being ignored or being avoided when they take public transport. The Norwegian public transport is very effective and well-

structured with full access to all. The seats are also well placed to ensure inclusion. Buses or trains are not always full except during rush hours. Norwegians, however, prefer to sit alone and will do all they can to occupy a whole row of seats for their solitude and peace. Generally, immigrants are represented on public transport because majority of them have no cars. Most Africans who feel excluded may have different and varied interpretation for Norwegian individualized behaviors.

Interview Results (Qualitative Data)

In the individual and group interviews we tried to explore reasons for exclusion/inclusion from various sectors of the Norwegian society. Emerged themes from the interview data were: Education exclusion, Health care exclusion, Employment exclusion, Housing exclusion and Transportation exclusion. Following the analysis of the raw data, various reasons were explored from the field. Reasons mentioned by participants were summarized as language difficulties, lack of understanding of the Norwegian system, religion skin color and ethnicity.

Perceptions of Participation & Exclusion Experiences

When participants were asked to narrate their experiences regarding discrimination and exclusion, varied stories were submitted. These were grouped into major themes and sub-themes.

Education Exclusion

The findings under this theme were being excluded from getting a degree, being excluded from promotion, being excluded from teamwork, being excluded from communication. Participants reported that Group work exclusion was a hard one and found this to be painful.

According to the majority of the participants access to education in Norway is easy and free of charge. Learning is also pretty good compared to their countries of origin, which in most cases had rigid school systems. Participants found campus (university) life in Norway to be different and not inclusive.

One participant Khaled from Sudan had this to say:

I felt excluded throughout my master's program at the university, especially during group work and discussions. I was always the last person to get a group of Norwegians to accept me. Sometimes lecturers had to forcefully put me in a group, and this made me sad.

Participants attributed exclusion in the education sector to skin color, since they ended up forming a group of minorities only.

Health Care

Findings on this theme show that participants were not satisfied with health care delivery system and the main reason given was that hospitals and medical

practitioners do not take minorities seriously. Form of exclusion ranges from exclusion from fair treatment, exclusion from being taken seriously, exclusion from quick response to emergencies, exclusion from thorough check up by MP.

One of the interviewed participants gave the following comment:

My worse experience in this country is visiting my doctor. I was pregnant and bleeding she never took the time to examine me she said “sorry, you have lost your child but don’t worry you will get pregnant again. My GP never had time for me, so I changed her for an Indian GP he understood me, and we went on well. I think the system is to be blamed since the government is not doing anything about this.

For exclusion under this theme, participants felt that health service personnel including doctors and nurses could not understand them well and had no patience to listen to their problems. It could mean that there was language barrier creating a lot of misunderstandings.

Employment Exclusion

The findings reported that many participants were turned down several times for a job they applied for, while others felt that their contributions at workplaces and meetings were not taken into consideration. The critical finding under this theme was excluding colleagues from meetings either willingly or unwillingly. In an interview a young medical doctor had this to say:

After hard work in the university with so many challenges of feeling excluded. I finally became a medical doctor but getting job as a medical practitioner has not been easy. I am now a medical doctor and in the health care service, and it is not all information I get from the administration concerning meetings and other deliberations. I try to draw the attention of the others to issues of being seen as outsider, but nothing happens (Baba).

Housing

The study findings indicated rental exclusion, buying exclusion, feedback exclusion and dialogue exclusion. Most of the participants who were renting faced rental exclusion and inability for landlords to give feedback. According to interviewees, dialogue was totally lacking.

A participant had this comment:

If you are lucky to get a rented apartment, then it is an apartment that no Norwegian will take. This is also true with jobs. I got tired of searching for rental apartment that I had to stay with a friend for three years. I managed to save some money and bought my own apartment. The sad thing was that I read announcement at Finn.no and found vacant apartment for rent, I went and had a look I really liked the apartment, so I called the owner the following day to show my interest, but she told me that it was let out. However, when my friend’s wife (Norwegian) called she was told the apartment was still vacant. In fact, I was totally broken... I think the Norwegian government should do something about racism issue in this country (Johnny).

Another participant added:

Getting a room or apartment to rent is the worse in this country (.). Agnes from Nigeria continued. When you go for a show looking for accommodation the owner of the house will talk to you nicely, but you will never get the accommodation to rent. When I was pregnant, I used three months to get a place to stay, I think I got it because nobody was interested in that apartment.

Most of the participants had mortgages while few had rented apartments. All who had their own houses confirmed that purchasing a house was much easier than finding an apartment to rent. Getting loans to purchase could be difficult if there is only one income and low annual income. Even though the housing system is regulated, and the highest bidder gets the house, the seller or house owner still decides whom to sell the house to. It was found in this study that most Africans live in poor communities, perhaps due to their low economic power. This supports the Ombud 2018 report, which stated that the background of an immigrant mostly determines their chances of owning a house, as houses were cheaper in those areas.

There is no doubt that the narratives of participants, what they have gone through, and experiences shared have affected them in many ways. Social exclusion with its accompanied psychological and mental problems such as issues of low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and anger has developed ways of battling the menace. Some have visited psychiatric hospitals for help, and some have been sent back home to their countries of origin where social capital is enormous and freely available. Although some are still living in a world of disappointments, others just ignore and move on with their lives.

Transportation

The study findings indicated distancing of Norwegians on public transport such as trains and buses. Norwegians avoid seats occupied by minorities.

Fatou from Gambia had this to say:

When I sit in public transport such as bus or train, I may be sitting alone occupying a double seat row or triple seat row on a train, I noticed that When Norwegians enter the transport, they bypass me to find another seat. In a worst-case scenario when the bus or train is full, I may still be sitting with either one or two empty seats while Norwegians will stand.

A common experience for most Africans was that the first year was always difficult, but things got better after knowing the system. This was the case with Obeng from Ghana:

My experience on a train with controllers was terrible few weeks after being in this country. (.) and (.) ticket controllers called the police to arrest me on the train because I found myself on the wrong coach and did not have a prepaid ticket. I told them I was a student but they could not listen to me. I was then new in Norway I said I did not know and did not speak Norwegian. The police handcuffed me until one Norwegian man who saw the whole episode intervened. The message the police got

from the controllers to warrant my arrest was that I was an illegal immigrant. I was taken to the dormitory where I showed them where I lived and my ID card. That was really a bad encounter with the transport system (Obeng).

Khaled from Sudan had a different experience but had similar feelings of social exclusion. He finally bought a car to avoid public transport and being singled out among other passengers:

It is hard to look different in Norway and very visible among the lot. Whenever I sit in the public transport and the ticket controllers happen to come on board to check those with valid tickets, they always come to check my tickets first. I felt like terminating my studies the first year in Norway with all the negative attention always on me. On the buses too when I enter they will just look at me and look down without talking. Thank God now I have bought a car and I don't see such things again. Under normal circumstances train conductors don't check tickets when one sits on a prepaid coach, but I have been checked severally not by the ticket control authorities but rather conductors... This is really a racist country (Khaled).

The reason for exclusion on public transport may stem from various factors including historical, cultural, and social dynamics. For Africans stereotypes and biases such as associating Africans with poverty and crime may be some of the reasons. Also, public transport authorities or fellow passengers might engage in racial or ethnic profiling, whereby Africans are singled out because of their appearance and ethnic background.

Even though human rights laws in Norway are working certain individuals take the laws into their hands and do whatever they feel is right. When on top of all these one is not fluent in the Norwegian language and there is an issue nobody listens. It might, however, be said that participants experience of bad treatment of Norwegians were based on individual attitudes but not on the system level.

What Strategies are employed to cope with Exclusion?

To answer research question 3 the participants were required to mention key mechanisms they employed to cope with exclusion. It was suggested participants name maximum of 3 strategies. Some participants mentioned one key coping mechanism, while others mentioned two or more coping mechanisms, they considered effective. There were four themes regarding coping mechanisms of discrimination: 1) positive reappraisal, 2) mindfulness, 3) control and power 4) avoidance and confrontation to a less extent. Table 7 shows the frequencies of response types, indicating that Positive appraisal, Mindfulness, Control and power as most effective.

Table 7. Coping Mechanisms of Exclusion

Mechanisms	Number
<i>Positive reappraisal</i>	62
<i>Mindfulness</i>	51
<i>Control and power</i>	39
<i>confrontation</i>	14

The top key coping mechanisms identified by participants was not acceptance, confrontational strategy, avoidance strategy, theological group discussion and positive attitudes. Though some used confrontation strategy without being angry they all recommended the use of positive reappraisal, mindfulness and control and power coping mechanisms.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the inclusion and exclusion experiences of African academics in Norway and impact on mental wellbeing. Framed by the theory of human rights we used questionnaires requiring responses to Likert-type scale rating, and open-end questions.

The results showed that respondents experienced exclusion in areas such as health care, employment, and education. The descriptive results and interviews also showed that African academics were excluded in employment and housing but to a lesser extent. The study findings depart from a similar study (Ibrahim, 2019) where Africans felt more excluded in housing and employment than the rest of the sectors. Exclusion types include isolation/ignoring of colleagues at work, not getting jobs qualified for, denial of rental accommodation and not being taken seriously within the health care service.

The finding on educational exclusion towards Africans is surprising, as Norwegian schools do not lack cultural diversity and there is free access to education. However, the qualitative data showed exclusion on university campus and lecture theatres. Participants found campus (university) life in Norway to be different and not inclusive. This may come from their peers, or university staffs. Lecturers may use favoritism towards a student of their own race to discriminate or exclude students of different races. The same might be said of school administrators who in one way or the other may exhibit differential treatment on black students or staff. Interestingly, there were some nuances in the qualitative finding where Norwegian born Africans experience less exclusion at the universities. This may, perhaps be explained by their fluency in the Norwegian language and more abreast with the Norwegian culture. On the other hand, non- Norwegian born Africans may prefer to speak their first languages with their African counterparts, making exclusion an issue of choice.

These findings are similar to previous research pointing out that there is bullying of immigrants in Norwegian schools/universities and at workplaces (Ida, 2014; Svendsen, 2014; Ibrahim, 2019). These authors reported that exclusion and discrimination of people based on the color of their skin or ethnicity are not only on the streets, but it is also an issue in Norwegian institutions and housing.

Again, the finding on health care services with as much as (74%) reported exclusion in the health sector is a contentious finding. Since there is universal health access, we wonder whether respondents are talking about individual perceptions of discrimination in their encounter with health service workers or real exclusion from health care. The qualitative responses showed that the reported experiences were around mental or psychological sickness. The issue here is that a

lot of time is used in the diagnosis of mental sickness which most immigrants find to be cumbersome. In many cases respondents reported that they gave up on their MDs and had to call their MDs in their home countries for medical help.

Participants reported that exclusion had impact on their mental wellbeing such as inferiority complex, stress, anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Participants experiencing exclusion or discrimination in the universities, could impact their ways of getting a proper education. This finding is consistent with the study of Erdal's (2021) stating that, discrimination and exclusion experience of any type or form can create a lack of belonging for an individual and can restrict individual's ability to participate in their communities, workplaces, and schools. Indeed, experience of discrimination, exclusion and racism could also undermine human rights of a person or a group (Migration Policy Institute's Report, 2015). Participants used strategies such as confrontation, distancing, awareness creation and facing the negativity of exclusion with positive attitudes. Here participants had less desire for vengeance to cope with these negative experiences. The study also found that human rights education could be used in the formation of positive attitudes through tolerance, and that knowledge about human rights and other cultures could create room for more inclusiveness within education, employment, health care and housing. The most effective coping mechanism according to participants was the formation of immigrant group network where they rely on professional legitimacy and to speak out.

Participants face the negativity of exclusion with positive attitudes with less desire for vengeance. Positive reappraisal, which has proven to be effective in reducing aggressiveness, is an emotion regulation strategy that consists of reframing a negative situation in positive terms. The victim of social exclusion uses this strategy as an occasion of learning and personal growth (Timeo, Riva, & Paladino, 2019).

Another coping mechanism participants found important was mindfulness. Some of the participants mentioned that they are used to the fact that not all people like them, so they are mindful of incidence of social exclusion. A study on coping with exclusion showed that awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose in the present moment of the event diminishes negative emotions and foster recovery after rejection (Jones, Wirth, Ramsey, & Wynsma, 2019).

With control and power, it is natural to prefer to behave aggressively when one feels excluded and loses control, however aggressive confrontation might yield the opposite effect. According to research control and power strategy helps to restore the sense of control people feel to have on events, which has been threatened by social exclusion (Jones, Wirth, Ramsey, & Wynsma, 2019). Aggressive behavior and response depict a powerless situation and may increase more rejection. Overall, acting on the sense of power and control may help to break this vicious circle, thus lessening the negative impact of social exclusion.

Few participants said they used mechanism of acceptance of discrimination as a form of modern racism. Theological discussions were also organized in small groups in search for social connections for comfort and reflections to better prepare them the next time they were discriminated against. Religious and spiritual support helped participants focus on their strength in social exclusion.

These findings indicate that despite human rights being used as a framework for Norwegian institutions, it is evident that minorities are protected from exclusion. And policy makers should reframe processes that allow for more inclusion of migrant groups.

Conclusion & Recommendations

In this paper, we have discussed the experiences and understanding of Africans and African Norwegians on social exclusion and inclusion in Norway. The study found that, most of the participants had experienced social exclusion within the transport, health care, education, housing, and labor market sectors, with damaging psychological consequences. Social exclusion in the labor market was among colleagues and the exclusion in the employment market was the fact that most qualified Africans were not being called for interviews and not getting the jobs they are qualified for.

The experiences of social exclusion at institutions (universities and schools) were also observed, among colleagues. The participants expressed how their Norwegian classmates isolated them in group work and even sometimes not getting the chance to join a group with the perception that Africans had nothing to offer or contribute. On many occasions forming groups ended up with only Africans and other minorities in a group, with participants sending a clear message to school authorities with the responsibility of creating a congenial and friendly school environment for all. Participants agreed that lecturers should be directly involved in deciding membership in a group.

Social exclusion and discrimination of Africans and African Norwegians was minimal in the health sector but was very high in housing especially renting of accommodation where Africans were never on the priority list of securing rental apartment. Participants were of the view that buying a house was much easier if one could afford as it saved them the frustrations of constant rejection in the rental market. This study has shown that African academics in diaspora experience significant exclusion in various aspects of the Norwegian society with significant negative consequences.

Majority of the participants used strategies like positive reappraisal, mindfulness and control and power to reduce the effects of social exclusion. Few participants used the strategy of avoidance and confrontation. However, all agreed that solution to discrimination in the country should be done both at national, group and individual level. A pointer to participants as discussed was knowledge of the human rights laws and a good knowledge of the Norwegian language and how the system operates as area that they should consider seriously. It was also suggested that there should be a group representing African and African Norwegians interest in the society.

These findings provide a pointer to the role of media, which could be a powerful tool in portraying good image of Africa. A bigger study of this nature is recommended to examine the psychological and mental health effects of discrimination of Africans and African Norwegians. The analysis also draws attention to the fact that the

public discourses on the positive sides of immigration in general and the role of migrants' contribution to the Norwegian society be stressed by the Norwegian authorities. The major limitations are that the study focused only on Africans and African Norwegians with university education and did not include those without. A further study is recommended to include all categories of Africans. Again, the current study could not answer "why" Africans and African Norwegians are at the bottom line of exclusion in all sectors of the Norwegian society, so a study to examine their exclusion will be appropriate.

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