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radical transformation  
2020 Special Issue**

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# CURRENT ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE EDUCATION

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## Editorial Introduction

**Paula Mantilla-Blanco**  
*Teachers College, Columbia University*

This year marked the latest truly global challenge for education systems worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic motivated numerous calls to face urgent, unprecedented issues in the field of education, ranging from school infrastructure to unequal access to digital resources. Efforts to imagine the “post-Covid” world and the role of education in it have become commonplace. The challenge of envisioning education for post-Covid intersects with the uncertainties of when or how such “post” will take place. But a post-pandemic world is far from being the only imagined “post” reality that shapes educational efforts in the present. This Special Issue of *Current Issues in Comparative Education* engages with questions about the temporal dimension of issue-driven programs, taking the projections into the future as an analytical tool to understand controversies in the present.

**Tavis D. Jules** draws on the case of Tunisia to illustrate how the concept of transitologies can be used to understand educational forms and reforms in “post-spaces.” The author traces four different historical periods in Tunisia and suggests that educational codings in periods of transition are framed by political and economic power. Shedding light on the complexity of educational projects in post-spaces, this article offers theoretical insights into the connections between transitological and policy discourses.

**MaryFaith Mount-Cors, Jill Gay, and Rokhaya Diop** explore how gender equality can be addressed within schools and communities at the start of primary school in low- and middle-income countries. This article draws on the case of an early primary reading program in Senegal, as well as on existing literature on gender-related issues, to discuss barriers to gender transformative approaches. The authors introduce strategies to acknowledge and address these barriers and underscore the importance of addressing gender equality in the present to ensure a future transformation.

**Matthew Gallagher and Carrie Bauer** describe and analyze an innovative education program in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda. This program used offline technology to provide a university-level course in agribusiness to refugee students. Highlighting the ways in which this program enhanced skills such as digital literacy, the authors stress the importance of providing higher education opportunities for refugees so that, upon returning to their home countries, refugees will be better equipped to contribute to future post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

**Seulgi Kang** takes an imagined post-unification Korea as a scenario for testing the decentralization theory on education finance. The author conducts an analysis of the relationship between educational outcomes and education finance models in 40 OECD countries to identify whether fiscal decentralization is effective in closing the gaps between two different socio-economic communities. Kang applies this analysis to make a case for a deconcentration model in a future Unified Korea.

**Hasnain R. Badami** and **Rubab Fatima** propose a pedagogical framework rooted in experiential learning and critical pedagogy. Drawing on the case of a low-fee private school in Pakistan, the authors introduce the 5A framework and assess the impact of implementing it in the classroom through a qualitative methodology. Noting the need to prepare students for a post-information age, this model is designed to help teachers reconceptualize the purpose of education as a tool for transformation.

**Kara D. Brown**, **Payal P. Shah**, and **E. Doyle Stevick** offer a relevant critique of labeling practices in the field of Comparative and International Education (CIE). The authors note how the labels that scholars and students attach to specific places reflect power, perspective, and plurality. This article offers examples and introduces a framework to address categorization processes, advocating for a more intentional approach to labels in teaching CIE. The authors put forth a pertinent invitation to question the use of the “post” prefix itself.

Finally, **Paul Tarc**’s timely essay on education for a post-Covid-19 world closes this Special Issue. Tarc reflects on the global transition to online education and how the challenges posed by Covid-19 might shape a future return to face-to-face education. Going beyond concerns about the practical implications of a return to normality, the author takes the abrupt move towards an online environment as a vantage point for reimagining face-to-face pedagogies.

This issue calls attention to the multiple ways in which education is tasked with addressing – and creating – a reality that has yet to come. Adding nuance to the forward-looking nature of education, this collection of articles contributes to our understanding of the temporal dimension of comparative education.

*Paula Mantilla-Blanco is a doctoral fellow in International and Comparative Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the editor in chief of Current Issues in Comparative Education. Email: [plm2128@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:plm2128@tc.columbia.edu); for CICE business please contact [cice@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:cice@tc.columbia.edu).*

# La Mission Civilisatrice, Le Bourguibism, and La Sécuritocratie: Deciphering Transitological Educational Codings in Post-spaces – the Case of Tunisia

Tavis D. Jules  
Loyola University Chicago

*This article builds upon Robert Cowen's (1996) work on educational coding in transitological settings and post-spaces by deciphering the efficacy of political and economic compressions in Tunisia from the French protectorate period to the 2011 post-Jasmine revolution. First, I diachronically decrypt and elucidate the specific experiences and trajectories of Tunisia's transitologies, while paying attention to the emergence of specific synchronically educational moments. It is suggested that educational codes during transitory periods are framed by political compressions and preconceived philosophies of modernity. It is postulated that four educational codings can be derived in Tunisia's post-spaces: (a) the protectorate code defined by la Mission Civilisatrice (the civilizing mission); (b) the post-protectorate code defined by le Bourguibisme (Bourguibism); (c) the post-Bourguibisme code defined by la Sécuritocratie (securitocracy) in the form of the national reconciliation; and (d) the post-Sécuritocratie period defined by the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) – as economic and political power is compressed into educational forms. I situate educational patterns within the Tunisian context to illustrate how educational codings shape post-spaces across these four transitory periods.*

*Keywords: Tunisia, la Mission Civilisatrice, la Bourguibisme, la Securitocracy, transitology and educational codings.*

## Introduction

This paper employs Robert Cowen's (2000) concept of "educational coding, that is, the compression of political and economic power into educational forms" (p. 10) within the context of transitologies (the study of transition) to reading the *motor nuclei* (a sequence of signposts that transcend discourse) of educational development across post-spaces. This is done by explaining the efficacy of transitologies in pre- and post-authoritarian contexts, settings, and spaces by using Tunisia as a case study to chart the trajectory of a particular national context using pre-modern, modern, and late modern ideologies (Cowen, 1996) and transitologies. Cowen (2000) notes that transitologies refer to the "simultaneous collapse and reconstruction" of institutional systems such as "state apparatuses; social and economic stratification systems; and political visions of the future" during which "education is given a major symbolic and reconstructionist role in these social processes" (p. 338).

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<sup>1</sup> Acosta and Perez Centeno (2011) use *motor nuclei* to explain "a series of milestones or episodes which have become transdiscursive as the discipline has evolved" (p. 1) as such, this article modifies their original idea of *motor nuclei* to focus on the transdiscursive evolutionary dynamics of changes in educational 'post-spaces' within the discipline of comparative and international education.

For Cowen (2000), educational patterns or ideal-type modules become visible as ideological, social, political, economic, and cultural complexities of societies are exposed during the redefinition period in the aftermath of a transition (be it peaceful, dramatic, or turbulent). As societies' complexities are exposed during the transition, educational sites display an array of educational forms (political compressions) and educational patterns that reveal new educational codes "that captures the intersections of the forces of history, social structures and the pedagogic identities of individuals" (Cowen, 2000, p. 336). Education is observed as habitually comprising a methodical segment of the transitological process since it connotes the 'shape' and 'vision' of the state apparatuses, the socio-economic orthodoxy of the stratified system, and the political dreams of modernization.

In what follows, this article will diachronically decrypt and elucidate the specific experiences and trajectories of Tunisia's transitologies, while at the same time considering the emergence of specific synchronically educational moments. This is done with the aid of "concepts, abstractions, [and] theories, ... [to] provide lenses or frameworks to compare, explain and interpret historical phenomena" (Kazamias, 2001, p. 446). Given the complex nature of the educational project in 'post-spaces' (used here as a generic term to capture the transitory undercurrents of several paradigms – post-socialism, post-revolutionary, post-authoritarian, and post-Sovietology), attention is given to the metamorphosis of "immunologies and permeologies of social and educational patterns" (Cowen, 1996, p. 85; see also Jules & Barton, 2014) as countries readjust their 'filters' to consider: *Why are some reforms filtered in and others filtered out preceding and subsequently after a transitology has occurred?* In using educational codes to decipher this question, this article suggests that the creation of "policyscapes" (Carney, 2009) or policy discourses that are grounded in a distinctive nationalist transitological language are implicit. The theoretical insight for this article stems from that transitology literature, and the core concept worked with is 'post-spaces,' which "provides the lenses or the medium to select, organize and interpret the historical material" (Kazamias, 2001, p. 446).

This paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, the existing literature on transitologies in Comparative and International Education is reviewed and updated. It is suggested that educational codings facilitate a holistic depiction of studying the historical trajectory of a national educational system since it focuses on the efficacy of endogenous time and space compressed within national educational systems. In focusing on the *motor nuclei* of education coding, this study is "...situat[ed within the context of] local action and interpretation within broader cultural, historical, and political investigation ... [to grasp] ... which historical trends, social structures, and national and international forces shape local processes" (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006, p. 96). The study is grounded in a "historical-comparative or comparative-historical approach" (Acosta & Perez Centeno, 2011; Cowen, 2000; Larsen, 2010; Schriewer, 2002), as the "method of inquiry and as a frame of analysis" (Novoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003, p. 424). As a vertical site or "vertical case study" (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006), the aim is to illuminate the evolutionary dynamics that undergird educational reforms during times of transition.

In the second half of the paper, it is indicated that educational codes during transitory periods are framed by political compressions and preconceived philosophies of modernity. *Apropos* to my argument, educational codings in Tunisia's educational transitologies exist across different educational patterns. Based on the findings, it is advanced that four educational codings can be derived: (i) the protectorate code defined by la Mission Civilisatrice (the civilizing mission); (ii) the post-protectorate code defined by le Bourguibisme (Bourguibism); (iii) the post-Bourguibisme code defined by la Sécuritécratie (securitocracy) in the form of the national reconciliation (particularly the concepts of *le Changement* – the Change – and *le Pacte National* – the National Pact; and (iv) the post-Sécuritécratie period defined by the ascendancy of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA). In seeking to understand the evolutionary dynamics of agenda-setting attitudes after transitions have occurred, attention should be paid to the 'transitological moments' that come to define and dominate the educational architecture as new futures are envisioned, and the past gives way to historical revisionism. Such an approach focuses on "'transversal' and 'horizontal' comparisons, and what connections and colorations one can see as a result, or what has been called "'situatedness'" or "embeddedness" (Robertson, 2012, p. 39) to highlight the "politics of knowledge production" (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006, p. 98). As economic and political power is compressed into educational forms, this article aims to illustrate how the context of the educational patterns generated educational codings that were shaped across these four transitory periods. In exploring the post-Sécuritécratie period, the paper concludes by framing the efficacy of Tunisia's transitions upon the Arabic Spring.

### **Educational coding: An approach to deciphering transitologies**

The transitology framework accommodates "the historical contingency of particular forms of educational systems," along with their "cultural variations" and their "transitions from one major historical paradigm to the next" (Rappleye, 2012, p. 52). While Cowen (2000) asserts that transitologies transpire within the first ten years after a changeover and "they occur at remarkable speed and often with stunning suddenness" (p. 339), I concur with Bray and Borevskaia (2001) that a linear timeline imperils not all transitologies. Tunisia's complex history lends itself to a theory that illuminates multiple dimensions of its educational past, while simultaneously offering insight into possible trajectories of its educational future. The argument presented here implies that in addition to transitology not being linear in scale, there can also exist a 'transitology of transitology' in the form of an ideational. The transitology scholarship emerged as a way to study the economic, social, and cultural problems of Southern Europe, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe (Cowen, 1996; 1999; 2000; Lowenhardt, 1995; Petsinis, 2010; Griffiths & Millei, 2013). In comparative education, several studies have drawn on Cowen's (1996) typology to examine educational transitologies by replacing the Sovietology research with this typology as a way to examine ideological differences (Cowen, 2000; Gans-Morse, 2004; Millei, 2013); focusing on how post-soviet countries have transitioned towards democratic educational systems (Silova, 2009); using the typology as a comparative framework for interpreting developments in countries of transition, as in the case of Mongolia (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004); operationalizing it by way of cases that may give rise to one or more forms of comparative education (Carney, 2009); and exploring the financing of education during transitory periods (Bray & Borovskaya, 2001). However,

using Cowen's conceptualization, I expand on earlier literature to explain transitions within Tunisia – a post-authoritative state without prospects for effective integration.

Despite the apparent linearity through which Cowen's three educational paradigms are often viewed, Cowen (1996) contends that "evolution is not linear – it is not possible to assume that shifts from pre-modern to modern to late-modern educational patternings are routinely predictable – embedded within an automatic historical sequence" (p. 162). Thus, the purpose of using a transitological framework in the Tunisian setting is to gauge educational occurrences by examining these transitions, or 'turbulences' – through the uncovering "acts of rupture, conflict, tension, and resistance" (Carney, 2009, p. 69) and creating a "mini-narrative" (Cowen, 1996). Thus, "transitologies become our compass, helping us get our bearings in relation to time (history) and space (geography)" (Rappleye, 2010, p. 15). It is important to note, however, that transitology research is not an end in itself and does not aim to explain causality, but instead offers a clear agenda with profound insight (Rappleye, 2012). What truly sets transitologies apart from other analytical research tools in Comparative and International Education is its acuity to "tell us of the spirit of the battles still to come" (Cowen, 2000, p. 339). It challenges researchers to travel beyond the present, which is essential in making grounded policy decisions. Further, transitologies give academics "new and meaningful insights into the interconnectivity of politics, history, and culture across localities at a time when these three elements are often dismissed as outmoded..." (Carney, 2009, p. 69). Taking into consideration this concoction of elements brings new meaning and trajectories for education research, "including the redefinitions of the past and the visions of the future" (Cowen, 2000, p. 2).

To best study transitologies, Cowen (1996) forces researchers to think both historically and holistically, offering three educational patterns – pre-modern, modern, and late-modern – to analyze against the central leitmotifs of political, economic, and cultural development. By focusing on the evolutions of these educational periods, scholars can better understand the intricacies in educational processes and development. Further, shifts and educational experiences within pre-modern, modern, and late-modern systems are often experienced globally (with exceptions); therefore, opening doors for future comparative analysis across vertical and horizontal levels.

It is in times of disarray that "the educational patterns that are ordinarily, in ordinary daylight as it were, difficult to see" (Cowen, 2000, p. 339) are revealed. These patterns are dependent on local conditions and assume a unique historical identity—adapting and diverging from perceived educational models (Rappleye, 2010). In this way, "educational reform itself helps to construct not sequential equilibrium conditions but more transitologies..." (Cowen, 2000, p. 339). Therefore, by historically analyzing the changes within Tunisia's education system, educational codings may be revealed that are "the compression of political and economic power into educational forms" (Cowen, 2000, p. 339). An example of such compression is an education provision in Tunisia that was sanctioned by the Ben Ali regime, which provided all families with a computer, which, in turn, created a cadre of educated Tunisians that turned against their government (Covatorra & Haugbølle, 2012).

Just as transitologies compress power, they can lead to expansion. Cowen (2000) asserts that educational codes are made most visible in transitologies, which often occur “when there is a collapse (and rapid redefinition) of international political boundary, of political regime and of political vision” (p. 341). Reading transitologies and transitological moments in the post-Arabic Awakening period is thus a step towards “reading the global,” which “edges us toward reading the forces of history and the interplay of the domestic and the international in the construction of educational patterns,” specifically “educational codings” (Cowen, 2000, p. 339). Attempting to understand educational codes is not a unidirectional process, but instead, a deep historical practice that focuses on political, economic, and cultural relations. Therefore, education is not divorced from other social, political, and economic occurrences; each domain is but a number needed in conjunction with other numbers to provide the entire code, which often appears in times of chaos. It is this exact process that “captures collective and socio-specific time” and “allows for national context specificity, and allows etic and emic perspectives to coexist” (Rappleye, 2010, p. 15). Further, by attempting to uncover and analyze educational codes, research has the potential not only to be comprehensive, but more comparable.

The complexity of transitologies leads one to question whether such research can ever be successful. Rappleye (2012) asserts that the very act of deciphering educational codes would indeed be difficult or “nearly impossible ... or at least a single, definitive decryption of them” (p. 409). However, Rappleye (2012) posits that perhaps Cowen uses a plural ‘codings’ to suggest not only “different countries and different transitions, but different codes for different actors/groups within the same transition or transfer moment” (pp. 409-410). What is suggested here is that educational codings were never meant to result in a single script or model, but, instead, transitology research often yields “parallel codes or multiple views of a single transition...” (Rappleye, 2012, p. 410). Again, this produces a line of research inquiry that focuses on the totality of the transitional process, a path that creates various insights and codes within single monumental events. While this approach transcends the existing analysis that calls for attention to a historicization of recent educational transformation against the milieu of political, economic, and social change, the location of transitological disruptions and divergences within shifts; or ‘transitologies of transitologies’ that can occur simultaneously as progression transpires between educational paradigms, can be located. The rest of the paper applies the concept of educational coding to four periods of transitions that have experienced political and economic compressions in Tunisia.

### **Methodologically Framing Educational Codings**

Methodologically, this paper employed a “historical-comparative or comparative-historical approach” (Cowen, 2000; Kazamias, 2001; Larsen, 2010; Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003; Schriewer, 2002), “centered on historically contextualized causal relationships within a comparative framework” (Ritter, 2014, p. 98). Following Kazamias (2001), this historical-comparative study within the context of transitologies in Tunisia represents an “understanding an educational system or aspects of it, not for purposes of changing or improving it” (p. 446). Discourse is an institutional way of thinking, and, therefore, the aim is to study transitologies within and across different scales to decipher how educational codes are governed. Such an approach attempts to re-conceptualize “...the relations between space and time in historical and

comparative research” (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003, p. 429) by grounding this study in the contexts and history of Tunisia. In returning to Kazamias’s (2001) idea that historical research involves the use of core concepts, the concepts (development, modernization, authoritarianism, unemployment, and stability) were selected by the author to frame this paper while recognizing that several other concepts warrant coding.

The starting point was that educational codes are discursive trace patterns that exist across and within multiple discourses (cultural, political, social, and economic), and therefore, these codes are transdiscursive. Thus, new spatial arrangements embedded within transitologies are trans-historical and transdiscursive and can be studied to understand better the architectonic components that emerge as multiple discourses compress. These codes were developed and employed to contextualize the Tunisian milieu since comparative-historical analysis “assumes that the relevant causal factors ... identified are somehow rooted in, and influenced by, *historical trajectories*” (Ritter, 2014, p. 99). The aim was “to develop, test, and refine causal, explanatory hypotheses about events or structures integral to macro-units such as nation-states” (Skocpol, 1979, p. 36). Following Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003), the comparative-historical analysis used has three features: (i) the explanation of causal configurations; (ii) the focus on explaining processes over time; and (iii) the description sequels within delimited historical contexts (Jules & Barton, 2018). The aim was to focus on the macro-descriptions of the historical educational policy narratives that existed across the different transitory periods Tunisia has undergone. In other words, the focus was on unearthing casual relationships, and not correlational variables, by paying attention to the long-term policy processes from Tunisia’s two dictatorial regimes. The techniques of *process tracing* (outlining the trajectory of a phenomenon over time by linking a causal factor) and *path dependence* (locating sequential changes that influence institutional patterns and outcomes) were employed to “uncover the link between cause and effect ... through the ‘reconstruction of the origin of a certain event’” (Ritter, 2014, p. 99).

In developing educational codes, the analysis focused on the discursive level of policymaking, and different national plans, policies, and papers that were active during the education reforms across these periods were analyzed. Convenience sampling was used, and over fifty documents were analyzed. The codes were developed by identifying “steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 176). This was done by “establish[ing] and evaluat[ing] the link (or the absence of a link) between different factors” to determine “whether the causal process of the theory that [is being used] can be observed in the sequence and values of the intervening variables” (Vennesson, 2008, p. 231). As such, in developing codes, the focus on was on what mechanisms contributed to a given outcome in education by paying attention to how structural and institutional environments shape educational patterns. Again, earlier policy decision in education has a direct impact on contemporary reform agendas.

The arguments here are derived from the scanning and coding of several textual sources for themes, patterns, and keywords. In using such an approach, the focus was on exposing the “intangible, impalpable, spiritual forces” (Kandel, 1933, p. xix) or

“forces and factors” (Kazamias, 2001) that shape the different types of educational patterns to understand the major educational codes embedded in the political, economic, and cultural configuration. Thus, the historical analysis relied on what White (1996) describes as a “signpost,” since codings can take place across several sources, including official policy documents, government-funded studies, and administrative reports from the colonies, educational policies, white papers – all to examine what the different administrations (pre-and post-colonial) say about the policies that were being implemented. Therefore, the educational codings across different educational patterns “places historical analysis of local histories and local trajectories front and center” (Rappleeye, 2012, p. 52). In grounding the analysis in the “genealogy of problems” of educational systems, where history is used to “understands *facts* to be objects of knowledge brought into view and highlighted in a conceptual system in which specific processes are seen as a *problem*” (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003, p. 431), the aim was to take up Cowen’s (2000) infant conceptualization of educational codings by considering the context of Tunisia’s educational system.

While space does not permit a detailed overview of Tunisia’s entire educational system, for the remainder of this article, the educational codes (La Mission Civilisatrice, Le Bourguibism, La Sécuritocratie, and post-Sécuritocracy) emerging from the historical-comparative perspective are used to illustrate Cowen’s typology (pre-modern, modern, and late-modern) as they occurred during different transitions in Tunisia’s history. In using these codings, it is suggested that as economic and political compressions occur to create macro transitological processes, we can simultaneously have micro or meso transitologies happening across vertical sites. Following Cowen’s (1996) framing of educational patterns, his three ideal-type models of transitologies can be viewed within the context of Tunisia and how these patterns are central to the development of what I call transitologies of transitologies. Moreover, during the transition from one period to another, we see the transitologies of transitologies develop as the old system fragments, and, in the new system, we see vestiges of that old transitology.

**Pre-Modern Educational Codings: *La haute Mission Civilisatrice de la colonisation***

For Cowen (1996), pre-modern educational patterns held political rather than economic purposes in high regard within the state. Tunisia’s pre-protectorate educational coding not only corroborates Cowen’s (1996) postulations, but they were significantly influenced by France’s cultural policy, which arrived in the Middle East around the 1860s. In 1878, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), viewed as modern and perceived as second only in importance to Quai d’Orsay’s (the Foreign Ministry), set up its first school in Tunis. Its policies ultimately yielded the long-term consequence of creating the “francophone factor” – where “Tunisian are Arabs, and the educated ones seem to be more at ease in France than in the Arabic countries” (Borowiec, 1998, p. 9). At the beginning of the French protectorate period, Tunisia had one of the most advanced Muslim educational systems in the Maghreb region. Following the Bey of the Husainid Dynasty, Tunisia’s pre-modern education codings are deeply entrenched in and defined by France’s “la mission civilisatrice” (the civilizing mission), which gave France significant control over Tunisia under the 1881 Treaty of Bardo and total rheostat under the 1883 Treaty of La Marsa. This occurrence not only cemented Tunisia’s status as a French protectorate but also led to the beginning of the Tunisian transitology from one exogenous ruler (the Bey of Ottoman

Eyalet Tunis) to another (the French). When the French formally took control of Tunisia, they found an educational system consisting of *kuttabs*, Zitouna, and Sadiki College. Under the Beys, the *kuttabs* – Islamic primary schools – used Arabic as its method of instructions for basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills to educate a small selected group of Tunisians. Students who showed an aptitude for learning were sent to pursue supplementary religious studies in the mosques, such as the Grand Zitouna Mosque-University, located in Tunis (DeGorge, 2002; Sizer, 1971). Upon finishing the Zitouna, a small number of graduates found positions as Islamic teachers, judges in Sharia courts, or became members of the Ulama ranks (an exclusive group of religious leaders) (Green, 1978; Micaud, 1964). In returning to the concept of transitologies of transitologies, in keeping the pre-French system intact during the transition to French protectorate and building a new system upon the old, we see how political and economic compressions shape new educational patterns.

The movement toward colonial rule, as well as ensuring political and economic compressions of this transitology, saw Tunisia steadfastly hold onto its schools, guilds, and limited judicial jurisprudence. However, in reality, the French had ultimate power in Tunisia under the system of *le Control*, grounded in the Office of the French Resident-General (Alexander, 2010; Ikeda, 2006). Over time, power and ensuring “governance activities – funding, ownership, provision and regulation” – (Dale, 2005) of education became centralized in the office of the Resident-General, and the French language replaced Arabic in the public sphere (Jules & Barton, 2014). The French found that the education at the *kuttabs*, Zitouna, and Sadiki College did not meet their administrative needs, and, in 1883, the Tunisian system came under the control of *la Direction de l’Enseignement Public* with Louis Machuel becoming the Director of Education (Green, 1978). The educational system was thus reformed to mirror the French school system. By the time educational reforms were completed, the *kuttabs* had remained untouched. However, the Franco-Arab school system was established to instruct Tunisians in French. In 1881, the European-style French secondary school, *Lycée Carnot*, was established and modeled after the French *lycées* in France and staffed entirely with French nationals.

A distinctive feature of francophone educational patterns of the pre-modern era focused on preparing the political and administrative elites to function in the colonial bureaucracy (Cowen, 1996; Ikeda, 2006; Rappleye, 2012; White, 1996). The evolution of Tunisia as a protectorate was accompanied by the influx of French civil servants and administrators, creating “a colony of servants” who command a salary known as “le tiers colonial” (a colonial third). As France expanded its economic interests in the Middle East, its educational interest developed. As the French solidified their control over Tunisian society, it “retained, strengthened, and extended the bureaucratic administration of the local state” (Anderson, 1986, p. 9), while at the same time laying the foundation for what ultimately became a powerful centralized educational bureaucracy that still exists. France’s intervention in Tunisia was purely economic, and the French never wanted to create a “settler colony” (Alexander, 2010) as it did in Algeria. Thus, this pattern – governance from afar by France – is one that depicts the educational code of ‘*la haute mission civilisatrice de la colonisation*,’ since pre-modern Tunisian education aimed at doing the absolute minimum in the colony while reaping the maximum benefits by ensuring that the bureaucratic machinery had the necessary human capital requirements.

### **Modern Educational Codings: From *La Mission Civilisatrice* to Bourguibisme**

The modern educational paradigm has three dimensions: “the role and moral messages of the central state, educational content and structures and the inter-national relations of the education system” (Cowen, 1996, p. 168). Independence from France signaled the movement from the pre-modern educational patterns categorized as *La Mission Civilisatrice* to modern educational codings classified by what is term *Bourguibisme*. In defining the post-independence period as an era of modern education and the coding of this period as Bourguibisme is twofold in that it has to do with the education reforms that occurred after abolishing the Beys and the creation of the Republic of Tunisia by Habib Bourguiba in 1956. It is throughout this phase that a shift in educational ideology becomes clear: a focus on the perceived benefits to the nation. The transition from pre-modern to modern created a policyscape for the incubation of Bourguibisme that ultimately rose as economic and political compressions occurred through the transformation of the Tunisian landscape. Throughout the struggle for independence, the emergence of modern educational codings during the Tunisian transition can be seen. In Tunisia, the post-independence period was characterized by the consolidation of its independence, sovereignty, and the abolishment of the monarchy under the proclamation of a Republic with Habib Bourguiba as president, ‘father of the nation,’ ‘le Guerrier Suprême’ (the Supreme Warrior), ‘le Combattant Suprême (the Combatant Supreme), and later ‘Presidential Monarch’ as he assumed the role of both chief of state and chief of government.

The economic and political compressions under the leadership of le Guerrier Suprême is defined by his focus on constructing the modern Tunisian state by ‘Tunisifying’ the bureaucratic structures and institutions (particularly the unification of the judiciary and education) through governing and redefining the society and the individual (Jourchi, 2013). Le Guerrier Suprême viewed modernity as a drastic break from the historical orthodoxy of Arabic-Islam, which was persuasive in the region at the time and focused on developing Western-type systems. The educational codings prevalent under Bourguibisme are intricately linked to Bourguiba’s ruling Party *Parti Socialiste Destourien* ([PSD], the Destour Socialist Party), and the educational policies in which they advanced. The most significant reform in the immediate aftermath of the transition to self-determination occurred in 1957 when the 1956 *Code du Statut Personnel* (Code of Personal Status) – proscribing polygamy, yielding female and male equivalent rights, ascertaining a minimum age for marriage, authorizing women to initiate divorce, and requiring the right to education for women – went into effect. The second tenant of Bourguibisme was the 1958 ten-year educational plan that concentrated on “training expeditiously the cadre that the ongoing state-building urgently needs” (MOET, 2002, pp. 9-10) and expanding access to schooling from first grade through university. At the heart of the expansion of mass education was the emphasis on technical and vocational education to ensure that the French bureaucratic structures were able to function. The third attribute that led to the categorizing of the modern educational codings, as being defined by Bourguibisme, has to do with Bourguiba personal philosophy that education held great power in transforming the nation to ensure that the “...legitimate right to fundamental needs such as sufficient food, decent housing, education, culture, health and a job” (TECA, 1992, p. 21). Additionally, he viewed education as the “training consonant with demands and needs of a society that aspires to progress and is resolutely open onto modernity”

(MOET, 2003, p. 9). At the core of Bourguibisme was the educational policy of Tunisification or Arabization – “(i) evoking history; (ii) enhancing culture and religion; and (iii) promoting gender equity” – (Fryer & Jules, 2013, pp. 409-410) that aimed to unify the country. During this period, Bourguiba used “education to create citizen-subjects ... in which Westernization and Tunisian Islamic culture would be ‘synthesized’” (Champagne, 2007, p. 204), and by 1967, 90% of school-aged boys and 50% of girls were receiving a primary education (Sizer, 1971).

Under Bourguibism, the quest for modernity created several junctures within the ensuing polycscape. The political decision and revision of the Tunisian constitution in 1959 that made Bourguiba president for life, coupled with economic decisions and socialism, illuminated another case of the transitology of transitology. Bourguibisme fell under pressure during the first five years, and the economy moved away from a centrally planned system to a form of state capitalism in the hope of creating jobs and encouraging development. While the plan for mass schooling continued, in 1961, Bourguiba appointed Ahemed Ben Salah, author of the 1955-56 socialist plan, as the head of the Ministry of National Plan and Economy with the mandate of developing the Tunisian economy at any cost. Ben Salah, like many other leaders, turned to import-substituting industrialization (ISI) – substituting foreign imports with domestic products – to rejuvenate the Tunisian economy. However, Tunisian Socialism – void of class conflict, Marxist communism, and revolution – lasted for one decade and concentrated on developing cooperation as a way to reduce the disparities between the governorates. Tunisian socialism, grounded in aspects of Islam, was about planning and efficiently using resources; therefore, it did not signal a significant break or transitology from the forgoing era. Instead, it was a well-crafted plan to safeguard the “implicit contract” (Alexander, 2010). By 1970 socialism had failed, unemployment was high, elites were disenfranchised, and a growing educated population was becoming discontent. As a way to tackle these issues, the *infitah* (opening) reforms were implemented and led to the promotion of fiscal austerity in education while promoting privatization in other sectors. However, it was the 1984 bread riots and the treatment of rising Islamic fundamentalism that led to the unraveling of Bourguibism and the rise of Ben Ali and his securitocracy state.

#### **Late-modern Educational Codings: From *Bourguibisme* to *Securitocracy***

Cowen’s last educational paradigm, late-modern, is a system concerned with creating “new patterns of labour force formation: the economic dimension of education becomes more influential than the civic” (Cowen, 1996, p. 161). Education takes on a neoliberal structure; whereas, choice becomes a prerogative for state and consumer. This is in sharp contrast to the modern paradigm given that states seek an “off-loading” of educational responsibilities “while official and political discourse recasts citizens as consumers of education” (Rappleye, 2010, p. 11). The business approach to education shifts away from the modern educational paradigm’s commitment to “equality of educational opportunity” and replaced “by conceptions of the internal efficiency of educational institutions and their external effectiveness” (Cowen, 1996, p. 161). Competition becomes the driving force within late-modern education systems – locally, nationally, and internationally.

The historical trajectory of Tunisia’s transitology to the late modern educational patterns commenced on November 7, 1987, in the bloodless *coup d’état constitutionnel*

or “medical coup d’état” (Jebnoun, 2014) or “tranquil revolution” (Alexander, 1997) by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali that removed Bourguiba from power, citing his senility and incompetence in handling state affairs. The educational patterns under Ben Ali’s rise to power are framed by the securitocracy of the state apparatus. Securitocracy – a strong security apparatus or “*mukhabarat* [intelligence-based] police state [based on a] ‘strong neo-corporatist state’ or the ‘force of obedience’ or an ‘authoritarian syndrome’” (as cited in Schraeder & Redissi, 2011, pp. 5-6) with securitocrats and the backing of Ben Ali’s Party, the *Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (the Democratic Constitutional Rally or RCD) – emerged as the counter narrative to Bourguibisme. Unlike the rest of the Arabic World, Tunisia’s military is a “meritocratic national institution” (El-Shimy, 2011) structured around military defense. It is a composite of several sectors of the society and thus out of the control of the president. Ben Ali’s new national program, steeped in the neoliberal discourse of “national reconciliation,” quickly became the dominant rhetoric of the transitology. The national reconciliation had two key components, *le Changement* (the Change) and *le Pacte National* (the National Pact), both of which focused on economic and political change based on an “ahd jadīd” – New Era or New Covenant – (Alexander 2010; Erdle 2004). *Le Changement* became the official policy speak from the replacement of *le Parti Socialiste Destourien* (the Socialist Destour Party [PSD], renamed in 1964 from Neo Destour party / *Nouveau Parti Libéral Constitutionne*) to *le Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique* (the Constitutional Democratic Rally). The first reason for the Party’s name change was to disassociate it with the failed socialist experiments of the 1960s that did not yield the intended economic result of incubating militant Islam.

The second reason was that it signaled to the West that Tunisia was embarking upon new modes of economic governance and tackling its economic problems and high unemployment through neoliberalist policies. In this vein, the national reconciliation focused on ensuring political pluralism by bringing legal recognized political forces and the social and political organization into *le Pacte National*. Among other things, *le Pacte National* called for recognizing the multiplicity of opinions, restoration of Arabic and Islamic influences, development of Tunisian values, and commitment to the political system and goals for development. Subsequently, reforms took place that focused on – “vaccinat[ing] against fundamental Islam” (Alexander, 2010, p. 50) by specifically claiming that Islam is the national identity of Tunisia; allowing the Theology school of University of Tunis to use its old Islamic name, Zitouna; abolishing the State Security Court that dealt only with cases involving fundamentalists; and prohibiting political participation base on “religion, language, race or region” (Alexander, 2010, p. 45) – amending the penal codes for arrest and custody. *Le Pacte National* restructured the political landscape of Tunisia by consolidating power into the “president democracy” – whereby all decisions were made by him – to guarantee political stability and security.

The rhetoric of these reforms signaled the demise of Bourguibism and the beginning of securitocracy, defined by the “rise of a security ‘technician’” (as cited in Jebnoun, 2014, p. 108) under the aegis of “democratic apprenticeship” (Alexander, 2010). In theory, Ben Ali’s policies contained the reforms that Bourguiba had begun, but instead, the national reconciliation fixated on ridding the country of Bourguibisme, in all but name, and moving away from socialism by concentrating on reforming living standards (Alexander, 2010). In essence, securitocracy did not change the state’s

relationship with education as much it changed how Ben Ali talked about the virtues of Tunisian education. Whereas Bourguibisme used a “single hegemonic party and state bureaucracy as tools to accomplish his ambitious political goals, Ben Ali mainly mobilized his power by closely surveying the population in both public and private space” (Jebnoun, 2014, p. 102), and, therefore, its educational patterns stressed a new form of modernity. Ben Ali’s Party became more dominant while educational partnerships were expanded with Europe, and economic restructuring focused on nurturing Tunisians for the European markets.

**Conclusion: From la Sécuritocratie to post-Securitocracy (the National Constituent Assembly) and New Educational Transitologies**

To conclude, the contextualization of the second part of Tunisia’s late-modern period of transitologies can be defined as the post-Securitocracy era. As Tunisia’s population is mostly devoid of prehistoric cleavages, tribalism, and sectarian issues, it is easier to chart this transitology in a general sense. Noting the post-Jasmine revolution era, with the imposition of a state of emergency and the suspension of the 1959 constitution, on October 23, 2011, Tunisians elected the 271 members of the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) with a mandate of drafting a new constitution (completed in January 2014). The post-Securitocracy era is defined by three periods: (i) the rise of the Troika (the alliance of the three large parties in Tunisia – Enahda [the Renaissance Party], the Congress for the Republic [CPR], and Ettakatol [the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties]), (ii) the interim period of Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa (January 29, 2014, to February 6, 2015); and (iii) the democratic transition under Beji Caid Essebsi, elected president as of December 2014 to July 2019.

The NCA is, therefore, the commencement of transition from la sécuritocratie under Ben Ali’s regime to the post-Securitocracy era system of governance. In this context, post-Securitocracy is seen as a break from the political repression of the past and movement toward consolidated democracy. However, the transitology from the post-Securitocracy has only maintained the existing structures, and pre-revolutionary reforms are still being implemented. Under Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa (January 2014 to February 2015) no significant educational reforms were undertaken, but Arabic became the de facto language of instruction in primary and secondary schools. Under President Beji Caid Essebsi’s, Tunisia’s first post-revolutionary democratic president, the existing state security system was overhauled, and the remaining vestiges of authoritarianism were stripped. In fact, no major educational reforms were undertaken, and simple tweaks to the educational system were proposed under the Planned Strategies for the Education Sector 2016-2020, which called for private sector partnerships, curricula upgrades, teacher training, and quality in standards. What this shows is that during transitions, politicians were hesitant to make broad-based changes to the educational system and focused on band-aid solutions in the hope that they will trickle down – what I call a transitologies of transitologies. This meant that unemployment among youths remains high as the educational system is not catering to improve labor market performance.

In placing this study within the broader literature in Comparative and International Education, it has been advanced that transitologies are not linear but multiscalar and embedded in several governance activities. In what follows, the idea is advanced that “educational codings” (Cowen, 2000, p. 339) permit us to view educational disruptions

within transitologies that can give rise to the 'transitologies of transitologies' as educational reforms emerge under the compression of societal turbulence. In other words, as the transition occurs during any period of educational change (pre-modern, modern, and late-modern) as the efficacy of political and economic compression, the subsequent educational codes that emerge after the transition gives rise to new transitologies within education. This transitologies of transitologies create a splinter in the new system where vestiges of that old transitology remain within the current education system, and new transitological patterns emerge. The ensuing educational codes materialize during this period of educational change, thus creating a mega transitological event. Therefore, transitologies of transitologies can exist within a specific educational transition, even if there is no significant social turbulence occurring within the society.

It has been argued that education in transitory contexts is prized to undergo a different evolutionary dynamic. In other words, we can have different transitologies occurring at the same time and transitological moments within transitologies. Therefore, a historical coding of Tunisia's educational patterns suggests that transitologies are a complex web of interstellar relations that crisscross different scales, include different actors, and exist outside of the compressions of political and social actions. As the world becomes more connected, innovation becomes key to establishing a knowledgeable economy. It can be suggested that as new players enter the educational landscape, national ideologies no longer drive transitologies, but rather, they are being driven by regional aspirations, international commitments, bilateral and multinational actors and agencies, transnational cooperation, and global transdiscursive practices. Moreover, in the current error that legitimates megatrends (disruptive technology, demographic changes, climate security, and data mining), transitologies are no longer a national undertaking by a multiscalar activity that, in several instances, is also out of the hands of the state apparatus. It is suggested that while Tunisians were firmly in control of the uprising that brought down the Ben Ali regime, the revolution was not the sole "coordinator in chief" (Dale, 2005) of Tunisia's transitological trajectory. However, it certainly played a crucial role in strategically directing key transitological moments. Such a distinction is essential in the current transitological period since transitologies are no longer solely shaped by political and economic compressions but are heavily included by ideological pivots in an era of uncertainty.

Thus, educational coding, as discussed above, is brought to fruition at the whims and fancies of personalities, donors, agendas-setting attitudes, and a host of other uncontrollable factors. While political and economic compressions create the perfect transitological storm, this trickledown effect of this storm into sectors such as education may have unintended and unmitigable consequences, thus giving rise to transitologies within transitologies. Moreover, this study suggests that it is possible to do comparative research within one country by focusing on the transdiscursive architectonic components, particularly within the new cosmos that are coming to define economic capitalism (see Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006). The common thread that runs through all of the Tunisian transitologies is that educational codings across different educational patterns begin and end with an over educated and unemployed youth population. It was the educated elite that rejected the mission civilisatrice and rose against the French. It was the post-independence educated elite that silently sanctioned the transition from Bourguiba to Ben Ali in 1987. And again, it was the

educated masses that toppled Ben Ali in the Jasmine Revolution, causing the Arab Awakening.

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**Tavis D. Jules** is an Associate Professor of Cultural and Educational Policy Studies at Loyola University Chicago, specifically focusing on Comparative and International Education and International Higher Education. His vast professional and academic experiences have led to research and publications across the Caribbean and North Africa. He is President of the Caribbean Studies Association, Book and Media Review Editor for the *Comparative Education Review* and an International Institute of Islamic Thought Fellow. His most recent books include: *The Educational Intelligent Economy: Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and the Internet of Things in Education* (with Florin D. Salajan, Emerald 2019); *Educational Transitions in Post-Revolutionary Spaces: Islam, Security and Social Movements in Tunisia* (with Teresa Barton, Bloomsbury 2018); *Re-Reading Education Policy and Practice in Small States: Issues of Size and Scale in the Emerging Intelligent Society and Economy* (with Patrick Ressler, Peter Lang 2017); and *The New Global Educational Policy Environment in the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Gated, Regulated and Governed* (Emerald 2016). Email: [tjules@luc.edu](mailto:tjules@luc.edu).

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## **Towards a radical transformation: Promoting gender equality when children start school**

**MaryFaith Mount-Cors**

*EdIntersect, LLC*

**Jill Gay**

*EdIntersect, LLC; What Works Association*

**Rokhaya Diop**

*Chemonics International; Université Gaston Berger, St. Louis du Sénégal*

*Two of the current United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim for quality education and gender equality, which are inextricably linked. Education efforts in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have rarely addressed issues of gender equality as children start school, except to expand access for girls. The authors explore how gender equality can be addressed within schools and communities in LMICs at the start of primary school. The authors offer promising strategies to make early grade education efforts more gender transformative and thus more effective.*

*Keywords: gender, gender equality, reading, early grade education, early primary, literacy*

Two of the current United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim for quality education and gender equality. These goals are inextricably linked. Other than efforts at expanding access for girls, education efforts in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have rarely addressed issues of gender equality as children start primary school. Interest in gender equality in education often begins with female adolescents, who may drop out due to child marriage and/or pregnancy (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization – UNESCO, 2017). However, gender inequality, is manifested in all aspects of the lives of children, their families, and their schools. For example, textbooks may only show women in sex-stereotyped roles as caretakers. Teachers may seat boys at the front of the class. The authors explore how gender equality can be addressed within schools and communities in LMICs starting in early primary levels. The authors point to promising strategies and opportunities to make early grade education efforts gender transformative and thus more effective.

By way of background on international goals, the Dakar Framework in 2000 adopted Education for All (EFA) and the goal of achieving equality in education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000). The SDGs in 2015 then set out seventeen goals, to include SDG4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunity for all and SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (United Nations, 2015). Movements to address school quality and the lack of student learning, dubbed the global learning crisis, proposed to address not only increasing access to education, but ensuring the learning of basic skills, such as

literacy. Amidst these global movements to improve access and quality of education, donors and their implementing partners have also addressed the need for education to be gender transformative so as to actively promote gender equality (Save the Children, 2014).

As this issue of the *Current Issues in Comparative Education* points out, “education for” movements, efforts, and frameworks such as those mentioned above contain an aspirational element that looks toward a future in which change will have occurred and a gender-transformative, universally literate society will be in place in which girls and boys will have equal opportunities and equal reading abilities so as to lead equally prosperous lives in societies that benefit from their improved equality of status and learning. Gender equality and individual, familial, and systems/structural change are needed to achieve education for all, reading for all, and gender-transformative approaches within those movements. Barriers to gender equality must be addressed in the present, and are critical for the future vision to be achieved.

With international efforts outlined above as background and the call delineated above for a radical transformation to meet the goals laid out, the authors of this article aim to review why gender considerations are important in early primary education programs in LMICs. Attention to promoting gender equality is critical for building an effective early elementary program, focused especially on students in Grades 1 and 2, generally aged 6 to 8.

While, ideally, gender-transformative education should begin even prior to age six, efforts at universal access to primary schools allows countries to assure that children can be exposed to a gender-transformative education. In recent years, donor efforts have focused on school quality in early primary through early grade reading programs in national languages. Teaching children to read in a language they speak and understand – a national language or sometimes alternately referred to as a local language, home language, first language or a mother tongue – is also a way to encourage family members to engage and support young children in learning to read. When gender differences in early reading outcomes are not statistically significant, programs may believe there is no further work needed in gender-transformative efforts. In fact, girls outperforming boys in early grade reading outcomes is common across countries (McGraw-Hill, 2020; Price-Mohr & Price, 2016; OECD, 2015; Brown Center on Education Policy, 2015) and does not eliminate or mitigate the gender issues embedded in the society and systems. Gender issues must be addressed, understood, and transformed.

While not attempting to be complete, this article will elaborate on some of the gender-related issues within early primary reading programs. Some of the issues addressed include: women in teaching, women in leadership in school systems, household chores, norms, differential amount of time for play, school-related gender-based violence, and parent and community support to learn to read. This article draws from literature on this topic as well as the authors’ experience in integrating gender approaches within an early grade reading program in Senegal, the USAID-funded All Children Reading (ACR) program or, in French, the *Lecture Pour Tous* program. In this article, the authors discuss why this topic is important, the methods used to gather data, and then move to the findings and conclusions that point to steps toward the

radical transformation of actualizing gender equality individually, familially, and structurally in early grade reading education.

We hope that this article leads to more implementation efforts to integrate gender equality into early primary reading programs. Additionally, we hope that there will continue to be more documentation of these efforts and, finally, a scale-up of evidence-informed gender-transformative education at the start of children's primary education.

***Gender-transformative early primary education: Why is this important?***

EFA goals were not met in 2015 with over 260 million children still not in school and more than 480 million women 15 years or over lacking basic literacy skills. Fewer than half of countries had reached gender parity in primary and secondary education in 2015, with no country in sub-Saharan Africa projected to achieve it at both levels. Around 66% of countries achieved parity in primary education, only 50% in lower secondary, only 29% in upper secondary, and only 4% in higher education. Girls, and particularly girls from the lowest-income families, faced the largest challenge in gaining access to primary education. Secondary education gender disparities had improved, but persisted, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Arab States. Half of adult women in South and West Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa were not able to read or write (UNESCO, 2015).

It is important to note that, often, global emphasis on gender and education starts after a girl reaches puberty, but, in fact, gender differences are marked at the earliest ages, even before school starts, with boys allowed more mobility and freedom of movement and girls tasked with domestic chores (UNESCO, 2016). Discrimination between boys and girls – how they are socialized into different gender roles from birth – can also have negative effects on both boys' and girls' development even at a very young age (WHO, 2018). A study of young adolescents in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Europe, and North America found that in all areas of the world, unequal gender norms are entrenched by age 10 (Moreau, et al., 2019). It makes sense therefore to start promoting gender equality at the earliest ages across all subject areas, including early primary reading. Nevertheless, "despite a considerable literature documenting gender-related barriers, gaps in knowledge exist regarding the degree to which interventions to reduce gender-related barriers to schooling in LMICs are effective in improving education outcomes for girls" (Chuang, Mensch, Psaki, Haberland, & Kozak, 2019), which is particularly true for early grade reading. It is more cost effective to address the causes for the divergence in learning outcomes in early primary grades when these differences are small than in later years as students drop out, repeat, or fail their school exams. Girls in particular drop out in larger numbers during this period between primary and secondary school, often due to obligations societies and families place on girls to do more domestic work as well as fewer economic opportunities for young women (DFID, 2015).

As the academic focus area of the early elementary programs of interest in this article is reading, the prevailing thinking on reading and literacy should be considered next. Literacy can be defined along a continuum – from a set of skills or cognitive processes that form the ability to read, to write, and to calculate on to literacy as applied within a context, within a family, within a set of cultural or social practices, and on to a set of capabilities, and then finally to a tool for critical thinking (UNESCO Institute for

Lifelong Learning, 2013; Mount-Cors, 2016). Literacy, or the cognitive abilities that allow a person to read and understand a text, has been the focus of early grade reading programs in which children learn to read ideally in a language they speak and understand. By gaining this opportunity, the rationale is that the children will be able to transfer those reading skills to other languages, such as to the official language of schooling in that context, and continue learning. Often, the differential experiences of girls and boys from birth and certainly from the beginning of their schooling, may be ignored or considered nonexistent.

The deeper connections between reading skills in the early grades of elementary education and girls' education may not have received adequate attention, but girls' education has nonetheless been the focus of many multilateral and bilateral actors since 2000. There are numerous global actors in the space: including multilateral actors such as UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and UNESCO, and bilateral actors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), who have contributed to this field. UNGEI advocates for girls' education globally and is a learning hub (UNGEI, 2020). UNESCO conducts ongoing monitoring of gender equality. USAID requires gender assessments and plans across all of its sectors (USAID, 2017), including education. Gender assessments and plans as a USAID donor requirement for all projects (USAID ADS Chapter 205) tend to focus on attendance, retention, and quality to identify any gender-related barriers that early primary students may face (Chemonics, 2016) or to develop and implement a gender plan that "reaches all aspects of the project and instill gender equality throughout each level to achieve lasting and sustainable impacts" (Diop, Gay, & Mount-Cors, 2017. p.5). Gender plans often include whether gender is part of the education sector strategic plan, if teachers facilitate equal access for boys and girls inside the classroom, or if assessment data are analyzed for boys and girls. If grade repetition is high, then overage girls in primary levels may pose a specific area of concern. The support of a local gender and social inclusion expert within the project structure is critical to provide ongoing areas of training and embedding of critical gender components into teacher preparation, teacher and student materials, and parental, family and community literacy efforts. Girls' access to education is responsive to changes in cost and distance as well as improvements to pedagogy and teacher practices. In addition, "programs can be mindful of gender issues without being specifically targeted to girls" (Evans & Yuan, 2019, p.4).

### **Research Sites and Methods**

The three authors collaborated on gender planning in a national language reading program in early primary grades in Senegal, the USAID-funded All Children Reading (ACR) program, which serves 3,572 schools and 59 *daara* (Koranic schools) in six regions of Senegal. In this paper, the authors discuss barriers to gender-transformative early primary approaches and present a goal-based conceptual framework for early grade reading programs, based on literature review, consultations, and classroom and school-based observations. The paper draws on the authors' collaborative work on the ACR program, as well as the expertise of the three authors in education, gender, early grade reading and literacy.

A mixed methodological approach allowed the authors to collect and examine the quantitative and qualitative data available at central and decentralized levels. The

authors conducted a thorough literature review, which included grey literature from bilaterals, especially USAID, and multilaterals such as UNICEF; government of Senegal policies and reports; donor-funded projects' training modules and publications authored by implementing partners; and peer-reviewed literature.

The authors held consultations at the sub-regional level in the intervention areas at the start of the program in 2017 to develop a plan to promote gender equality and to allow the plan to be updated and progress to be tracked. These consultations included over 50 stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, school directors, school management committees, parents' associations, mothers' associations, women teachers' networks, ministry of education authorities and ACR program staff to collect information and /or recommendations for the development of the ACR gender plan. Sampling was based on the research area and the objectives of the project.

In addition to individual interviews with representatives as described above, the team conducted interviews and classroom observations with school directors and teachers from the ten public elementary schools and *daara*, in the regions of Louga, Kaolack, Kaffrine, and Dakar. In each of these schools, classroom dynamics, teacher interactions with students, number of girls and boys in the classroom, teacher behavior toward girls and boys (for example, if girls were called on more often than boys) and teacher attitudes toward gender roles were assessed. Focus groups also included representatives from the ministry of education, local parent associations, the network of women teachers, mothers' associations, school management committee representatives, community liaisons and community supervisors tasked with the parent /community engagement objective of the ACR program.

### Discussion

Between 2005 and 2011 in Senegal, primary school enrollment rates soared from 79% to 93%, with a higher number of girls enrolling than boys (USAID, 2014; UNICEF Senegal, 2016). However, only 13% of students had sufficient reading skills (Jangandoo, 2017). On a national level, there are sometimes concerns that the focus on promoting girls' access to education resulted in boys falling behind: in 2004, girls were 79.6% and boys were 81.2% of primary school students, but by 2015, girls constituted 92.2% and boys 81% (PASEC, 2016). Yet, girls' and boys' rates of access, performance, and dropout differ by region; of those who repeat first grade in Diourbel, a region of Senegal, 16.5% are boys and 19.2% are girls (IA, 2015). Intersecting areas of girls' lives in addition to geographic location, such as socioeconomic status and disability, can also compound the disadvantage of girls in school access and performance. World Inequality Database in Education (WIDE), indicates that in Senegal, Guinea, Pakistan, Mali, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Benin, Chad, and Nigeria, the poorest girls spend less than two years in school on average, which includes Senegal at 1.87 mean years of education for girls with the lowest socioeconomic status. In addition, in Senegal, 55% of the poorest girls are out of school at the primary school level, 58% at lower secondary, and 83% at upper secondary (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020).

In Senegal, both girls and boys have shown they are making progress in early grade reading skills in national languages on the Senegal Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) midline study (Mount-Cors, Rousseau & de Galbert, 2020) with no appreciable gender differences demonstrated at midline. Thus, rather than showing that there are no gender disparities, hence no gender-transformative programming

needed within a given intervention, it is of note that girls are not outperforming boys as this does not follow patterns that have been established across many different countries (McGraw-Hill, 2020; Price-Mohr & Price, 2016; OECD, 2015; Brown Center on Education Policy, 2015).

The gender plan for the Senegal program was organized according to the project outcome structure and this same structure is used to organize the discussion sections below. The key components, or inputs, of the program's intervention connected to each area below are as follows:

- Improve Early Grade Reading Instruction in Schools, including providing evidence-based teaching and learning materials to students in public schools and *daaras* and supporting comprehensive, professional development for teachers through pre-service and in-service training, coaching, and supervision
- Improve policies and systems to scale up and sustain quality reading instruction, materials, and community engagement
- Strengthen the support students receive from family and other community members as they learn to read (Mount-Cors, Rousseau & de Galbert, 2020)

The sections below illustrate some of the goals toward gender equality in early primary reading, and examples of evidence-informed interventions to reduce gender-related barriers to early grade reading efforts in each of the key component outcome areas in early grade reading.

#### ***Improve Early Grade Reading Instruction in Schools***

ACR implemented interventions as an early grade reading pilot in a total of approximately 54 *daaras* (Rousseau et al, 2020). One key observation in Senegal is that the number of girls versus boys in *daara* classrooms tends to skew heavily to boys, with girls making up just 30 to 35% of the classroom population, which can lead to inequities when desks or materials are in short supply. The picture here from a *daara* that was part of the pilot described above shows how girls have been placed on the floor while boys are seated in desks.



Figure 1: *Daara* [Koranic school] early primary classroom, Senegal. (Diop, 2019)

**Improve textbooks to eliminate or reduce women, men, boys and girls being depicted in sex-stereotyped ways.** Findings of a 2015 UNESCO study indicate that gender bias in textbooks is a serious issue: “Textbooks and curricula matter not only for learning new information but also for what perceptions they create about women and their roles” with “study after study showing significant gender bias in textbooks, with women greatly underrepresented and both women and men depicted in gender-stereotyped ways” (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016, p. 254). Studies from developing and developed countries find that females tend to be greatly underrepresented, and both males and females are depicted in gender-stereotyped ways. A recent textbook in Senegal included a text that perpetuated harmful gender norms, suggesting that boys should help their fathers in the fields and girls should help their mothers at home.

Some examples from Senegal show both gender-harmful and gender-transformative messages (Diop, Gay, & Mount-Cors, (2017). The first image below can be considered on a scale between gender harmful and gender neutral as it shows a woman with a baby sleeping on her back while another young child is stirring a pot nearby. While this may be a traditional set of responsibilities for a mother, the depiction does not point to a broader role or set of capabilities possible for the woman.



Mamadou et Bineta (© Editions Edicef)

Figure 2. *Mother cooking with children.* (Editions Edicef, 2015)

At the same time, the next depiction, from an ACR reading book in Wolof for children to take home for practicing reading, is gender transformative, with a girl and boy shown washing dishes together. This illustration shows how gender roles can be transformed so that chores at home are shared. When this sharing happens, the time of girls is not disproportionately placed into domestic tasks; then, they can both practice reading and take part in free play, which boys traditionally have more time to do. Sharing the domestic chores can transform the gender structure, which has ripples into each aspect of a child’s day and life cycle.

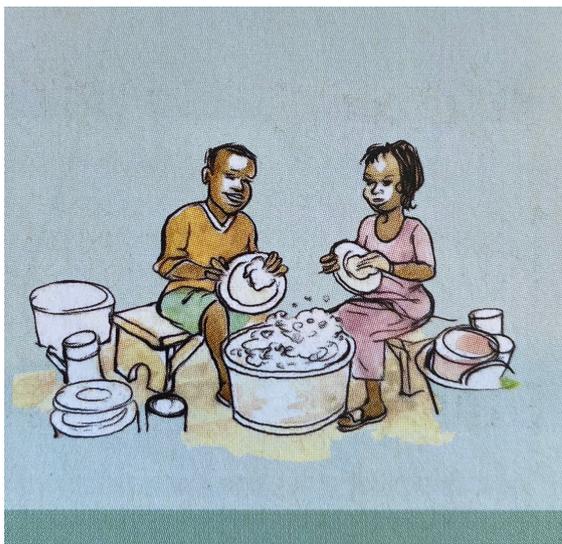


Figure 3. *Boy and girl washing dishes together.* (Ministry of Education of Senegal, 2018)

**Address unequal gender norms that affect teacher-student interactions through social-emotional learning approaches as part of any early grade learning program.** Positive interactions have physical and mental benefits for child development. Early social interactions help children develop strong language skills, and other important life-course assets, such as the social-emotional skills of communication, confidence, creativity and empathy. Nevertheless, teachers may be unaware that they are creating gender disparities among their students by what they expect from girls as compared to boys, in addition to prioritizing whether girls or boys can speak, whether girls or boys must listen, and whether girls or boys can ask questions: “Overwhelming evidence now emanates from different parts of the globe to suggest that schools and teachers tend to reinforce gender-loaded perceptions regarding the abilities of boys and girls” (Jha & Pouzevara, 2016). McCracken, Unterhalter, Marquez, & Chelstowska (2015) also suggest the importance of putting attention on this issue of gender stereotypes that are perpetuated by teachers. Girls often do not recognize their right to education and girls are less likely to be forthcoming in class (Aikman & Rao, 2012). Related to the section below on increasing the number of women in teaching early grades, part of this work is to not only improve gender equality in the workforce within the school systems, but to also ensure that teachers treat girls and boys equally in the classroom, using praise and other behavioral approaches rather than relying on corporal punishment (Reichert & Hawley, 2014). In our observations in schools in Senegal, thanks to gender equality training, teachers now are more likely to call equally on boys and girls.

**Address the early foundations of school-related gender-based violence.** Like all statistics on gender-based violence, school related gender-based violence (SRGBV) is underreported. However, Together for Girls has found that up to 30% of girls in Malawi, and 50% of girls in Nigeria and Uganda experienced school-related sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by teachers and/or classmates (2020). Lack of latrines and privacy for girls are also associated with school-related gender-based violence (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). In Mali, girls who missed school did so because they did not feel safe, and the most-often cited reason for not enrolling in school both among girls and parents was financial constraints, indicating that girls’ education was not prioritized when money was short (EdIntersect, 2019).

Separate latrines for girls and boys, and for female and male teachers, that afford privacy and can lock, need to be provided (Sahoo et al., 2015; IASC, 2015). Referral systems need to be created for schools to effectively address sexual abuse, both among children and teachers, with linkages to counseling, health services, and if desired, legal systems. Girls are more likely to report SRGBV if schools have established mechanisms to report incidents (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016).

***Improve policies and systems to scale up and sustain quality reading instruction, materials, and community engagement***

The gender plan in Senegal ensured attention to gender equality was incorporated into all forms of education communications, such as posters. Those responsible for communications at the regional and district levels received training on how to create communication materials that promote gender equality (Diop, Gay, & Mount-Cors, 2020). The project ensured incorporation of gender and inclusion considerations into the sustainability and scale-up plan. The self-analysis and consideration of the belief systems and practices around gender norms of education staff both within the project and in ministry units would be an important activity and metric as well.

**Ensure a strong policy environment both in the country and with implementing partners.** It is also essential to work with the ministry of education concerning why attention to gender is important and practical steps to take. It is also useful to measure change, such as the percentage of women in school leadership and management positions, and gender parity in teacher pay by sector and level (UNESCO, 2016). It is important that girls and boys have equal amount of time outside school to practice reading. Our observations in Senegal indicate that this is a work in progress.

**Address the lack of female teachers as role models.** It is necessary to help women educators be part of gender transformation, rather than internalize oppression. It is critical for girls – and boys - to see women teachers as role models. In a number of LMICs, women are a small number of the teachers. Due to gender norms, women are less likely to be literate, less likely to graduate from higher education, and have less rights to mobility to be posted in rural areas of a country. In Ethiopia, a project pilot for quality education included a telling recommendation: increase the number of female teachers who are role models. Often the lack of female teachers keeps girls from attending and persisting in school, especially as they reach secondary school (Save the Children, 2014). The gap in Senegal is especially marked across all language groups (Wolof, Pulaar, and Seereer, the three languages of the ACR program) in the national language reading program in rural schools, with up to 70% in rural areas of first and second grade teachers being men (Mount-Cors, Rousseau & de Galbert, 2020).

In addition, teacher assignment and transfer patterns in the ministry of education tend to be biased against women and need to be addressed also for reading programs in national languages for language match (RTI, 2014; Chemonics & Cambridge Education, 2017; Diop, Gay, & Mount-Cors, 2017.). As a point of comparison, the ministry of health in Senegal has put in place a plan to institutionalize gender by integrating gender equality in human resources management in the health sector (Newman, 2018). The ministry of education must be encouraged to hire, train, and promote women teachers, particularly in rural areas.

**Address the lack of women in positions of educational leadership.** Women face obstacles to becoming a teacher and then rising within the educational bureaucracy. “Gender-equitable leadership is a major concern in education. Women continue to be underrepresented in senior management positions, on school boards and in education ministries in rich and poor countries alike” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 43). In Senegal, in the six regions where the early grade reading project is active, over 95% of the school directors are men (Mount-Cors, Rousseau & de Galbert, 2020).

Women who do achieve a level of senior leadership in a school or at a local or national ministry level may not be able to affect gender structures inherent in the educational institutions. Often, women even in leadership positions lack voice and agency.

As with the example of the health sector planning highlighted above in Senegal, potential gender-transformative actions could include positive discrimination to promote women to positions of leadership, leadership training for women, and support groups for women who work in the educational system.

***Strengthen the support students receive from family and other community members as they learn to read***

A family approach can build early reading skills both at home and at school. This means that mothers, fathers, older sisters, older brothers and others in the household can be mobilized to help the young child with letter-sound correspondences, orientation to print, and listening comprehension skills developed by reading stories to the child. A kind of intergenerational learning can be employed in which the family is working together through family literacy efforts on building basic literacy in the national language that the family speaks and learns together (Mount-Cors, 2016). This family literacy approach is recommended to strengthen the effect of early grade reading programs in national languages (Sarr et al, 2020).

In the Senegal ACR program, community members, such as parent associations, have been trained on gender in the 20% of communities where the parent and community component of the project is active. Promotion of gender equality has been part of all community fora, debates, and other community events.

**Address unequal gender norms that affect free time, mobility and chores, taking away from learning.** As mentioned above, gender-harmful norms often prevail, such as that boys belong outside playing soccer and girls belong around the home with domestic tasks, with more limited mobility. “Girls and women disproportionately bear the burden of household chores, including time-consuming tasks such as collecting water and firewood, even while in school” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 37). Expectations are often quite different for girls compared to boys: “In most countries, girls are more than twice as likely to be involved in child domestic work than boys” (UNESCO, 2019, p. 3). Children’s work, even in limited amounts, adversely impacts a child’s learning (Jha and Pouezevara, 2016). Consultations in Senegal revealed examples such as: when a boy helps with household tasks, he is teased for his lack of masculinity.

With the covid-19 pandemic, these unequal gender norms may be exacerbated. As mentioned above, girls are more likely to be tasked with domestic chores, which have increased due to the pandemic. One way to reduce transmission of covid-19 is through

frequent handwashing, which calls for more water. As girls are often tasked with carrying water, this increase in water needed for personal hygiene most affects girls' time and stress. In addition, gender-based violence has increased during the pandemic (UN Women, 2020). It is notable that girls are more likely to suffer from gender-based violence yet may have nowhere to seek shelter or report the abuse.

Community dialogues have been effective in changing gender norms. Effective programs have used participatory methodologies such as that of Tostan (Fernald & Weber, 2015) and Save the Children (2014). It is important to hold community dialogues on the benefits of girls' education, while not neglecting boys. In fact, engaging boys in "girls' education" is one of the best ways to transform gender relations and norms from a young age. Save the Children's Choices curriculum consisted of eight developmentally appropriate activities, supporting children aged 10 to 14 to explore alternative views of masculinities and femininities. Research in Nepal showed an increase in gender-equitable attitudes and behavior changes among both boys and girls relating to discrimination, social image, control and dominance, violence, attitudes to girls' education, and acceptance of traditional gender norms, after participating in Choices (Lundgren et al, 2013). It is also critical that boys and girls be involved in sports clubs and reading clubs, both in single sex and co-ed groups, to learn the equal rights and capabilities of both girls and boys to achieve their human potential no matter what gender norms have been inculcated. Single sex and co-ed clubs such as those sponsored by CARE in various countries, can also be used as models for this type of gender-transformative activity.

### **Conclusions**

Gender-transformative approaches to early primary education are critical to the successful lives of the world's children. Girls getting an education leads to a society's increased wealth, better health for her and her future children and many other positive impacts (Levine et al, 2009), but is also a basic human right. It is critical to act on the whole: at the individual level, the family level, and the structural level, and to recognize that, at the child's level, social-emotional learning incorporating gender-transformative reflection and content alongside reading education would enhance the positive effects for girls and boys and the families and societies in which they live. Actualizing gender-transformative approaches will also make early primary programs more effective and sustainable over the long term as they can also make an impact on familial, community, and structural levels. The goals outlined in this article require acknowledging and addressing the gender-related barriers with an evidence-informed, solution-based approach that includes documentation, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure effectiveness. Promoting gender equality when children start school will lead to a radical transformation, with progress toward the SDGs for all children.

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**MaryFaith Mount-Cors** is President of EdIntersect, LLC. She is Technical Lead for the EdIntersect team on gender and inclusion, technology strategy, and early grade reading assessment and local education monitoring on the Senegal ACR program. She has a Ph.D. in Education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Contact information: MaryFaith Mount-Cors, EdIntersect, 103 W. Weaver St, Suite A, Carrboro, North Carolina 27510, USA. Email: [maryfaith@edintersect.com](mailto:maryfaith@edintersect.com).

**Jill Gay** is Senior Gender Advisor for EdIntersect, LLC and Chief Technical Officer for What Works Association. She has worked at the National Academy of Sciences, and has provided gender expertise globally for the UN, USAID, foundations, and other organizations. She is the lead author of [www.whatworksforwomen.org](http://www.whatworksforwomen.org).

**Rokhaya Diop** is Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Specialist for the Senegal ACR program on the Chemonics team. An alumna of the Fulbright Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program, she has a B.A. in English, M.A. in Sociology, and is pursuing graduate work at the Université Gaston Berger, St. Louis, Senegal.

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# Refugee Higher Education and Future Reconstruction Efforts: Exploring the Connection through the Innovative Technological Implementation of a University Course in Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Uganda

**Matthew Gallagher**

*Arizona State University, Education for Humanity*

**Carrie Bauer**

*Arizona State University, Education for Humanity*

*Higher education (HE) for refugees and displaced persons has often been considered a luxury. However, the humanitarian and educational sectors have recently committed to offering HE to this population. This is a welcome development, as research demonstrates that HE is intrinsically connected to development at the individual, community, and national levels. This study presents the findings of an HE program with thirty refugee students in Uganda which utilized offline technology to improve content knowledge in agribusiness, digital literacy, and other skills. The study's results advance the idea that refugees, upon return to their home country, are better able to contribute to the reconstruction efforts of post-conflict societies when they have participated in HE programs.*

## **Introduction**

Future reconstruction efforts in post-conflict areas, where warfare has ended but reconstruction and peace are still in the formative process, are dependent on current efforts in higher education (Cloete, 2011). Higher education (HE), defined here as all post-secondary educational program opportunities, is necessary for successful and sustainable reconstruction processes implemented through inclusive, sustainable, gender-equitable, and peaceful means (WUSC, 2018; Cloete, 2011). Despite this, HE for refugees and displaced persons has often been thought of as a luxury and not a priority (Dryden-Peterson, 2012). This is evident through the 70.8 million displaced people and refugees around the world for whom educational opportunities are extremely limited and access rates scant in comparison to global averages (UNHCR, 2019a). Approximately half of all refugee children have access to primary school, only 22% have access to secondary school, and only 3% have access to HE in comparison to 36% of global youth (Save the Children, 2017; UNHCR, 2019a; UNESCO, 2017).

While access to HE education still lags far behind where it needs to be for these marginalized populations, global humanitarian efforts and support for HE education have recently increased. In the early 2000s, the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) and Africa Regional Training Conference on Tertiary Education (2003) brought the issue of HE for displaced populations to the forefront. In 2015, the United Nations adopted Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” by 2030 (UNHCR, 2019c). In 2018, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework and the Global

Compact on Refugees highlighted HE education as a solution for refugee inclusion and integration, thereby allowing them to “thrive, not just survive” (Grandi, 2019). Most recently, attendees at the December 2019 Global Refugee Forum targeted education and its financing as a main goal for humanitarian efforts moving forward, setting a goal of increasing refugee participation in HE from 3% to 15% by 2030 (#15by30).

However, despite growing support and efforts, existing HE programs do not always address the current barriers refugees face in accessing HE, such as their isolated location in low-resource environments, and a lack of technological and built infrastructure, electricity, access to devices, and internet connectivity, among others (Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). Additionally, existing HE programs do not tailor their content and structure to provide the knowledge and nurture the skills refugees will need to contribute to reconstruction efforts when they return to their countries of origin, such as “self-management; thinking and solving problems; working together and communicating, ...understanding the business..., effectively using numbers, IT, and language” (Thayaparan et al., 2015, p. 341).

In this context, Arizona State University’s (ASU) Education for Humanity program (E4H) piloted a four-month program from April to July 2019 that provided a university-level course to 30 learners (see Methods for additional learner data) in a resource-constrained environment via solar-powered, offline/online technology that allows access by any Wi-Fi enabled device via a Wi-Fi hotspot. This article presents an overview of the existing literature and explores the role that the results of this program has in informing the field of refugee higher education, the use of technological solutions to meet international goals, and the connection between university-level topical knowledge, digital literacy, and other gained skills with future reconstruction efforts in post-conflict societies.

### **Literature Review**

A refugee, as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention which codified their rights at the international level, is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (UN General Assembly, 1951, p.3). Currently, refugees face an average displacement time of 26 years (UNHCR, 2016). In 2018, 2.9 million displaced people, including 600,000 refugees, returned to their home communities (UNHCR, 2019b).

### ***The Socio-ecological Framework Model***

Refugees live in a context where their behaviors influence and are influenced by their unique social environment. This study draws upon the social-ecological framework of Berkes and Folke (1998) and the socio-ecological frameworks of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) and Henderson and Baffour (2015). The frameworks are utilized to provide structure for this paper’s position that refugees that have participated in HE can have a more beneficial impact on post-reconstruction societies once they return to their home countries due to the mutual and collective influence of individuals and communities on each other. The framework embraces the idea that individual gains and those of the larger system(s) are all connected and interdependent. The figure below (Figure 1), adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model, visualizes how these various levels interact and influence each other, and, for the purpose of this study,

represents how individual access to HE has important ripple effects when applied at the community and national levels.

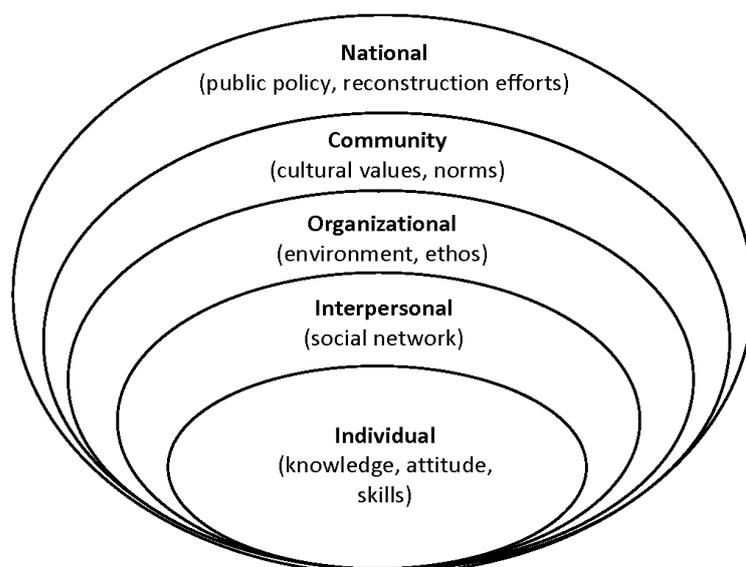


Figure 1. *Socio-Ecological Framework Model*. Adapted from “Toward an experimental ecology of human development,” by U. Bronfenbrenner, 1977, *American Psychologist*, 32(7), 513-531.

This framework emphasizes that the decisions, actions, and behaviors of individuals are impacted by their existence in specific physical environments and contexts that have mutual exchanges (Colding & Barthel, 2019). However, as researchers, we also recognize that refugees are not homogenous or monolithic. Their intersectional lives, the overlapping oppressions and identities, defined both individually and via social relationships and structural levels, are impacted by their lived situations (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000). As such, refugees’ multiple-situated identities at both the individual level (i.e. how they define themselves via ethnicity, gender, etc.) as well as the way external systems define them (i.e. refugee policies of host-country and global governing bodies; citizenship status; economic access, etc.) affect them and their access to HE.

Using the socio-ecological framework to structure the literature, the next few paragraphs will explore the benefits of HE, how they affect refugees at the individual level, and explore the ripple effect that occurs when each benefit accumulates and then radiates outwards to the interpersonal, organizational, community and national levels. Finally, we will present how this accumulation influences reconstruction efforts in post-conflict societies. This structure will demonstrate how the interdependent relationships between educated refugees and their larger communities influence one another and have the potential to benefit post-reconstruction societies.

### ***Higher Education and Prosperous Societies***

Higher education has long been hailed as a fundamental component of stable and prosperous societies (Ferede, 2018), and its presence in society has been shown to

improve feelings of hope and increase the spectrum of available opportunities for individuals affected by displacement (Crea, 2016). Wright and Plasterer (2012) showed that participation in HE creates resilient, supportive, and thriving communities, and provides the foundation needed for the creation of stable, functioning societies. Bloom et al. (2014) notes that investments made in HE help to accelerate technological diffusion, decrease knowledge gaps, reduce poverty, and result in greater economic returns for society.

Reflecting on the various roles of HE, Van Laar et al. (2017) and Pheeraphan (2013) both note that the role of HE is not to simply train students for a specific job with content knowledge and technical/hard skills, but to cultivate and nurture the skills needed to adapt to evolving job responsibilities, process information, and become lifelong learners. Brown (2018) noted the wide spectrum of skills that HE cultivates, including soft skills like written and oral communication; critical thinking; leadership; confidence; teamwork; and work ethic, and technical/hard skills which directly relate to the type of subject being studied, such as building knowledge for construction or mathematical knowledge for accounting.

In addition to topical content knowledge and soft skills, HE also develops core competencies in digital literacy, including skills to understand and use technology in a society where access to information is predominantly through digital platforms, which are not often available in secondary education (Kay, 2010; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Technology divides often exist in marginalized societies, which then carry over to post-conflict societies (Pheeraphan, 2013). In some refugee camps and settlements, digital literacy programs are recognized as an area of need and offered to learners, but this is not yet the norm (GIZ, 2016). Recognizing the important role digital literacy skills will play in building knowledge-based economies, Van Larr et al. (2017, p.577-578) expressed that “the development of the global knowledge society and the rapid integration of ICT make it imperative to acquire digital skills necessary for employment and participation in society.” Refugees recognize the benefits of gaining digital literacy skills by demanding access to technology as part of any HE opportunities offered to them (Dryden-Peterson, 2012). Crea (2016) learned from refugee students enrolled in HE that access to technology helped increase their technical and professional skills. In cases where students had not been exposed to technology, these skills were not developed, and negatively affected their professional opportunities.

### ***Higher Education and the Role of the Individual in Community and National Reconstruction Efforts***

On an individual level, the literature concludes that HE strengthens psycho-social functions (Ferede, 2018), builds positive self-identity necessary for leaders to mitigate feelings of fear and persecution (Zeus, 2011), promotes a sense of pride, accomplishment, and personal growth, and improves leadership, communication, and language skills (Crea, 2016). Furthermore, participation in HE allow refugees to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to contribute to their development and growth at the personal level - a critical need as knowledge-based economies increasingly become the global norm, (Van Laar et al., 2017; Pheeraphan, 2013; Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010).

Moving outward from the individual level on our socio-ecological model, once a critical mass of individuals possess these types of skills and knowledge, it influences society's ideology, cultural norms, and public policies (Henderson & Baffour, 2015; Clark, 2006). On an interpersonal level, HE cultivates soft skills such as inclusivity, tolerance, collaboration and teamwork, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Brown, 2018), that can contribute to the development of social networks, the establishment of cultural norms and beliefs, and influence public policy (Van Larr et al., 2017; Thayaparan et al., 2015; Henderson & Baffour, 2015; Pheeraphan, 2013; Tahiraj, 2010). These skills manifest in the development and implementation of inclusive policies and programs in post-conflict societies (WUSC, 2018; Tahiraj, 2010), thereby linking the individual skills gained from HE to the community and national levels of the socio-ecological model. The ability to listen to and understand other's views gained from the collaborative work stressed in HE manifests at the community and national levels through policies and programs that aim to meet the needs of the many (Brown, 2018).

In the context of post-conflict reconstruction efforts and activities, the skills and knowledge gained from HE will be expressed at all levels of our socio-ecological model. Higher education "equip[s] students to contribute to socio-political and economic reconstruction" (WUSC, 2018 p. 6). University-level courses provide refugees with the topical, readily applicable knowledge and skills necessary for reconstruction efforts (Thayaparan et al., 2015; Trnavcevic, 2010) that are needed at the individual, community, government, and cultural levels for a well-functioning society (Henderson & Baffour, 2015). In looking at the contributions of resettled university graduates, WUSC (2018, p.5) notes that "many resettled students make the decision, later in life, to return to their countries of origin to contribute their skills and knowledge to rebuilding efforts, helping to ensure a more inclusive, sustainable, and peaceful process."

Making a more practical connection between HE and the skills needed for reconstruction, Collier (2000) argues that one of the risk factors in post-conflict societies is ethnic dominance. Higher education often promotes integration and intercultural competence by providing opportunities for learners to collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds and create more stable and diverse interpersonal social networks (Law et al., 2019). This applies to the gender equity of reconstruction efforts and policy as well: an individual's gender and intersectional identity influence how they view and perceive conflict and reconstruction and will influence public policy in communities at local and national levels (Kaufman, Williams & Ebc., 2016 Henderson & Baffour, 2015).

Reflecting on the long-term durability and sustainability of these post-conflict reconstruction efforts, Wright and Plasterer (2012, p.104) concluded that the knowledge and skills refugees obtain through HE result in more effective and durable solutions and are "a strategic [issue for] long-term processes of post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding." Post-war South Korea provides an example of when national policy makes a direct connection between HE and durable development and reconstruction. South Korea prioritized the development of formal education institutions (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and self-described the effort as 'education fever.' The country now cites this effort as a reason for its ability to grow

and succeed post-conflict (Seth, 2010). Indeed, currently ranked 36th globally, they have been highlighted as one of the most developed and strongest HE systems in the world (Mani, 2018).

Looking once again at our socio-ecological model, post-reconstruction societies do not develop in a vacuum. Individuals apply their gained knowledge and skills, build and participate in democratic processes, create social networks, and together affect the economic prospects of their immediate communities, which, in turn, collectively determine the relative success of post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Therefore, efforts to provide individual refugees with HE access, along with the topical content knowledge, soft skills, and digital literacy skills that accompany it, will collectively and positively impact the success and sustainability of reconstruction efforts in post-conflict societies (Bloom et al., 2014). Future reconstruction efforts are therefore dependent upon current efforts in HE. When refugees return home, reconstruction efforts will be reliant upon citizens with knowledge and skills gained from HE to lead and implement reconstruction efforts. The literature has demonstrated that a more durable and sustainable post-conflict society is created when populated by citizens with the ability to think critically and solve problems in the face of the inevitable challenges faced during reconstruction efforts. Summarizing the benefits of HE in the area of national reconstruction efforts, Trnavcevic (2010, p.99) states that “the re-establishment of education contributes to normalization, democratization, and economic recovery.”

### ***Purpose Statement***

The purpose of this study was to assess growth in agribusiness and digital literacy knowledge and skills of refugee learners of Nakivale settlement, Uganda who participated in the AGB250: Agribusiness course. This paper will demonstrate how this program advances the idea that refugees, upon returning to their home country, can better contribute to the reconstruction of post-conflict societies when exposed to higher education content delivered via innovative methods that aim to build digital literacy skills.

### **Methods**

Despite the demand for HE, the various benefits it provides, its ability to foster strong and resilient post-conflict communities, refugees still face many access barriers, such as cost, infrastructure, connectivity, access to devices, lack of documentation and many others (Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). An innovative technological solution was one way to simultaneously diminish these barriers, create opportunities for access to HE, and offer the opportunity to acquire digital literacy skills.

The open-source course was housed in the learning management system Moodle, on a raspberry pi computer in a SolarSPELL, which is a portable, solar-powered, digital library for use in low-resource locations. Its digital library provides locally-relevant, open-access, educational resources to learners by emitting an offline Wi-Fi hotspot to which any Wi-Fi-enabled device within a 50-foot radius can connect. The SolarSPELL therefore mimics an online experience to help build learners' information literacy, technology, and digital learning skills in a safe, offline learning environment (Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). Given previous research on technology's ability to open education pathways to refugees (Dahya, 2016; Mendenhall et al., 2018), this program used

technology to create educational access for a marginalized community and paired it with human support. In order for learners, facilitators, and the faculty member to stay connected, the ASU team used a 95/5 model. The 30 learners could access the 95% offline material via 12 internet-enabled devices (6 laptops and 6 tablets) and the other 5% was accessed online via mobile connectivity from smartphones. All devices were provided by ASU.

The initiative took one year to design and build. Implementation occurred from April to July 2019 by ASU's E4H program, in partnership with Windle International Uganda (WIU). The site and agribusiness course topic were chosen based on E4H's internal research and needs assessment conducted via interviews in camps, settlements, and urban centers in the Middle East and East Africa with refugee-service providing organizations. Nakivale, Uganda was chosen based on numerous factors discovered through this process, including: 1) strong learner interest due to WIU's existing agriculture vocational program, 2) the community's robust agrarian economy, and 3) Uganda's liberal laws and policies in regards to refugees, such as their employment rights, freedom of movement, and access to social services including health and education, mandated through its membership in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and as a co-signatory of the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education (World Bank, 2016).

Student enrollment consisted of 10 females and 20 males, from six countries: Burundi (5), Democratic Republic of the Congo (9), Rwanda (3), Somalia (1), South Sudan (4), and Uganda (8). Students were recruited through Windle's Vocational Center in Nakivale, Uganda, of which all 30 students were active in the agricultural vocational program. Facilitators consisted of one female and one male, who were English speakers, with IT backgrounds. The students, in addition to the two local facilitators who managed and implemented the course, were recruited by WIU through flyers and WhatsApp messages. Guidelines for target learner recruitment included: age of 18+, strong English skills (as the course is in English), were ready for courses at the university level, expressed interest in the course topic, were a mix of refugees (non-Ugandan learners) and host community members (Ugandan), and gender parity. Facilitators were hired based on their English and digital literacy skills and to achieve gender parity. Windle was instructed by the E4H team to strive for equity in gender representation and to recruit from the refugee and local communities. While success was more readily apparent in community diversity, Windle struggled to achieve gender equity as they were limited by the applicant pool. Course oversight, grading, and feedback on student assignments was overseen and implemented by the ASU course professor via the course gradebook and WhatsApp. The program culminated in a certificate ceremony for those who passed the course.

The study utilized a mixed methods research design. Qualitative components included facilitator interviews and student questionnaires prior to and after program implementation, and embraced an emergent design, allowing for unstructured dialogue with research participants and the use of probing questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This positioned the facilitators as knowledge producers and allowed for flexibility to revise and adapt the questions (Cresswell, 2014). The interviews were conducted, and the questionnaires were distributed by Education for Humanity's Research and Evaluation Specialist (a white man) and Project Manager (a white

woman) who are both from the United States. In collecting information from marginalized people in a developing country, both staff recognized the inequities in power that their backgrounds presented (Beneria, 1999; Mies, 1991; Suet-Tang, 2008). To mitigate the effects of these dynamics, Windle staff reviewed all protocol and questionnaires for cultural appropriateness, ethical standards, and to ensure useful responses. ASU's Institutional Review Board provided internal clearance. Interview and questionnaire data collection occurred in-person with signed consent forms. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 15 minutes, and transcriptions were created afterwards.

To generate an information feedback loop throughout the program, a supplementary set of data collection tools was developed. The comprehensive evaluation process was separated into three program phases: 1) pre-implementation assessment, which consisted of the pre-program student questionnaire and facilitator interviews; 2) program monitoring, which consisted of bi-weekly calls with the researchers, facilitators, and course professor, bi-weekly reports completed by the facilitators via WhatsApp, and course activity monitoring; and 3) post-implementation assessment, which consisted of the post-program student questionnaire and facilitator interviews.

Analysis of qualitative responses was completed using Dedoose. Qualitative analysis was purely inductive; codes and themes were generated from the collected data and not from the socio-ecological framework or other theory. Quantitative analysis was conducted on the student pre- and post-questionnaires in the form of paired t-tests via SPSS.

### **Results and Findings**

This section presents results and findings regarding learner development in digital literacy and agribusiness comprehension and skills. They will be presented in three sub-sections: 1) program participant expectations; 2) agribusiness program outcomes; and 3) digital literacy program outcomes.

Quantitative data will be presented along with themes discovered in the qualitative responses from the learners, facilitators, and professor. When applicable, illustrative participant quotes are presented as supporting evidence to each theme area, and coded as follows: students (S1 to S30), and facilitators (F1 to F2).

#### ***Program Expectations***

The pre-program questionnaire found that 92% of students had never taken an online course (n=24), and 85% had never taken a university-level course (n=26). This indicated that the majority of students had no prior comparable experience to relate to the current AGB250 course and that learners would be taking the course without influence from previous university course experience.

To gain feedback on program expectations, students were asked to complete the following sentence: "At the end of the AGB250 Agribusiness course, I expect to...". Of the 28 responses, six main themes were found. Twelve students hoped that the course would improve their digital literacy skills, including their comfort and confidence levels in using computers, tablets, and smartphones. Similarly, the course facilitators stressed the importance of exposing students to the different technologies utilized in

the course. They believed the students would be highly motivated to participate based on the opportunity to use these devices, thereby capitalizing on this rare opportunity to strengthen their digital literacy skills. Facilitators cautioned that while they expected students to be excited about using new technologies, they also expected them to struggle in the early days due to low digital literacy. Facilitators expected that this would require time to orient students to the various course devices. Nine students focused their responses on agribusiness: five learners hoped to improve their skills in agribusiness and four hoped to improve their knowledge of agribusiness. Facilitator responses supported this, indicating that the course could improve students' business knowledge of agriculture: "In Uganda, agriculture is seen as one of the main economic ways of living. I think it would be very good for [students] to know that when they grow a certain kind of crop, it will have a certain price at the market... economically, the course will be beneficial for them" (F2). Nine students also reported that they hoped to apply what they learned from the course, including sharing information with fellow community members, securing a job in the agribusiness field, or starting their own agriculture-based business: "I hope that the agribusiness course will help me for the rest of my life, not only as the source of an employment opportunity, but also during my daily life" (S2). Three students expressed hope that this course would help them academically: "I will gain more skills and experience in agribusiness, and I also hope to continue with this course up to the Master's level" (S15). Three students expected to work together with course facilitators and fellow classmates to collaboratively improve their knowledge and skills in both agribusiness and digital literacy: "My expectation is to work together with my fellow learners to develop our skills for the future" (S11). Finally, three respondents looked forward to receiving a certificate upon successful completion of the course.

#### ***Program Outcomes - Agribusiness Skills***

At the end of the eight-week course, 26 of 30 students completed and passed (Table 1), as based on grading standards that included polls and other interactive activities, reflection boards, unit quizzes, and a final exam. For those that did not, three dropped out without completing any course content, and one dropped out due to difficulty understanding English. Final course grades were as follows:

**Table 1. Course Grades (n=30)**

A+	17%
A	57%
A-	7%
B	7%
Incomplete	13%

The completion and pass rate was 87% for this often marginalized population attempting a university-level course delivered via new technology in a low-resource environment. Reflecting on the program barriers, a facilitator summarized, "I've been working with refugees since 2015. Most of them do not complete their studies. They easily drop out because there are so many challenges. But when you have an 87% completion rate like this program, that was really great...so, so great!" (F2). Similarly, the course professor remarked, "This was the best class I have ever had. I would put these students right up there with my best ASU students."

In terms of learning outcomes, students self-expressed that the course increased their knowledge of agriculture: “The greatest strength of the AGB250 course is that it equips a learner with the skills and knowledge about how agriculture is carried out globally” (S14). Additionally, both facilitators shared that the students increased their knowledge of business and economics, which are of increased importance due to their current environment: “You know the way they live here in the refugee camp...they have to survive, their livelihood has to be enhanced. So, they gave us feedback that they looked at this as something very positive and are taking it on” (F2).

Regarding the business and economics knowledge the students acquired, the facilitators discussed that students learned they needed to focus their business ideas and specialize in a specific service or product: “...students told us they learned how to specialize, instead of doing too many different activities. This makes it easier to find a market. It is an important step for them. They are now aware of where to allocate their resources, especially time” (F1). The students also reported that the course motivated their business mindset: “The course taught us how we can manage our resources either in agriculture or other businesses” (S1). A facilitator expanded on this topic, “They got to know how they can predict prices in the market and how to specialize. We had an instance of a student saying they were dealing in three products, but now says he’s going to look into the market and what people like most is what he will focus on” (F2). Facilitators also observed an increased desire among students to continue their education and gain access to educational resources through online learning: “They really loved it. They want to experience more because they kept on mentioning that and asking us for other courses” (F1).

Overall, when asked to reflect on the agribusiness content in the course, eight students remarked that the course had met their expectations as they had increased their knowledge of starting and running a business. Two learners took the opportunity to request additional courses in agribusiness in order to continue improving their skills and knowledge in agribusiness. One student shared that their expectations were met because there was more business content in the course than they had expected.

***Program Outcomes - Digital Literacy Skills***

In both the pre-program and post-program questionnaire, students were asked to rate their skills in three areas of digital literacy: motivation, confidence, and comfort.

For level of motivation to be digital learners (Table 2), results indicated that the biggest change was students moving from ‘Somewhat motivated’ (37% pre-program; 8% post-program) to ‘Motivated’ (11% pre-program; 42% post-program). The percentage indicating they were ‘Very motivated’ or ‘Not at all motivated’ remained consistent from pre-program to post-program.

**Table 2. What is your current level of motivation for digital learning?**

Rating	Pre (n=27)	Post (n=24)
Very motivated	44%	46%
Motivated	11%	42%
Somewhat motivated	37%	8%
Not at all motivated	7%	4%

For their digital learning course confidence level, pre-program results were distributed across all four confidence levels (Table 3). At the program conclusion, all students indicated that they were either 'Very confident' or 'Confident' in digital learning courses (63% and 38%, respectively).

**Table 3. What is your current level of confidence in digital learning courses?**

Rating	Pre (n=26)	Post (n=24)
Very confident	27%	63%
Confident	35%	38%
Somewhat confident	27%	0%
Not at all confident	12%	0%

For comfort level in digital learning course interaction (Table 4), responses indicated growth in students feeling 'Very comfortable' (37% pre-program; 50% post-program) as well as 'Comfortable' (30% pre-program; 46% post-program). Similarly, questionnaire responses indicated a decrease in students feeling 'Somewhat comfortable' (26% pre-program; 4% post-program) and 'Not at all comfortable' (7% pre-program; 0% post-program).

**Table 4. What is your current comfort level in interacting with digital learning courses?**

Rating	Pre (n=27)	Post (n=24)
Very comfortable	37%	50%
Comfortable	30%	46%
Somewhat comfortable	26%	4%
Not at all comfortable	7%	0%

Paired t-tests were used to analyze the significance of the results for both sets of questionnaire data regarding digital literacy (Table 5). Students were included in this analysis if they completed both the pre- and post-questionnaires (23 of 30 students).

Analyses indicated all three areas showed statistically significant change (Table 5). Students reported the most change in their digital learning course confidence, ( $t(21)=5.01$ ,  $p=.00$ ). Students also reported statistically significant change in their digital learning motivation ( $t(22)=2.55$ ,  $p=.020$ ) and their comfort level in digital learning course interaction ( $t(22)=2.51$ ,  $p=.020$ ).

**Table 5. Paired T-test Results**

Survey Question	Survey Timing	Average Rating (1-4 scale)	Change	SD	t	p-value	Significant? ( $\alpha = .05$ )
What is your current level of motivation for digital learning? (n=23)	Pre	2.83	0.47	0.898	2.554	0.02	Yes
	Post	3.30					
What is your current level of confidence in digital learning courses? (n=22)	Pre	2.59	1.00	0.926	5.006	0.00	Yes
	Post	3.59					
What is your current comfort level in interacting with digital learning courses? (n=23)	Pre	2.87	0.56	1.080	2.510	0.02	Yes
	Post	3.43					

Throughout the program, students took steps to proactively improve their digital literacy. The course designers, consisting of the professor, his teaching assistant, and a member of E4H staff, chose to provide twelve internet-enabled devices for the thirty students; they hoped this approach would encourage students to work and learn together. However, the research found that the limited number of devices was frequently noted as a challenge by students and facilitators. Learners took the initiative to coordinate classroom attendance times so they would each be able to access a device on their own or with one other person. This was driven by students’ desire to strengthen their digital literacy skills.

Regarding digital learning, facilitators described the value of a strong, consistent network connection and reliable power, which allowed students to focus solely on the course content. They also described the motivation and commitment of students to complete the course, which they attributed to the course being university-level and from an American institution. These two characteristics pushed the students “to see if they could learn just as well as those from a first-world university” (F1). Overall, when reflecting on their digital literacy skills, students attributed their improvement to the fast, consistent, and strong network connection that SolarSPELL provided - a phenomenon not usually available in refugee settlements. One student shared, “The greatest strength was the network speed, which allowed us to use the devices to access the course very quickly without interruption” (S16).

**Discussion**

As presented earlier, only 3% of refugees have access to HE in comparison to 36% of global youth (Save the Children, 2017; UNHCR, 2019a). Based on these statistics, UNHCR, the German Federal Foreign Office, and the German Academic Exchange Service set an ambitious goal of increasing refugee participation in HE to 15% by 2030 (UNHCR, 2019a). If academic and humanitarian organizations work to achieve this goal, it offers the potential to increase the topical knowledge and skill base of refugees, and to create a critical mass of community members to pursue, implement, and sustain

reconstruction efforts in refugees' home countries via innovative solutions. Within this context, we will now explore more deeply the study's results and findings.

### *University-level Courses*

Despite the numerous barriers that refugees face in accessing HE, this program demonstrated that when these barriers are addressed, refugees are able to succeed in university-level courses. This success should be seen as a welcome sign for academic and humanitarian organizations intent on not just meeting UNHCR's 15% by 2030 goal, but having students succeed in the HE programs in which they participate. Moreover, the program's students were not satisfied with a single university-level course, but expressed interest in pursuing more courses and degree pathways. These students recognized the value HE offers to them in the short-term, as demonstrated by the students applying their newly acquired agribusiness knowledge at the local market. In their request for additional courses and degree pathways, they also recognized the value HE offers for the long-term. As presented in the literature review, the knowledge and skills that refugees gain through HE increase their prospects for personal development as well as the possibility of playing key roles in future reconstruction efforts. Organizations offering HE to refugees should endeavor to stress readily applicable content knowledge and skills in areas important to reconstruction efforts. Additionally, refugee HE programs should adopt a structure that supports inclusivity, tolerance, gender equity, teamwork, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Within the program presented here, thirty students from six different countries, both male and female, demonstrated the teamwork and problem-solving skills that will be necessary in future reconstruction efforts and that are nurtured through HE when they proactively coordinated their schedules to improve their digital literacy skills.

### *Digital Literacy*

Knowledge-based economies are now the engine of thriving nations (Van Larr et al., 2017). Higher education prepares refugees for transition into the expanding knowledge-based job market as they gain the confidence, knowledge, and skills necessary for employment (O'Sullivan 2002; Crea 2016). For the reconstruction efforts that await the world's current refugee population, digital literacy skills will be critical to develop, implement, and sustain them. As demonstrated through this study, incorporating innovative technology approaches into HE offerings improved the digital literacy of students. Specifically, students' daily usage, maintenance, and management of the program's smartphones, laptops, and SolarSPELL technology served to improve students' motivation to be digital learners, raise their confidence in digital approaches to learning, and increase their comfort level with digital learning technology. Improvements in all three of these areas were highly significant, indicating clear and lasting progress. There exists a possibility that providing internet-enabled devices to every student from the program's outset would have strengthened digital literacy skills more than what was measured, and this remains an area for future research. Overall, organizations offering HE to refugees should endeavor to take advantage of students' demonstrated interest in acquiring these skills by incorporating technology into their program structures. This will not only increase students' investment in and dedication to the HE pathway, but will build the digital literacy skills necessary for them to contribute to building a thriving and resilient post-conflict society.

### ***Higher Education in Resource-constrained Environments***

In light of current efforts to achieve the #15by30 goal, the results of the SolarSPELL pilot study take on added significance. The 27 current members of the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, of which Arizona State University is a co-lead, are universities and education providers that are leading the effort to provide HE in areas of displacement. In order to offer HE programs, these universities have been restricted to operating in refugee communities equipped with computer labs, internet access, and electricity (Gladwell et al., 2016; WUSC 2018). While these efforts should be continued, the lack of an offline solution means that refugees located in low-resource environments will continue to lack access to HE programs. The offline SolarSPELL technology has demonstrated its ability to expand current efforts to offer HE to refugees, and expand the geographic footprint in which HE programs can be offered. This expansion offers an opportunity for these universities, as well as the humanitarian education sector as a whole, to reach the stated goal of 15% of refugees participating in HE by 2030. As the literature presented here has demonstrated a connection between participation in HE, development at the individual and community levels, and reconstruction at the national level, future reconstruction efforts will benefit from having more refugees participating in HE programs. Moreover, expanding HE access for refugees in low-resource environments are of particular importance, as future reconstruction efforts in post-conflict societies will need individuals with university-level education, and the knowledge and skills that go along with it, represented in all areas of the economy, if these efforts are to be sustained long-term. This pilot program has demonstrated an option to achieve this with marginalized refugee populations, to meet the #15by30 goal, and to meet the needs of national post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the program was to grow the agribusiness knowledge and digital literacy skills of 30 refugee learners of Nakivale settlement, Uganda who participated in Arizona State University's AGB250: Agribusiness course via the Education for Humanity: Powered by SolarSPELL technology. The program was small in scope (reaching 30 refugees) and limited in reach (confined to the Nakivale community in the refugee-friendly country of Uganda), and additional analysis from future implementations of university courses utilizing the SolarSPELL offline technology will be needed to increase the validity of the results. Improvement in the area of students' soft skills were not measured through the study, but were evident in the qualitative themes that emerged. Future implementations of the program will need to assess the growth of students' soft skills, as the literature has demonstrated their importance in successfully implementing and sustaining reconstruction efforts. Additionally, longitudinal studies will be critical to determine the extent of the connection between refugee higher education at the individual and community levels and the success and sustainability of reconstruction efforts at the national level.

Utilizing the socio-ecological model to frame the results, the study demonstrates the ability of HE delivered via offline technology to build the following knowledge and skills of refugees at the individual level, which will be necessary for future reconstruction efforts at the community and national levels: topical content knowledge and digital literacy gained directly from university-level courses, and critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and collaboration skills strengthened through program

participation. This result is relevant to all academic institutions and humanitarian organizations committed to achieving UNHCR's pledge to increase refugee participation in HE from 3% to 15% by 2030, and to current refugees who will implement and support the future reconstruction efforts of post-conflict societies.

**Matthew Gallagher** is the Research and Evaluation Specialist for the Education for Humanity Program at Arizona State University. He is also a current PhD student in Arizona State University's School of Community Resources and Development. Email: [mgallag9@asu.edu](mailto:mgallag9@asu.edu).

**Dr. Carrie Bauer** is the Instructional Design Specialist for the Education for Humanity Program at Arizona State University. She led the course design team and the technology design team for the Education for Humanity: Powered by SolarSPELL program. Email: [cmbauer1@asu.edu](mailto:cmbauer1@asu.edu).

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# Should Unified Korea Choose Fiscal Decentralization for Education? Testing the Decentralization Theory on Education Finance with Cross-country Analysis for Korean Unification

Seulgi Kang

Teachers College, Columbia University

*The unification of South Korea and North Korea is a plausible idea yet it requires a comprehensive preparation in advance. As a method to achieve fiscal efficiency in public services, decentralization theory<sup>1</sup> is consistently applied. However, the current literature and political reality argue that decentralization does not always hold its efficiency. Therefore, this paper focuses on finding an ideal education finance model for post-unification Korea by studying how one country's academic/economic status is related to their education finance model. This paper conducts the OLS linear regression analysis with 40 OECD and its partner countries' information on GDP per capita, Gini Index, PISA mathematics score, and the form of education finance system. The main findings of this research are that the political and fiscal decentralization are different ideas, and fiscal decentralization does not always hold its efficiency as the decentralization theory states. Among the types of decentralization, the optimal education finance model for academic and economic improvement is deconcentration – which is a combination of fiscal centralization and political, or administrative, decentralization to empower regional autonomy.*

*Keywords: Decentralization Theory, Fiscal Decentralization, Education Finance, Korean Unification, Economics of Education, Cross-country Analysis*

## Introduction

During more than 70 years of Korean peninsula's division, Korea transformed into two radically different communities – South Korea and North Korea. In 2019, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of South Korea was 88 times more than of North Korea (UN Statistics Division, 2020a). North Korea ranked the lowest in the Democracy Index among 167 countries, while South Korea was listed as 22nd, which was a higher rank than Japan and France (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016). Following a 'failing state' of North Korea, a survey to North Korean refugees even showed a dramatic result that 99.2 percent of North Koreans they knew in North Korea wanted unification (Park et al., 2011). Moreover, considering current international conflicts that North Korea faces with world's leading countries, such as the United States, Japan, and China, as well as with South Korea, unification of Korea is only a matter of time that no one knows when it will happen (Shin, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to plan ahead and prepare how essential public services such as education should efficiently function to close not only the achievement gap but also the socioeconomic gap in the era of post-unification with limited resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Decentralization Theory: a political theory that believes smaller governments are more efficient in providing public services and therefore encourages local autonomy in public services.

As one of the approaches to fiscal efficiency in public services, fiscal decentralization receives significant attention from many nations. Fiscal decentralization is a theory that believes it is always efficient for local governments to provide public services (Oates, 2008) and thus should provide more budget autonomy as well as taxing power to local governments (Welsh and McGinn, 1999). This idea received attention with the movement of political democratization in the 1980s (Welsh and McGinn, 1999) and has also been applied in education. In fact, many European countries and the United States are pursuing the fiscal decentralization of education, and they believe in its efficiency by allowing a chance for choice nearer to people (DeBoer, 2012). However, existing literature also reports that several countries are recently coming back to centralization from decentralization in administering their public service budget. While the global trend of decentralization exists, recentralization also implies some uncertainty of the effectiveness of fiscal decentralization (Gershberg, 1995; Hanushek et al., 2011).

This paper therefore aims to identify whether fiscal decentralization of education is effective in closing achievement and/or socioeconomic gap between two different socio-economic communities, with the concrete example of a future scenario for post-unification of South Korea and North Korea. With a clear example of two different communities in terms of education, politics, economics, and culture, this research would initiate further research on the school finance model of Unified Korea, but it may also activate more definite conversations and help devise a new approach to education policies around social desegregation beyond Korean peninsula.

First, this paper will provide the background of two Koreas' education systems and how North and South Koreans perceive the concept of unification. The literature review on the validity of (de)centralization in school finance and the kinds of fiscal (de)centralized models will then follow. For the data analysis, this paper will provide: a) the descriptive analysis and b) the Ordinary Least Squared (OLS) regression on 40 different countries' education and economic data. This data analysis will identify the ideal school finance model from the cross-country analysis of 40 OECD countries and suggesting policy recommendations of Unified Korea based on the analysis.

## **Background**

### ***How Education Systems Function in Two Koreas***

Education has played a significant role in both Koreas although its goal was completely different in two countries. Borrowing from Labaree's (1997) interpretations of the educational goals to explain this difference, there are three goals of education – democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. Democratic equality of education is when education is used for preparing students as effective and responsible citizens. This includes teaching students what their rights as citizens, as well as providing them a uniform learning experience as a citizen of one nation. Another educational goal is social efficiency, stating that education is primarily for training workers that meet the needs of the society. Lastly, social mobility argues that education is to help students climb the social ladder and achieve social or economic ambition (Labaree, 1997).

North Korea has used education for a radical version of *democratic equality*. Under the name of patriotism and loyalty to the nation, North Korean dictators used schooling primarily for "brainwashing" the citizens (Bennett, 2013). On the other hand, South

Korean society implicitly and explicitly promised *social mobility* via education, and this enables an impressive expansion of the number of educational institutions and high enrollment rate in every educational level evenly within a few decades (Shin & Koh, 2005; Seth, 2002). Interestingly, in order to achieve the two very different educational goals, both North and South Korea chose a centralized education system.

North Korea's dictatorship and its use of education clearly explain why North Korea chose a highly centralized education system; in fact, federalism does not exist in North Korea, which leaves no option for decentralization. On the other hand, it is helpful to analyze why South Korea persisted with their centralized education system over 70 years. According to Seth (2002), this centralized system reflects two intentions of South Korean government during the educational development: (a) to achieve internal efficiency to establish an educational system quickly after the consecutive historical incidents that broke the entire nation, and (b) to make schooling equally available to all students with an equal standard and content. Accordingly, the education system in South Korea is highly centralized, and the central government is spending almost 15 percent of its annual budget to education (National Assembly Budget Office, 2019); this is a similar amount of investment that the U.S. federal government makes to their defense (15.2 percentage) in the same year (Congressional Budget Office, 2020). Although the education budget from the central government flows as a grant and is executed at the regional governments, the educational grant from the central government makes more than 70 percent of the entire regional education finance (National Assembly Budget Office, 2019). When compared to the education finance of the United States, where the state and local governments usually provide approximately 70 percent of the education budget (Spellings, 2005), South Korea shows a significant dependence on the central government for education.

### ***Two Different Attitudes on Korean Unification***

Korean Unification is no longer a vain idea. Although there can be a lot of political perspectives to consider to make such a bold statement, this paper supports the idea of unification based on two non-political reasons. First, there is currently no rightful heir to Kim Jung-un, who is showing bad health since 2014 (Groll, 2014; Berlinger, 2020; Bowden, 2020). Second, with the trend of globalization and the strong cultural wave (in Korean, *Hallyu*) directly from South Korea, including K-pop and K-drama, is also affecting North Koreans, and it is no longer possible to "brainwash" most of North Koreans to think their country is better than South Korea (Jung, 2016; Park et al., 2011). However, it is more important to notice that these combined external influences now make North Koreans think Korean Unification attractive and beneficial. According to Park and colleagues (2011), North Korean refugees in South Korea reported that 99.2 percent of North Koreans they knew wanted unification.

Despite the fact that North Koreans have become more open to Korean Unification, the reverse has happened in the South. According to the survey conducted by Park and his colleagues (2011), majority of South Koreans (over 75 percent) disagreed with the idea that Korean Unification will benefit individuals in South Korea. The main reason for such a negative reaction was the cost of unification.

South Koreans' perspectives and predictions about the unification cost is based on the lessons from German Unification. In fact, West Germany originally expected to spend

approximately 30 to 40 billion Deutsche Mark (DM) (176 - 242 billion USD; 16 - 22 trillion KRW) annually for German Reunification; however, West Germany had to spend five times more of what they had expected for 10 years. In total, it is assumed that Germany spent approximately one trillion Euro (1 trillion USD) by 2019 for reunification (Shin et al., 2008). What is worse is that the current economic gap between North Korea and South Korea is significantly larger than that of two Germanies at their unification period. In general, researchers agree that the unification cost for Korea would be between 1-2 trillion USD (1100-2200 trillion KRW) (Bennett, 2013).

Since 1991, Germany has put an extra tax called “solidarity tax” (in Germany, commonly known as the *Soli*), which is a specialized tax covering the costs of reunification. This tax comes from 5.5 percent of income tax and corporation tax. Germany finally announced the plan to end the solidarity tax in 2021 for most taxpayers progressively, almost 30 years after the reunification (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Most South Koreans who have heard or learned about Germany’s significant effort to meet the unification cost showed a negative attitude toward unification (Park et al. 2011). In another survey on Korean Unification in South Korea, 40.5 percent did not want unification, and another 44.2 percent support unification only with a condition of no huge financial burden (Lee, 2020). This pessimistic attitude is more prevalent among younger generations of South Korea, who relatively share less the impact of Korean War and an ethical bondage to North Koreans but have to be responsible for the costs when the unification actually happens as an active labor force (Bennett, 2013; Shin et al., 2008).

Thus, the first and foremost task that Unified Korea must focus on is allocating governmental finance efficiently, so that unification would reach potential Pareto improvement. Potential Pareto improvement is an economic term from cost-benefit analysis that the benefit must be bigger than the cost (IGI Global, 2020). Applying this concept into Korean Unification, it means that the cost that South Koreans would pay has to be less than what North Koreans would gain as benefit. Therefore, it is very predictable that the fiscal decentralization would rise as a new political agenda of Unified Korea when the government has to focus on reaching efficiency in finance, as Germany exactly experienced during the earlier period of German Unification (Ziblatt, 2002).

### **Literature Review**

The most basic yet important decision in determining the education finance model is that who is in charge of the budget. In other words, whether education finance will be controlled by the central government or local governments is the big question, and this leads us to questioning the decentralization theory. Oates (1972) and Rondinelli (1981) introduced the concept of decentralization theory in public services. In his seminal work, *Fiscal Federalism*, Oates (1972) argues that the decentralization in decision-making power is more beneficial to the local communities by allowing heterogeneous responses to the demands. Based on Oates’ decentralization theory, Rondinelli stated that there are three forms of decentralization based on the degree of decentralization: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Although these two papers’ main focuses were not limited to education, they were still seminal works for establishing fiscal decentralization within education. Later, scholars such as Welsh and McGinn (1999) brought this typology of decentralization into the context of education. They

first brought a decentralization movement with the administration autonomy within education and argued that lower governments or even parents should decide the curriculum, school structure, teacher hiring / training process, and monitoring method. This decentralization movement was later conceptualized within the education finance system by Werner and Shah (2006). They specifically brought the three types of decentralization – deconcentration, devolution, and delegation – in education finance and classified ten European countries' education finance systems into three. This typology of decentralization is now widely used in the education finance study.

*Deconcentration* is a form of decentralization that shows similar characteristics with that of centralization; the main difference, however, is that the administration is divided into several lower levels of branches and operates in the regional or local offices. Clearly, the central government, the “headquarter”, still remains as an important decision maker. *Devolution*, on the other hand, transfers most of the responsibility and authority to the state or local governments. Each regional government operates independently, and the involvement of the federal government is minimal. Lastly, *delegation* is the most progressive form of decentralization where a school is the primary decision maker and holds most of responsibility while the governments keep *de jure* responsibility for education. It is the most progressive form because the size of the unit for making critical decisions in education is smaller than the other two (Rondinelli, 1981; Werner & Shah, 2006; Ferrari & Zanardi, 2014). Such distinctions within the general term ‘decentralization’ highlight the need to consider several possible forms of decentralization in education, and the literature suggests that these differences must be considered in conversation about decentralization.

Fiscal decentralization of public services, including education, was traditionally supported by Anglo-American countries such as England and the United States. The advocates of educational decentralization stated that decentralization increases allocative efficiency because smaller governments hold the authority for tax allocation and spending power for their own communities; therefore, there is more autonomy in matching preferences and needs of people (Oates, 2008; Barankay & Lockwood, 2007). Decentralization was also preferred as it fosters accountability of local officials in terms of budget constraint and competition among other regions; decentralization enables each region to choose the most “efficient” way to help their students in their local context rather than following the orders from central government that sometimes do not reflect the different needs of different local communities (Welsh & Shah, 2006). Therefore, this could lead to innovative and creative approaches, as well as a positive competition among neighboring regions to improve student performances (Grauwe et al., 2015; Barankay & Lockwood, 2007).

Unlike such arguments, however, the real-world practices of fiscal decentralization often show mixed results on its impact. Barankay and Lockwood (2007) found evidence from Swiss cantons that fiscal decentralization increased education attainment; Similarly, Galiani et al. (2002) and Eskeland and Filmer (2002) also found out school decentralization in Argentina, which provided more autonomy in the budget as well, increased students' test scores. However, the studies by Galiani et al. (2008) and Gershberg and Winkler (2004) in West Africa stated that the correlation between fiscal decentralization and student outcome improvement is close to zero, and the most of positive improvement by decentralization is actually due to more parental

involvement rather than increased school autonomy in the budget. Ahmad and his colleagues (2008) also stated that there is a lack of consensus on the relationship between decentralization and higher student outcome as compared to a centralized system.

Hence, many countries—both in the Global South and North – show very diverse routes in their education finance system in the recent years. While the United States is historically well known for their belief and practices in decentralization, they are currently taking a smooth swing to a more centralized system in school finance through Title I, a US federal education funding for the disadvantaged population, under the name of adequate education (DeBoer, 2012). In the cases of Mexico and Mongolia, the two countries with traditionally centralized governments, they adopted decentralization once and recently returned to centralization due to cultural conflicts and municipal corruption under the decentralized system (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004; Gershberg, 1995). Meanwhile, in Italy, fiscal decentralization in education has been rising as a necessary educational reform to prevent the constant flow of unfair distribution of resources to southern regions of the nation (Ferrari & Zanardi, 2014).

This inconsistent trend in the education finance system implies there is no absolute answer, and therefore every country must analyze different factors, conduct empirical studies, and implement an efficient system for each country. However, most of existing literature on fiscal decentralization of education is limited to descriptive studies and there is a paucity of empirical studies that analyze its impact on students' educational outcomes. This paper aims to contribute to fill this gap by directly questioning and conducting quantitative research on the correlation between the fiscal decentralization policy and economic/academic outcomes.

To bring the context of Korean Unification into the existing literature on fiscal decentralization, the case of Germany is an important reference to Korea. Though there is limited resource on fiscal decentralization specifically in education during German unification period, Ziblatt (2002) well explained how fiscal decentralization worked in post-unification Germany. According to Ziblatt (2002), Germany too proceeded the fiscal decentralization in the late 1990s, mainly led by leaders of rich states (Länder) to end “financial punishment on economically strong states” due to the financial crisis caused by unification. Also, with the global trend of decentralization in academics since the 1980s, many influential German think tanks also published reports supporting the German “fiscal federalism”, which argues for taxing and spending autonomy within the state. However, as a final result, Germany did not pursue the fiscal decentralization of their public services because it was too radical considering the political reality of Germany's political structure as a nation-state and the fact that they just unified the nation (Ziblatt, 2002). The poorer states strongly disagreed, so did the Social Democratic Party, one of the major political parties in Germany. Even some politicians from Christian Democratic Union, the political party that led this proposal, disagreed. Though economists and scholars agree that fiscal decentralization would bring economic benefits, the majority of German politicians refuted and said the political cost of implementing such a proposal outweighs the economic benefit (Ziblatt, 2002). The literature on German unification and fiscal decentralization during post-unification signifies that fiscal decentralization and unification are huge political

matters, and fiscal decentralization with unification must be considered not only economic/academic benefits but also the political benefits.

Unfortunately, there is not much research focused on fiscal decentralization in education during post-unification period in Germany, and there are several different opinions on which education finance model Germany has used. Ferrari and Zanardi (2014) and Werner and Shah (2006) described German education finance system as deconcentration, which is the mix of fiscal centralization and political decentralization. Perhaps it was plausible to think that Germany has chosen deconcentration since it was often recognized as it maximizes the advantages of both decentralization and centralization systems. However, OECD's (2019) data on initial funding suggests that Germany is choosing devolution. Although there is no consensus in determining the education finance system of Germany, it is still noticeable that German chose deconcentration or devolution for post-unification period.

### **Methodology**

This empirical analysis is to examine whether there is any correlation among the economic status, student outcomes, and the education finance system of one country. While this paper focuses on testing the decentralization theory in education finance for Korean Unification, the main analysis is broader by including 40 countries. There are three reasons in making a broader analysis; first, there are a significantly small number of countries that experienced unification to limit the sample of this analysis. Second, this paper also hopes to make a further impact on determining the education finance model of the communities where academic achievement and socioeconomic gap are wide as South Korea and North Korea.

Last but more importantly, many scholars studying North Korea believe that there is no reliable data from North Korea in order to make an ideal data set for Unified Korea (Park et al, 2011; Shin, 2013). This is why even the scholars of South Korea do a few empirical studies on the future scenario of Korean Unification. For example, the United Nations is the only reliable international organization that receives (or sometimes estimates) the statistics of the nation, but the UN Statistics Division (2020a, 2020b) itself did not have the concurrent data for GDP per capita from 2010 to 2019. Also, North Korea has never shared their Gini Index and also has never participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Thus, the only certain assumption for Unified Korea is that it will have a lower GDP per capita, a higher Gini Index, and lower PISA scores from current South Korea's statistics. Thus, by conducting a broader study of 40 countries, this paper would like to identify the countries with the estimated statistics of Unified Korea and see how they manage the education finance system for economic and academic improvement.

Therefore, this section will now provide a cross-country analysis using 40 countries' (a) GDP per capita, (b) Gini Index, (c) a mathematics score from 2018 PISA, and (d) the form of current education finance system.

### **Data Source**

#### *GDP per Capita, Gini Index, PISA Math Score*

To make a comparison on different variables, data for each variable are gathered from different sources. For GDP per capita, this paper used the UN Statistics Division's

(2020b) Per Capita GDP at current prices – US dollars in 2018. For the Gini Index (a percentage form of Gini-coefficient that shows income inequality in a range of 0-100 [0=perfectly equal, 100=perfectly unequal]), I used World Bank's (2020) Gini Index estimates<sup>2</sup>. PISA, an international standardized test offered by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), provides a national score of reading literacy, mathematics, and science test scores from OECD members and partner countries, and I decided to use the most recent PISA mathematics scores from 2018 as a variable representing student performances. Also, data on the education finance model is brought from the OECD Education at a Glance 2019 indicators, showing the initial sources of public funds for education by governmental levels.

#### *The Education Finance Form*

For the last variable about the education finance model, it is very important to understand how classification is made. This paper is primarily interested in knowing the difference between the education expenditures that stay within the state/local borders and the education expenditures aggregated at the higher level and distributed according to the needs. Therefore, rather than the final funding power that could be diluted from the initial funding sources by either horizontal or vertical transfers between the governments, I decided to categorize the funding model according to the scale of initial funding. For example, approximately 70 percent of education finance of South Korea initially comes from the central government, but nearly all of them are transferred to the regional level to be executed (National Assembly Budget Office, 2019). In such cases, although the central government provides 70 percent of initial funds, the final funds describe that the budget is from the regional office. Indeed, the distribution of final funds narrates who has the most autonomy and takes responsibility in running education efficiently. However, it does not report whether the educational expenditures are aggregated solely within the border or outside of the border and are given from the central government, which is a critical implication to the future scenario of Unified Korea.

Therefore, I labeled the system based on the size of initial education funds from each level of governments. For the labels, I used centralization and the definitions from the existing literature categorizing decentralization into three different levels – deconcentration, devolution, and delegation. *Centralization* is used when more than 50 percent of initial education expenditures is from the central government and is not distributed enough to the sub-central governments via transfers. *Deconcentration* is when more than 50 percent of initial education expenditures is from the central government and is distributed enough to the sub-central governments by transfers so that more than 50 percent of final funds are at the lower governmental level. *Devolution* has been used when more than 50 percent of initial education funding is from sub-central (regional and local) level.

*Delegation* is the most progressive form of decentralization that a school has the most critical decision power than the governments. In terms of funding allocation, this

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the Gini Index in this dataset includes the latest version of the estimate and therefore is not from the same year; it is mostly from 2017 but includes years from a range of 2010-2018 as well. This follows the data collecting method of previous research that used Gini coefficient or Gini Index in cross-country analysis (Li & Zou, 2002; De Gregorio & Lee, 2002); because Gini coefficient is limited data mostly available by national level, it depends on each country's government to report, so it is hard to collect a single year's Gini Index if research uses cross-country analysis.

would be the case where either a school collects the initial funds directly from the families, or the school receives the funds directly from the central governments. Although Welsh and Shah (2006) named Denmark's form of decentralization as delegation due to the strong school autonomy in decision making, in this analysis, the case of Denmark is considered as devolution because the funds are still collected by the local size, not school size in Denmark. Thus, in this dataset, I assume that delegation is nonexistent, when the standard of naming (de)centralization is an aggregated level of initial educational expenditures.

### ***Empirical Strategy***

This paper focuses on a hypothesis based on Oates' (1972) decentralization theory, which states that the decentralization of public service increases efficiency by offering heterogeneous responses that are tailoring to the smaller group of people. To apply this theory in fiscal decentralization in education, this paper hypothesizes that the higher GDP countries or lower Gini Index countries (meaning less economic inequality), which are the countries with better economic outcomes and perhaps implying higher efficiency, will be concentrated on forming a decentralized finance system and therefore results in higher student outcome, vice versa. Plus, this paper will continue whether this theory can be also applied in Unified Korea, where it would show lower GDP and higher Gini Index yet aim to achieve efficiency – means higher GDP, Gini Index, and higher PISA score.

For the empirical analysis, this study will perform a) the descriptive analysis and b) the OLS regression analysis. The descriptive analysis will divide 40 countries into two categories and two subcategories – the former higher/lower GDP per capita and the latter higher/lower Gini Index. Then, the countries will be ranked by PISA Math scores. I wanted to see if there is any concentration of one education finance system by academic/economic status. The OLS linear regression analysis will target to find the most “efficient” education finance model to achieve a higher PISA test score and lower Gini Index. The dependent variable here will be GDP per capita, and independent variables are PISA scores and Gini Index of each country. For the regression and creating graphs, I will be using STATA 16 with the sample size of 40 (countries).

This study includes 40 countries, and most countries are the members of OECD and/or participants of the PISA test (See Appendix A). There are a number of countries whose students may have taken the PISA test yet are not included in this cross-country analysis because the data for initial and final funds for education was unavailable<sup>3</sup>.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive Analysis***

To understand how education finance models are differentiated by the academic/economic status (GDP per capita and Gini Index), the table is first divided countries into high GDP per capita (Table 1) and low GDP per capita (Table 2); then,

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<sup>3</sup> Since this analysis is based on strict criteria that a country has to participate in PISA and provide OECD advanced information on its education expenditures, it leaves out most countries from Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America and some countries in East Europe. This suggests that there could be a selection bias on the findings and does not fully guarantee external validity of the findings, especially for the country that shares similar characteristics of opted-out countries. However, to mitigate the selection bias as much as possible, this paper categorized the nations by their levels of GDP per capita, as well as the level of Gini Index.

the tables have subcategories – low Gini Index and high Gini Index, respectively. Therefore, one table has two columns, and the countries are ranked again by PISA mathematics test scores. This is to see whether there is any concentration of education finance model by academic/economic status. Table 1 and 2 are the main descriptive analysis of this paper.

Table 3 and 4 are the altered version Table 1 and 2 in order to apply this empirical analysis specifically to the context of Korean Unification. While Table 1 and 2 are divided by median countries (Japan and Italy) and equal in the number of countries (20 countries in Table 1 and 2 each), Table 3 and 4 are centered by South Korea<sup>4</sup>. Table 3 and 4 are available in Appendix B.

### *The OLS Regression Analysis*

To test the hypothesis in a broader sense, Figure 1 and 2 include all of the countries by its GDP per capita (Figure 1) and Gini Index (Figure 2) with PISA mathematics scores. The education finance models are categorized by the colors; red represents countries with a centralization system, green represents countries with a deconcentration system, and lastly, blue represents countries with a devolution system. Each figure also contains the fitted OLS regression lines for three different systems, so that education finance models can be compared and test a decentralization hypothesis – whether fiscal decentralization leads to higher academic outcomes, higher GDP per capita, and less inequality<sup>5</sup>. I acquired the idea and developed the model from DeBoer's (2012) Figure 'Fiscal educational decentralization and income, population, and diversity' (Figure 1 of DeBoer (2012)). The significance tests of Figure 1 and 2 have done and can find in Appendix C. To summarize, the education finance model of deconcentration in Figure 1 shows statistical significance, but other education finance models don't seem statistically significant in determining PISA Math scores, holding GDP and/or Gini Index constant. However, further study has to follow in order to make a more precise conclusion since this statistical insignificance may be due to smaller sample size (N=40), rather than the education finance models' effectiveness. With this caveat, however, this paper still considers the outcomes of Figure 1 and 2 important in recognizing the difference of education finance models on producing academic achievement, holding economic status constant.

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<sup>4</sup> China is not included in the Table 1 and 2 because it does not provide national PISA test scores but only four regional scores (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Guangdong) (OECD,2016). However, since Table 3 and 4 are divided by economic status of South Korea and thus exclude South Korea from the table, I decide to include one more country (China) for adding more context.

<sup>5</sup> Note that data for GDP per capita in Figure 1 has been "top-coded" to a range of 10,000 – 80,000 USD; in other words, GDP per capita less than 10,000 were replaced to a value of 10,000, and similarly, GDP per capita higher than 80,000 were replaced with a value of 80,000. The countries that were replaced with the minimum value (10,000) are Colombia, Mexico, Turkey, and Brazil, and the countries that were replaced with the maximum value (80,000) are Luxemburg, Norway, and Switzerland. This has been done in order to visualize the data more effectively, and this change was minor and did not hamper the findings we made according to the results visualized in Figure 1 and 2.

**Table 1. Cross-country Analysis of High GDP per capita (Divided by Median)**

GDP Status	High GDP per capita										
Gini Coefficient	Low Gini (More Equal Income Distribution)					High Gini (Less Equal Income Distribution)					
	PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Finance Model	Source of Initial Fund		PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Finance Model	Source of Initial Fund
Country						Country					
Netherlands	519	53,583	28.5 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Japan	527	39,082	32.9 (2013)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
Denmark	509	61,834	28.7 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Switzerland	515	82,709	32.7 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
Belgium	508	47,293	27.4 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional	Canada	512	46,192	33.8 (2013)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional
Finland	507	50,136	27.4 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	United Kingdom	502	42,526	34.8 (2016)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Sweden	502	55,767	28.8 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Ireland	500	79,415	32.8 (2016)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Norway	501	81,336	27 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	New Zealand	494	43,836	33.3 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Germany	500	47,514	31.9 (2016)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional	Australia	491	58,393	34.4 (2014)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Austria	499	51,230	29.7 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Luxembourg	483	117,370	34.9 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
France	495	41,358	31.6 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	United States	478	62,918	41.4 (2016)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
Iceland	495	76867	26.8 (2015)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Israel	463	44,215	39 (2016)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central

Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3., and Welsh & Shah (2006).

Table 2. Cross-country Analysis of Low GDP per capita Countries (Divided by Median)

GDP Status	Low GDP per capita										
Gini Coefficient	Low Gini (More Equal Income Distribution)					High Gini (Less Equal Income Distribution)					
	PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Finance Model	Source of Initial Fund		PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Finance Model	Source of Initial Fund
Country						Country					
South Korea	526	33,622	31.6 (2012)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Poland	516	15,444	29.7 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Estonia	523	23,242	30.4 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Latvia	496	17,852	35.6 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Slovenia	509	26,005	24.2 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Russia	488	11,394	37.5 (2018)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional
Czech Republic	499	23,079	24.9 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Hungary	481	16,264	30.6 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Portugal	492	23,478	33.8 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Turkey	454	9,368	41.9 (2018)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Italy	487	34,389	35.9 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Chile	417	15,923	44.4 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Slovak Republic	486	19,431	25.2 (2016)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Mexico	409	9,695	45.4 (2018)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Spain	481	30,406	34.7 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional	Colombia	391	6,650	50.4 (2018)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Lithuania	481	19,083	37.3 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Brazil	384	8,921	53.9 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
Greece	451	20,731	34.4 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Argentina	379	11,688	41.4 (2018)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional

Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3.

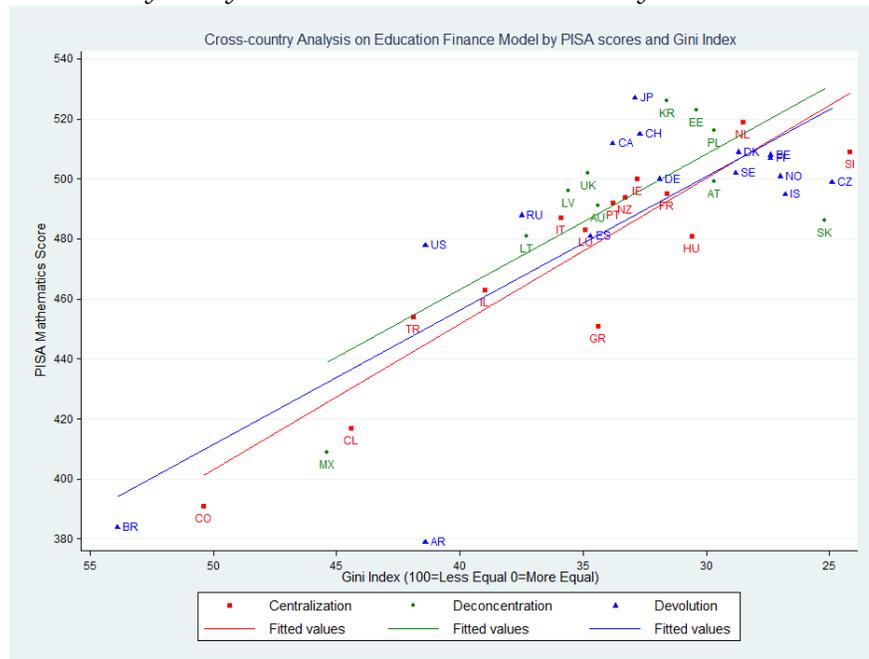
## Should Unified Korea Choose Fiscal Decentralization for Education?

Figure 1. Cross-country Analysis on Education Finance Model by PISA scores and GDP per capita



Note: GDP per capita in Figure 1 were top-coded with a range of (10,000-80,000) USD, and the value of seven countries were adopted accordingly. Country codes are available in Appendix A. Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3., Welsh & Shah (2006).

Figure 2. Cross-country Analysis on Education Finance Model by PISA scores and Gini Index



Note: Following the characteristics of Gini Index and a more intuitive data visualization approach, the x axis is reversed and has a minimum (more equal) value at the right side and a maximum (less equal) value at the left side. Country codes are available in Appendix A. Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3., Welsh & Shah (2006).

## Discussion and Conclusion

### *Findings*

This paper extends the idea of fiscal decentralization and the decentralization theory with the following several findings. First, separating and recognizing the difference of the sources of initial funds from final funds where the school finance is actually executed, this study argues that the definition of the centralization or decentralization of education must be more accurate. When applying the definition of deconcentration, devolution, and delegation into the education finance model, there is actually a significant number of countries where the initial funds are collected in national level yet the executive power is divided into smaller branches, such as regional governments, local governments, or municipalities, in a form of deconcentration. This implies that considering the initial sources of budget and where it comes from, there are more “centralized” countries in education finance than the existing literature often argue (DeBoer, 2012), and therefore needs a more accurate distinction of fiscal decentralization and political decentralization of education.

Following the first finding, this paper also recognizes that, as current literature has suggested, there is no one “absolute” education finance model prevailing in achieving better economic and academic outcomes. Tables 1-4 explicitly show that there is no concentration on one education finance model in achieving higher GDP per capita, lower Gini Index, or higher PISA mathematics scores. This aligns with the conclusions of DeBoer (2012), Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2004), Ahmad et al. (2008), and Welsh and McGinn (1999) that the form of education finance of one country must be determined in consideration of its politics, culture, feasibility, and administrative motives, and it should not be based on neither international trend nor a simple belief that choice near people would bring efficiency. A further study on fiscal decentralization may devise how quantitative research can include political factors and expand the decentralization theory further.

Third, besides the distinction of fiscal decentralization, the OLS regression cross-country analysis shows that political decentralization, or the distribution of administrative power to lower governments, tends to lead to higher economic and academic outcomes. Among three education finance systems, deconcentration and devolution are the system with political decentralization. The outcomes from Tables 1 – 2, and Figures 1 – 2 describe countries with either deconcentration or devolution as the education finance model ranked higher in GDP per capita and PISA mathematics scores, as well as lower Gini Index. In fact, 70 percent of countries with higher GDP/lower Gini Index per capita were using either deconcentration or devolution (Table 1 and 2). This implies that the decentralization hypothesis is valid when it is specific to political or administrative context.

Lastly, the results from OLS regression analysis in Figure 1 and 2 suggest that the optimal education finance model for better economic (higher GDP per capita and lower Gini Index) and academic (higher PISA scores) outcomes is deconcentration. One caveat that must be addressed, however, is that there is not enough data supporting the external

validity of this finding at the highest range of GDP per capita (60,000-80,000 USD) since there is no country having a form of deconcentration within that range (Figure 1). However, in Figure 2, the effectiveness of deconcentration as an education finance model is reconfirmed with external validity at this time. These results are aligned with the previous findings as well; deconcentration is a mixed form of fiscal centralization and administrative decentralization, and this is the education finance model that could maximize the advantages of centralization and decentralization of the education system.

### ***Policy Implications for Unified Korea***

Reflecting the results of the cross-country analysis, deconcentration is the educational finance model that will achieve higher economic and academic outcomes with less inequality between regions. Thus, according to the cross-country analysis, this paper suggests that deconcentrated education finance model would also work in imagined Unified Korea. In fact, centralization of the educational expenditures at the national level would be also preferred in political and administrative motives at the earlier stage of unification. South Korea and North Korea have been very different in terms of politics, and the political difference eventually results in a huge verge at the economic and academic status of two Koreas. Hence, education would rise as a critical administrative tool that could mend this verge by providing the same curriculum and pedagogy (Kim et al., 2014). Welsh and McGinn (1999) also argues that educational decentralization must be considered only when political support is promised. In such special political cases where two countries have to integrate under one regime, the centralization of curriculum development and teacher training are needed. Therefore, this paper recommends to maintain centralization in education finance, as well as the centralization of curriculum development and teacher training for Unified Korea.

However, maintaining centralization in every aspect of education is not as efficient as deconcentration, and therefore, regional autonomy must also be prioritized after the essentially centralized systems. For example, Ryu (2017) pointed out that current South Korea's educational grants are usually block grants, which are the funds delivered to the sub-national governments with specific categories. Rather than block grants, lump sum transferring mechanism promises a greater administrative freedom in planning educational budgets according to the needs of a smaller population (Burns & Köster, 2016), and this strategy may be beneficial in the case of Unified Korea, where every region would greatly vary in economy, culture, and demography. Likewise, while prioritizing the essential centralization for efficiency of the unification, the central government should continuously strive to empower the regional autonomy as well.

### ***Limitations***

There are three limitations in this paper's cross-country analysis and following findings. The first caveat that ought to be addressed with the results is that the analysis is based on the sample size of 40, which is a very small number of observations to confirm a statistical significance of the OLS regression. In order to make a more statistically significant estimate, it is necessary to include more countries with diversity in location, economic status, and academic performance because the current dataset is limited to 40 countries in OECD or its partner countries, which are mostly from the "Global North" (Odeh, 2010).

Another caveat regarding this study is that the typology for the education finance model in Table 1-4 is based on one dataset and one author's interpretation of it. Although the classification was done with calculation based on the amount of initial funds from each level of governments and the amount of transfers done via educational grants, there is a chance that the dataset provided in the OECD report may not reflect the actual proportion of how one country is distributing the educational expenditures. Since this paper is based on secondary resources, not information directly collected from each government, this paper could have misinterpreted the education finance model of one country. This, however, also implies that the comparative research about school funding should be continued and expanded to accumulate more precise data on each country's source of initial funding and the management of educational grants by sub-national governments.

Last, this paper has a clear limitation on making a claim of "the optimal education finance model of Unified Korea" because of the lack of North Korea's statistics. Due to the communist political regime that censors even the basic information such as a GDP per capita and population growth rate, it is impossible to calculate how different it will be when education is financed by the central government or local governments. Thus, this paper could only assume Unified Korea's academic and economic status based on the current South Korea's statistics. In order to test whether the deconcentration of education finance in Unified Korea would truly produce academic and economic efficiency like the 40 OECD countries' cross-country analysis finding, the data from North Korea is necessary. This implies that one of the early processes of Korean Unification must include a thorough and up-to-date data collecting for the better unification strategy construction.

### **Conclusion**

The study of Korean unification and the policy recommendations for Unified Korea are not limited to North Korea and South Korea. Rather, this paper also aims to reflect the plausible education policies in the community with high inequality in economy and politics. A clearer distinction between fiscal and political decentralization in education must be drawn, and it is often more efficient to pursue a mixture of fiscal centralization and administrative decentralization as an optimal form of the education finance model, including the future case of Unified Korea.

**Seulgi Kang** - also known as Seulgi "Abby" Kang- is a M.A. graduate of Economics and Education program from Teachers College, Columbia University. Prior to her Master's degree, she studied Economics and Educational Policy Studies in University of Wisconsin - Madison. She is interested in how to apply economic theories in education policies. Her research interest covers education finance, data-driven decision making in building an education policy, and the role of education for Korean Unification. She is currently working for the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) in South Korea. Email: [sk4652@tc.columbia.edu](mailto:sk4652@tc.columbia.edu).

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**Appendix A**

*The Descriptive Table of 40 Countries on GDP per Capita, PISA Mathematics Scores, Gini Index and Year, the Education Finance Form, and the Major Resource of Initial Education Fund (by alphabetical order)*

Country	Country Code	GDP per Capita (USD)	PISA Math Score (2018)	Gini Index (year)	Education Finance Model	Major Resource of Initial Education Fund	
<b>Argentina</b>	AR	\$11,688	379	41.4	2018	Devolution	Regional
<b>Australia</b>	AU	\$58,393	491	34.4	2014	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Austria</b>	AT	\$51,230	499	29.7	2017	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Belgium</b>	BE	\$47,293	508	27.4	2017	Devolution	Regional
<b>Brazil</b>	BR	\$10,000	384	53.9	2017	Devolution	Regional & Local
<b>Canada</b>	CA	\$46,192	512	33.8	2013	Devolution	Regional
<b>Chile</b>	CL	\$15,923	417	44.4	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Colombia</b>	CO	\$10,000	391	50.4	2018	Centralization	Central
<b>Czech Republic</b>	CZ	\$23,079	499	24.9	2017	Devolution	Local
<b>Denmark</b>	DK	\$61,834	509	28.7	2017	Devolution	Local
<b>Estonia</b>	EE	\$23,242	523	30.4	2017	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Finland</b>	FI	\$50,136	507	27.4	2017	Devolution	Local
<b>France</b>	FR	\$41,358	495	31.6	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Germany</b>	DE	\$47,514	500	31.9	2016	Devolution	Regional
<b>Greece</b>	GR	\$20,731	451	34.4	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Hungary</b>	HU	\$16,264	481	30.6	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Iceland</b>	IS	\$76,867	495	26.8	2015	Devolution	Local
<b>Ireland</b>	IE	\$79,415	500	32.8	2016	Centralization	Central
<b>Israel</b>	IL	\$44,215	463	39	2016	Centralization	Central
<b>Italy</b>	IT	\$34,389	487	35.9	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Japan</b>	JP	\$39,082	527	32.9	2013	Devolution	Regional & Local
<b>Latvia</b>	LV	\$17,852	496	35.6	2017	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Lithuania</b>	LT	\$19,083	481	37.3	2017	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Luxembourg</b>	LU	\$80,000	483	34.9	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Mexico</b>	MX	\$10,000	409	45.4	2018	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Netherlands</b>	NL	\$53,583	519	28.5	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>New Zealand</b>	NZ	\$43,836	494	33.3	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Norway</b>	NO	\$80,000	501	27	2017	Devolution	Local
<b>Poland</b>	PL	\$15,444	516	29.7	2017	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Portugal</b>	PT	\$23,478	492	33.8	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>Russia</b>	RU	\$11,394	488	37.5	2018	Devolution	Regional
<b>Slovak Republic</b>	SK	\$19,431	486	25.2	2016	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Slovenia</b>	SI	\$26,005	509	24.2	2017	Centralization	Central
<b>South Korea</b>	KR	\$33,622	526	31.6	2012	Deconcentration	Central
<b>Spain</b>	ES	\$30,406	481	34.7	2017	Devolution	Regional
<b>Sweden</b>	SE	\$55,767	502	28.8	2017	Devolution	Local
<b>Switzerland</b>	CH	\$80,000	515	32.7	2017	Devolution	Regional & Local
<b>Turkey</b>	TR	\$10,000	454	41.9	2018	Centralization	Central
<b>United Kingdom</b>	UK	\$42,526	502	34.8	2016	Deconcentration	Central
<b>United States</b>	US	\$62,918	478	41.4	2016	Devolution	Regional & Local

Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3., and Welsh & Shah (2006).

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Appendix B

Table 3. Cross-country Analysis for High GDP per capita Countries (Divided by South Korea\*)

GDP Status	High GDP per capita										
Gini Index	Low Gini (More Equal Income Distribution)					High Gini (Less Equal Income Distribution)					
	PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Finance Model	Source of Initial Fund		PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Finance Model	Source of Initial Fund
Country						Country					
Netherlands	519	53,583	28.5 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Japan	527	39,082	32.9 (2013)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
Denmark	509	61,834	28.7 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Switzerland	515	82,709	32.7 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
Belgium	508	47,293	27.4 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional	Canada	512	46,192	33.8 (2013)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional
Finland	507	50,136	27.4 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	United Kingdom	502	42,526	34.8 (2016)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Sweden	502	55,767	28.8 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Germany	500	47,514	31.9 (2016)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional
Norway	501	81,336	27 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Ireland	500	79,415	32.8 (2016)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Austria	499	51,230	29.7 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	New Zealand	494	43,836	33.3 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
France	495	41,358	31.6 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Australia	491	58,393	34.4 (2014)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Iceland	495	76,867	26.8 (2015)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Italy	487	34,389	35.9 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
						Luxembourg	483	117,370	34.9 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
						United States	478	62,918	41.4 (2016)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
						Israel	463	44,215	39 (2016)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central

\*: South Korea: GDP (33,622 USD); Gini Index (31.6)

Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3., and Welsh & Shah (2006).

Table 4. Cross-country Analysis of Low GDP per capita Countries (Divided by South Korea\*)

GDP Status	Low GDP per capita										
Gini Index	Low Gini (More Equal Income Distribution)					High Gini (Less Equal Income Distribution)					
	PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Model	Finance Source of Initial Fund	Country	PISA (2018)	GDP per capita (USD)	Gini (year)	Education Model	Finance Source of Initial Fund
<b>Country</b>						<b>Country</b>					
Estonia	523	23,242	30.4 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	B-S-J-Z (China)**	591	9,532	38.5 (2016)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
Poland	516	15,444	29.7 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Latvia	496	17,852	35.6 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Slovenia	509	26,005	24.2 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central	Portugal	492	23,478	33.8 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
Czech Republic	499	23,079	24.9 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Local	Russia	488	11,394	37.5 (2018)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional
Slovak Republic	486	19,431	25.2 (2016)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central	Spain	481	30,406	34.7 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional
						Lithuania	481	19,083	37.3 (2017)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
						Turkey	454	9,368	41.9 (2018)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
						Greece	451	20,731	34.4 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
						Chile	417	15,923	44.4 (2017)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
						Mexico	409	9,695	45.4 (2018)	<b>Deconcentration</b>	Central
						Colombia	391	6,650	50.4 (2018)	<b>Centralization</b>	Central
						Brazil	384	8,921	53.9 (2017)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional & Local
						Argentina	379	11,688	41.4 (2018)	<b>Devolution</b>	Regional

\*: South Korea: GDP (33,622 USD); Gini Index (31.6) \*\*: Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, and Guangdong only

Source: UN Statistics Division (2020b), World Bank (2020), and author's calculation based on OECD (2019) *Education at a Glance 2019*, Figure C4.3., and Ministry of Education China (2019)

**Appendix C**

*Significance Tests of Figure 1 and 2 on PISA Mathematics Scores*

Independent Variables	Figure 1	Figure 2	Combined
GDP per capita	0.0009*** (0.003)	-	0.0004** (0.0001)
Gini Index*	-	-4.6168*** (0.577)	-4.0732*** (0.476)
Centralization (base line)			
Deconcentration	25.0444* (12.968)	9.6796 (7.918)	13.3103* (7.437)
Devolution	3.0031 (13.311)	2.3726 (8.410)	-0.3872 (8.175)
Constant	440.6765*** (14.271)	637.4667*** (20.914)	604.4181*** (19.085)
Observations	40	40	40
R-squared	0.317	0.685	0.724

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

# Praxis for a Post-Information Future: Evaluating the Impact of a Pedagogical Framework Based on Experiential Learning

**Hasnain R. Badami**

*EDLAB Pakistan*

**Rubab Fatima**

*Graduate School of Education, Harvard University*

*This paper traces the implementation of a pedagogical framework in a low-cost private school in Karachi designed to put students' engagement with the world at the center of the learning process. The need for such a framework arose as a response to the realization that education system in Pakistan is lagging behind in preparing children of a post-information future. Through classroom observations, formal and informal interviews, and assessment of lesson plans conducted over the period of a year, the study investigated whether a learning cycle based on experiential learning could enhance student engagement in the learning process and help them develop the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly uncertain future. The observations before and after the training revealed significant impact on such variables as divergent thinking, the ability to ask open-ended questions, and willingness to probe concepts deeper as opposed to passive learning.*

*Keywords: student engagement, learning cycle, experiential learning, critical pedagogy, lesson planning, critical thinking, instructional design*

Educators, social scientists, and policy makers agree that Pakistan is facing an education emergency in matters of both quantity and quality. While we lament the 22.8 million children out of school in the country (UNICEF, 2020), deficiency of trained teachers; lack of unified curriculum; outdated textbooks; multiple examination boards, and unrealized policies are some of the many hurdles facing provision of quality education in the country (Lall, 2012; Siddiqui, 2016). Moreover, the existence of multiple educational institutions – public schools, elite private schools, madaris, etc. – cater to particular socioeconomic classes and contribute to further social stratification which also exacerbate the challenges (Malik, 2012; Rahman, 2004; Siddiqui, 2012). These difficulties have resulted in reducing education from being a transformative experience for its seekers and the society as a whole to merely being a time-bound process of acquiring knowledge that is incomprehensible and irrelevant to the current local and global scenario. With their focus on transmitting a fixed amount of knowledge, rote-memorization, and standardized testing, education system in Pakistan appears to be rooted in pedagogies of the past while preparing learners for an ever-evolving and unpredictable future (Shabeen, 2011; Malik, 2012).

Such an approach, which Papert (1993) terms as instructionism, was promising in Industrial age but is hardly a solution to the problems posed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are quickly moving towards a post-information age, which is characterized by civic

disengagement despite an influx of information and increasing social connectedness (Taube, 2004). While the present pedagogical model is driven primarily by the needs of Industrial age that assumes a one-size-fits-all approach, this age poses a unique crisis of understanding and demands a pedagogy that not only builds “deep conceptual understanding” (Sawyer, 2014, p. 2) but also allows the learner to position himself and his knowledge in relation to the world. Hence, the post-information era necessitates the development of individuals’ engagement with global issues together with conceptual development.

This paper presents a pedagogical framework for training teachers to reconceptualize the purpose of education as a tool for personal and social transformation. The study described in the paper trained teachers of a trust-based school in Pakistan on using the framework to increase students’ engagement with the world. Findings from post-training assessments show that students demonstrated – among others – increased ability to connect classroom concepts to the real world, to ask open-ended questions, and to engage in critical discussions. Beginning with a brief overview of the need for such a framework, the paper summarizes literature on experiential learning and critical pedagogy – two theories that form the basis of the framework presented. Next, the paper delves into a description of the 5A framework, using an example from the study. The two succeeding sections on findings and discussion present the impact of implementing the framework.

### **Background of the Study**

The framework proposed in this paper is one part of a year-long consultancy program for school development operating in Karachi, Pakistan. The need for a framework arose in response to the observation that one-time workshops and training have limited impact on empowering teachers and enhancing pedagogy. While there is an abundance of research on sound pedagogical practices, there are no holistic frameworks that provide a sustainable approach to teacher development and meaningful learning in the classroom. An initial assessment of teaching practices employed at the school under study showed that passive learning was a pervasive issue in the classrooms. This meant that students were disengaged with what they were learning and could not relate it to their own experiences owing to the use of rote-learning or lecture-based teaching practices. Simultaneously, content presented to the students was disconnected with the world outside as a result of – among others – outdated or missing real-life examples and rigid or unquestionable conclusions in the texts.

An example of this phenomenon was an observation made by the authors in a class session where grade 7 students were learning about climate change. The teacher read and translated the Social Studies chapter on climate change into native language, explained what it said, and students were finally made to answer questions that tested whether they understood what was written in the book. While at the end of the class the students could narrate a handful of facts relating to the topic, they did not come out of the learning process more aware of the implication of climate change, how it impacts our societies socially and economically, possible political and economic reasons behind the issue, and more importantly, their responsibility as citizens of the world. Such observations led the authors of this study to peruse literature on 21st

century pedagogy that aimed at promoting students' engagement of the learning process with their lived experiences as well as local and global issues.

### Literature Review

Borrowing from the authors' academic training in philosophy and psychology respectively, the 5A framework synthesizes research on experiential learning and critical pedagogy, presenting a code of practice that turns students into primary actors in the learning process. As part of the framework, the classroom is reconceptualized as a space for crafting an experience for the learner and the teachers as masters of that craft. This method stands in contrast to narrative education or the 'banking concept of education' criticized by Freire (1968/2005) in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire (2005) cogently articulates the oppressive nature of the modern education system where the learner is merely a passive recipient of disembodied knowledge that is narrated to the student by the teacher as a primary actor. The alternative, as the twentieth century scholars argued, is critical pedagogy.

Giroux (2019) interprets critical pedagogy as one that "views education as central to creating students who are socially responsible and civically engaged citizens" and distinguishes it from a pedagogy of repression that exists "to wield authority over passive subjects" (p. 509). In the same vein, building on the works of earlier pragmatic philosophers as well as social and cognitive psychologists, Kolb (2015) argued that learning is the result of the interplay between grasping and transforming experience. As opposed to the purely behavioral or cognitive view of learning, experiential learning emphasizes the necessity of combining sense experience with higher order reflection to create knowledge that can be used in novel situations. While both theories – experiential learning and critical pedagogy – define two distinct philosophies of teaching and learning, their emphasis on making learning a process of critical engagement with lived experience proves to be a fitting response to the demands of 21st century education.

The current pedagogical trajectory – that considers knowledge as fixed and teachers as the ultimate dispensers of that knowledge – is centered around the age-old question: what should students know about the world? Alternatively, the concept of student engagement with the world argues that a different approach to designing curriculum and deploying pedagogy is needed which instead inquires: what do my students think about the world? This idea captures, to some degree, Freire's notion of "reading the world" (Freire & Macedo, 2005). Similar to Freire's idea that reading of the word and world are interconnected, students' engagement with the world outlines the idea that the learning process is not merely an identification or comprehension of the world by the students but also a positioning of the self in the world. Eleanor Duckworth (2006) mentions a similar notion in her book, *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*. She writes,

As Lisa Schneier (personal communication, 1997) has said, we must find ways to present subject matter that will enable learners to get at their own thoughts about it. Then we must take those thoughts seriously, and set about helping students to pursue them in greater breadth and depth. (p. xiii)

This thought resonated with many twentieth century educationists such as Earl C. Kelly, who proposed that learning is the process of interacting with experience and deducing meaning from it (Raiola, 2011). This serves as a reminder for educators to

consider education as an interactive and immersive experience as opposed to merely being a narration of facts expounded by theorists or researchers of the past. In the same vein, Rachel Carson (1988) – a marine biologist and educator – presented a contrast between the learning process as a “way for the child to want to know” and education just being “a diet of facts” (p. 33). All of these educators present a mutual vision of what a pedagogy built on students’ engagement with the world represents and its significance in the learning process.

### **The 5As – A Theoretical Framework**

Adopting from the work on experiential learning, the process reflects the neurological basis of learning whereby new experiences – synaptic activation – modify neural pathways, resulting in growth and pruning of neural networks (Zull, 2002; 2011). Similarly, the framework follows a simple process for forming new learning:

- Experiencing a phenomenon
- Making sense of the experience
- Forming a judgement about the experience

Deriving from the above, the framework comprises five phases: Aim, Activate, Analyze, Apply, Assess (See Figure 1). In the classroom, teachers enable students to experience learning as a process of engaging with the world by guiding students through these phases. Unlike traditional pedagogies, the 5A framework blurs the clear demarcation between the roles of the teacher and student. Instead the students and their experience of the world become the primary focus of the learning process and the teachers assume the role of the “leader-facilitator,” that is: they simultaneously provide vision while also extending freedom to the students (Breunig, 2011, p. 60). Freire (2005), Carson (1988), Duckworth (2006), and many others have also reinforced the notion of the teaching and learning process being mutual. The following subsections outline the five phases in detail and present examples from a grade 6 lesson on the impact of plastic on the environment conducted by a teacher as part of this study (See Table 2).

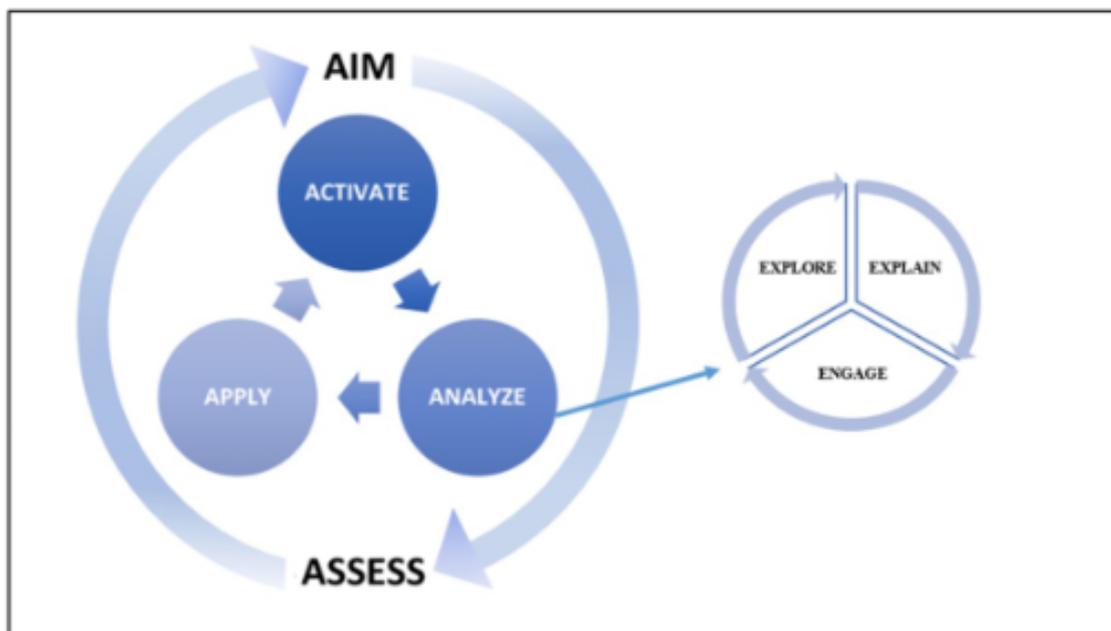


Figure 1. *Illustration of the 5A Framework*

**Aim**

As part of the 5A framework, the learning process is a journey of discovering meaningful ideas that help learners understand their experience of the world. The first phase of the framework, Aim, determines the desired end goals of the learning process. Since the purpose of learning is not merely the accumulation of knowledge but students' engagement with it, the learning process constitutes three dimensions: knowledge, analysis, and application. Dewey (1933) - who laid the foundation for connecting experience with learning - outlines the tenets of reflective thought which hint at these three dimensions:

Information related to it [observation/experience] is not merely amassed and then left in a heap; it is classified and subdivided so as to be available as needed. Inferences are made by most men not from purely speculative motives, but because they are necessary for the efficient performance of the duties involved in their several callings. (p. 49)

The end goal of the thinking process then becomes applicative. Whatever we learn is needed to be applied somewhere. For instance, a part of the lesson on the impact of plastics on the environment, a sample of the learning goals and outcomes designed for this topic is given Table 1 (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Example Learning Goals & Outcomes for a Lesson on the Impact of Plastic

Dimension	Learning Goal	Learning Outcome
Knowledge	I want the students to know the impact of plastic on the environment.	Students will outline the benefits and dangers of using plastic products (such as cheap product, easily available, but difficult to decompose, danger to marine life, etc.)
Analysis	I want students to analyze the dangers of continued use of plastic and solutions to the problem.	Students will compare different alternatives to using plastics.
Application	I want students to apply their understanding of the topic to bring one change in their immediate environment that could counter the impact of plastic.	Students will propose, plan, and implement a change in their immediate environment that can counter the impact of plastic.

She began her class by writing on the board the term Plastic Planet and asked her students what that could mean. Spending a few minutes to discuss their initial ideas, she proceeded to share the goals with her students, allowing them to self-regulate their learning. As such, the Aim of a lesson determines the roadmap of this learning journey for the teacher and student - both of whom act as co-inquirers in the process.

### **Activate**

Having laid out the map of the learning journey upfront, it is now important to motivate learners to partake in the process. The willingness comes when learners are met with a problem or a puzzle that initiates reflective thought (Dewey, 1933). As a result, curiosity is ignited which Dewey believes is one of the three “native resources” required for fruitful learning (1933, p. 35). The second phase, Activate, then becomes the Central Experience - the first impression of the topic - which kickstarts learning. Keeping in view the learning sought, the teacher could present a story, an experiment, a word problem, a visual, or simulate a real-life situation. Using the example of the lesson on the impact of plastic, one way the teacher presented a Central Experience to activate her students’ curiosities was to help them understand that plastic does not decompose easily and hovers in the environment for thousands of years. Two days before the beginning of her lesson plastics, she shared a temporary new policy for their class: No student was allowed to take any plastic product outside of the class. As a result, for two days, students collected all their plastic-based trash and stored it in the bins, shelves, and desks of the classroom. By the time her lesson began on the third day, students could see a substantial amount of trash everywhere. The teacher asked her students to imagine what would happen if the policy continued. In groups, as students brainstormed consequences of not being able to dispose of the trash – not having space to sleep, too much pollution, dirty and messy classroom experience, etc. – the teacher prompted students to consider their classroom as an analogy for Earth. She shared with her students the general idea that plastics took very long to dispose and asked them to pen down the possible groups of people, animals, plants, or marine life that might be impacted by this problem.

### **Analyze**

The Central Experience presented in the Activate phase is the dilemma that hooks the learners making it the medium through which necessary knowledge and skills are developed. Having experienced the abundance of plastic in their lives, students investigate the relation between plastic and the environment. To scaffold the process of analyzing the Central Experience, teachers lead students through three steps: Explore, Explain, Engage. We will consider each step using the example from the previous sections.

**Explore.** The teacher guides student exploration using a prompt that jumpstarts inquiry and encourages them to ask questions. This step borrows from Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana’s simple process of encouraging inquiry – the Question Formulation Technique (Rothstein & Santana, 2011). For this topic, the teacher used a provocative quotation by an American actress and activist, Sophie Bush: ‘To me, I think people who don’t think it’s a big deal to toss a plastic bottle in the garbage are not only being irresponsible, but I think they’re being disrespectful of all the other humans on earth.’ Students use this prompt to ask as many questions as they can while exploring the quotation, their Central Experience, and the topic at hand.

**Explain.** Having problematized their experience by raising a diverse set of questions, learners then move on to look for answers. The 5A framework encourages teachers to be facilitators of learning. For that purpose, teachers purposefully select books, speakers, discussion prompts, and other activities that will help learners discover concepts and ideas pertinent to the learning goals to help them fill gaps in their

understanding identified in the Explore phase. For the lesson on the impact of plastic, students watched a documentary called *Plastic Planet*, read articles on the impact of plastics on marine life, and read a chapter from their books on the composition and decomposition of plastic.

**Engage.** The engage phase borrows from Richard Paul's (2012) model for explicitly learning to think in a disciplined fashion (Nosich, 2011). This phase creates a space for dialogue in which teachers model higher-order thinking by helping students question their experiences, the knowledge they have received, the sources of that knowledge, and their assumptions. For instance, in the lesson on plastics, an idea that constantly resurfaced was the proposition of banning plastic products. One of the students who had a family member with a disability questioned the soundness of the proposition countering that banning plastics altogether could make simple tasks difficult for certain groups of people such as using a straw to drink water – especially for people who could not afford expensive alternatives.

In the classroom, the Explain and Engage steps often occur simultaneously and repeatedly with students acquiring knowledge from various sources while critically reflecting on it and connecting it to their experiences.

### *Apply*

The apply phase is a response to the oft-quoted lament that our education system is producing graduates who can recount distinct bits of disjointed information but are unable to produce original thoughts, solutions, or ideas on important local and global issues. As pointed out by Dewey (1938) that meaningful learning allows the learner to reflect on their experiences and to extract from them knowledge that can be used to serve us better in the future. The Application phase has a specific requirement: to be able to successfully apply a concept, phenomenon, or theory learnt in the classroom, learners should be able to use it to explain a phenomenon or solve a problem found in the real world. For the lesson on plastics, students applied their learning to impact various kinds of changes within their school. Some students petitioned to have separate bins installed for plastic trash and contacted organizations, with the help of their teacher, that would buy and recycle plastic waste. Others ran awareness campaigns for younger students, explaining to them why too much plastic was dangerous and how to limit single-use plastics.

### *Assess*

Despite being placed at the end of the 5A learning cycle, the Assess phase hardly happens at the end. In contrast to the customary style of conducting tests at the end of the learning process, the 5A framework reconceptualizes assessments as activities conducted at any stage of the learning process which informs learners of their progress in attaining the aim set out in the beginning of the learning process. Such assessments are designed with the purpose of identifying not just the mastery of content but necessary skills as well, such as the ability to raise intelligent questions, think critically, solve problems, communicate thoughts, and present ideas creatively. Moreover, insights from assessments eventually also become the guiding points for teachers to plan goals for future lessons. During the lesson on plastics, students were given various forms of assessments. One way students were made to recall the information they gathered was by giving them short quizzes on the documentary they watched

and the texts they read. At another point, students were asked to share one-line reflections on the critical discussions they had in the Engage phase within their groups. The final project in the Apply phase was scored using a rubric designed together by the students and teachers.

**Table 2.** *Summary of the 5A Framework with Example*

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Example</b>
Aim	Teachers plan goals and outcomes to guide learning and share them with students to allow them to self-regulate the learning process.	Topic: Impact of Plastics on the Environment Teacher asks students to think about the term Plastic Planet and shares goals and outcomes of the topic. Students briefly share initial thoughts about the aim.
Activate	Teachers present a Central Experience pertinent to the lesson to ignite students' curiosities.	Students are prompted to follow the new temporary policy: students are not allowed to take plastic-based trash outside of their classrooms. Students brainstorm what would happen if such a policy was not reversed. This helps students realize, through an analogy, the short and long-term impact of plastics on the environment.
Analyze	Teachers lead students through three steps to inquire and critically reflect on their learning.	
	Explore: Students are prompted to ask questions about the Central Experience and connect it to the day's learning goals.	Teacher Prompt: 'To me, I think people who don't think it's a big deal to toss a plastic bottle in the garbage are not only being irresponsible, but I think they're being disrespectful of all the other humans on earth.'  Example Questions by Students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is using plastic disrespectful to humans?</li> <li>• Isn't throwing plastic in the bin a good idea?</li> <li>• Why is plastic bad?</li> </ul>
	Explain: Students peruse various sources to acquire information and ideas relevant to the topic and to the questions they have raised in the previous step.	Students watch a documentary called Plastic Planet, read articles on the impact of plastics on marine life, and read a chapter from their books on the composition and decomposition of plastic.

	Engage: Teachers engage students in a critical dialogue by helping students question their experiences, the knowledge they have received, the sources of that knowledge, and their assumptions.	Teachers and students discuss the information taken from the various sources and their own experiences relating to the topic. Teacher models higher-order thinking by prompting students to think about the various solutions to the plastic problem and weigh the pros and cons of each for the various stakeholders in the environment such as different groups of people, animals, marine life, etc.
Apply	Students apply their learning to explain a phenomenon or solve a problem found in the real world.	Students work in groups on a project of their own choosing. They are provided with a rubric to ensure that the projects meet pre-established criteria.
Assess	Students are assessed throughout the learning process using various formative and summative methods of assessments to demonstrate whether the aims put forward have been met.	Students complete short quizzes at various points in the learning process such as after watching a documentary in Explain phase and after the discussion in Engage phase, Student are marked for participation in Engage discussion using a pre-established rubric. Their projects in the Apply phase are graded using a checklist. All of these assessments together form the final grade for each student.

### Methodology

The year-long, qualitative study consisted of training teachers of a low-fee, K12 private school to use the 5A framework and assess the impact of implementing it in the classroom. The school comprises two campuses and was funded by a private educational trust committed to improving the quality of education offered. The school is located in a suburb of Karachi populated by middle- and lower-class families and caters to students from diverse backgrounds. The teacher to student ratio is 1:25 in the primary grades and 1:20 in the secondary grades. Around 20 percent of students enrolled come from two local orphanages and the school provides foundational classes for basic literacy. Moreover, the financial assistance policy of the school provides complete or partial fee relaxation to students after a rigorous process. The study was broadly divided into three phases: pre-training assessment, training, and post-training assessment. Data was collected from 150 classroom observations, 25 formal and informal interviews, and assessment of 200 lesson plans designed by the teachers. The training was conducted with 50 teachers of different subjects from grade 1 till 12. Due to a high teacher turnover – owing to the teachers receiving low salaries, getting married or pursuing higher studies – several teachers left the school or were transferred between different campuses; as such, data from 12 teachers who participated in the study from the beginning and remained till the end was considered for analysis. The school follows the Sindh Board of Education, and graduating

students have to sit for their standardized board examination at the end of grades IX and X. As policy, the school hired individuals with at least a graduation in relevant disciplines; however, due to lack of competent candidates, the administration had to compromise on hiring teachers with at least a graduation in no specific discipline for most grades and subjects. Around 25% of teachers had previously attended trainings pertaining to different areas such as classroom management, child development, lesson planning, and other subject-specific workshops.

The researchers believed that significant impact on the teaching style could be seen if teachers planned their lessons based on the 5A framework under expert guidance before implementing them in the classroom. As such, teachers engaged in lesson planning every month and received feedback from researchers. Using a standardized checklist originally developed by University of Southern California's Center of Excellence in Teaching (USC, 2020), teachers and students were observed twice each month in one-hour units. After the first phase, teachers were trained by the researchers on planning and delivering lessons based on the 5A framework. The training consisted of 50 hours of workshops on incorporating the framework in their teaching as well as individual coaching sessions to help them deal with specific challenges. After the training, researchers extended feedback every month to teachers on their lesson plans and conducted at least two classroom observations for every teacher (one planned and one random) to assess the impact of the training on teaching style as well as student engagement.

### **Findings**

This section presents findings pertaining to two major areas where training was focused: student engagement and lesson planning using the framework.

#### ***Student Engagement***

Student engagement was broken down into the following variables: the quality of questions and linking classroom concepts to real world.

**Pre-Training.** A clear demarcation between disciplined and undisciplined behavior dominated student-teacher interaction. Students were regularly reminded that they were to remain quiet unless they were asked a question or needed clarification. Engagement with the content presented to the students was limited to explanation by the teacher followed by close-ended questions to the students to ensure that content had been understood and learnt. The result was learners' incapacity to produce original answers or ideas which teachers in the study attributed to lack of literacy, attention, and motivation on the part of students.

Moreover, almost all of the 12 teachers did not share learning outcomes with the students and began their classes either directly with explanation of the topic or with close-ended questions. Except for two teachers teaching Science for grades 3 and 8, application of concepts to the real world was missing. Most classes were structured around explanation and practice exercises or question and answers narrated by the teachers to the students. When asked during the interview whether the practice of narrating both questions and answers to the students was burdensome for the teachers and counterproductive for the students, teachers responded saying that students were incapable of producing original answers and made a lot of mistakes which is why

answers had to be dictated. Students later memorized these answers for exams. Only one teacher teaching Social Studies to grade 9 encouraged student-generated discussions in the classroom by asking open-ended questions.

**Post-Training.** As part of the framework, teachers were instructed to engage students in asking open-ended questions and holding critical discussions. An analysis of the questions produced by students showed that overtime learners produced more questions that were open-ended and considered linkages of the primary topic to other topics in the same discipline or other disciplines. During informal interviews, teachers explained that students displayed more energy and enthusiasm for learning concepts in classes where students were given the freedom to produce questions before explanation. One of the teachers, teaching Math to grade 1 – commented that beginning lessons with Activate and Explore phase made it easy for her to conduct the rest of the lesson because by the time her students reached the Explain and Engage phase, they had already thought extensively about the concepts. Explanations, which were usually considered boring by the students because they were given using teacher-directed lectures, became student-driven and exciting.

Student engagement with the learning process showed the most significant improvement when teachers began using real life examples to teach concepts and encouraged students to link ideas to their own lives. During informal interviews, teachers seemed content to share that students who rarely participated in class had stories and examples to contribute to discussions. One teacher from a grade 3 class commented: 'Many students are eager to share their stories. We have to think of ways to accommodate everybody in the limited class time.' When asked possible reasons for such a change, she said: 'We are asking students to share their stories and about times when they or somebody they know experienced something related to what we are learning.' Another teacher who taught grade 6 Social Studies explained that many of his students came from working class backgrounds and spent a lot of time on the streets. When sharing how the framework has impacted the level of student engagement in his class, he said: 'My students are getting a chance to combine their street life with school life because I give them the space to talk about things that are relevant to them.'

### ***Lesson Planning***

**Pre-Training.** Before the training, teachers were asked to submit their lesson plans for the previous year to understand their current approach. Of the 12 teachers, only 4 had plans they had made specifically for their students, the rest either did not use plans, or used teacher guides instead. The teachers who did submit original plans did not seem to follow a specific method for lesson planning and almost all of the plans used different approaches to teaching the content. Some common elements in the plans included identification of topic and subtopic, exercises to be done in class, and homework. Only one teacher, for Grade 8 English, differed from the general trend and identified the expected prior knowledge of students in the plan and mentioned the development of language skills. None of the plans mentioned any strategies for applicative learning, skill-based teaching, or active learning. Moreover, teachers were also asked during the interviews on their opinion on the need for lesson plans. Those who did not prepare any plans emphasized that their experience in the profession rendered the plan unnecessary. Most teachers even went on to say that preparing

lesson plans was an added task which did not contribute much to the teaching and learning process.

**Post-Training.** However, as part of the intervention teachers were required to make lesson plans for every session under the guidance of researchers. Since the structure of the plan was such that teachers were required to brainstorm critical questions and real-life applications of concepts they were teaching, they were bound to include these elements. Insofar that the framework bound the teachers on these elements, it acted as continued professional development for them because teachers were required every month to think critically about their subjects, find applications of the concepts they were teaching, and be informed about the origins of big ideas in their disciplines while making their lesson plans. This helped combat a problem prevalent before the training in which teachers considered content from the prescribed books as the only knowledge available on the subjects. They were driven to review other sources for a better understanding of what they were teaching simultaneously dealing with the challenge of untrained teachers or teachers with limited content-mastery. The Math Coordinator for primary grades shared the following when asked how this framework helped teachers: 'This model has been designed for growth of the teacher because it requires first for the teacher to be prepared before she finally takes the lesson to the students. Once teacher is trained and has learnt only then he/she can deliver to the students fruitfully.'

### **Discussion**

An area in the study that showed the quickest change was student engagement, and post-training observations demonstrated that an intervention as simple as introducing opportunity for sharing learner experiences and stories in regular lessons could have a significant impact on engaging the learners in the learning process. This contrasted sharply with the pre-training observations where students were alienated from the learning process by eliminating their voices and disconnecting the ideas that they studied in the classroom from their lives. Such a scenario was reminiscent of Freire's (2005) idea that education, as a one-way process, had the tendency to be oppressive insofar that it explicitly excluded students' lived experiences and thoughts about the world. Implementing a framework that incorporates such a space brought learners back into the learning process and made them active agents in the classroom.

Throughout the framework, there are several ways of allowing students the opportunity to connect learning with what matters to them. While sharing lived experiences relevant to the lesson is one way, asking questions that are significant for them is another way to help students identify with the learning process. An example that brought this to the forefront was a grade 8 Social Studies lesson on rural to urban migration. When students were prompted to share questions that they could think of relating to the topic, many of them connected rural to urban migration to infrastructural deterioration and overpopulation of cities like Karachi. This is in line with Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana's study where they saw that, when given the opportunity, students engaged in divergent thinking which helped them employ different perspectives to think about the same topic (Rothstein & Santana, 2011). This also showed that such issues did not go unnoticed by the young learners but were ideas that they considered. Such ideas, if left unexamined, take the form of unchecked biases and prejudices. Dewey (1933) also hints at this notion differentiating the

disciplined reflective thought from random thought. In the example above, the teacher took the opportunity to help students consider the various dimensions of the issue. For instance, she asked students to consider why anybody would want to leave their hometowns and families to migrate, and to consider both the benefits and challenges of rural to urban migration for the cities as well as the migrants.

Moreover, as researchers undertook the year-long program with the school, a trend emerged. In the first quarter of the year, teachers were wary of the training as the framework was introduced and implementation began. Teachers with a teaching experience of eight years or more often commented that they didn't require training and knew the content that they had to teach inside out. However, in the second quarter of the program, teachers noticed the impact on student participation and input, and realized that the program was worth giving a try. In an informal conversation, a grade 5 Urdu teacher said: 'I have to do a lot of work to prepare the lesson plan but in the classroom, I do less work and it is my students who do the most work.' While student engagement and inquiry were a positive change for the researchers, teachers – around the third and fourth quarter – felt that implementing the framework hindered in covering the curriculum prescribed by the school administration and the examination board. This suggested that despite being given a framework to encourage students to think beyond pre-established content, teachers still believed that their primary responsibility was to cover the prescribed curriculum. This reminded of Duckworth's plea to the educators to discard the idea of transmitting all the prescribed knowledge, and instead to "make such knowledge...seem interesting and accessible to the child" (2006, p. 8). However, such a change requires a re-evaluation of the philosophy of teaching; while the framework does help shape teachers' ideas about the transformative nature of education, the researchers hypothesize that a change in perception and philosophy of education require a significant amount of time and mentoring.

### **Limitations & Implications**

The impact of the framework on students' academic results and content mastery was out of the scope of the study. Hence, the paper does not discuss if the framework affects academic scores and students' performance on standardized tests. Future studies can assess the impact of the framework on students' academic performance particularly focusing on the role of critical thinking and student engagement with learning on content mastery and performance on standardized tests.

Moreover, during the study, it was observed that while some teachers were quick to take up the new practice and endeavored to brainstorm creative ways to deliver their lessons, most other teachers often appeared demotivated or reluctant to change current practice. The researchers hypothesize that passion towards teaching could be a contributing factor in explaining the progress some teachers made throughout the year as well as the reluctance towards change shown by other teachers. A particularly interesting area for further training could be facilitating teachers to recognize their roles as social change agents before training them on specific skills.

## **Conclusion**

This paper argues for a bottom-up approach to pedagogical transformation, as opposed to a top-down approach that demands progressive policies for change. That is not to say that more informed national policies and external support are not needed or significant. Instead, similar to the suggestion offered by Razzaq and Forde (2014), this paper argues that for a reform to be substantially transformative and sustainable it has to include the primary stakeholders – the teachers – and to translate policies, suggestions, and research into practice for the classrooms.

The 5A framework offers such a praxis that borrows from big ideas in education which have proven to be effective in isolation but have not been presented as a coherent model for teaching and learning yet. The framework has presented the ability to carve a niche for itself in any classroom owing to the flexibility with which it can be implemented. Most teachers, who participated in the study, found that the framework gave them freedom to employ a variety of techniques ensuring that teachers also had ample opportunities for learning and growth alongside the students.

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**Hasnain R. Badami** is a seasoned Learning & Development professional with diverse experience as a Trainer, Instructional design specialist & Critical thinking consultant for schools and corporates. His work with teachers and schools focuses on creating reflective and meaningful classroom experiences for learners. His research centers on critical pedagogy & alternative learning design. Email: [hasnainbadami9@gmail.com](mailto:hasnainbadami9@gmail.com).

**Rubab Fatima** is an Ed.M. candidate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, specializing in Learning & Teaching. She has also been associated with the School Development Program at EDLAB Pakistan as a school consultant and trainer. Her research focuses on alternative pedagogies aimed at creating spaces of dialogue for learners. Email: [rubabfatima@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:rubabfatima@gse.harvard.edu).

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Appendix

Classroom Observation Checklist

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER (BELOW MINIMUM)	TIER 1 (MINIMUM)	TIER 2 (PROFICIENT)	TIER 3 (EXCELLENT)
<b>Class Organization</b>				
<b>Instructional plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor changes the established class session plan without prior notification to students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The class session demonstrates clear signs of planning and organization, and follows a logical flow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The class session includes instruction and formative assessment to assess student learning for that class session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The class session includes instruction, formative assessment, and reflection components.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication of clear learning goals for the class session</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor communicates no learning goals for the class session and/or each lesson activity.</li> <li>Instructor communicates inappropriate or unrealistic learning goals for the class session and/or each lesson activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor clearly identifies realistic learning goals for the class session.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor clearly connects the learning goals for the class session to the course learning objectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor clearly identifies the learning goals for each instructional activity, and connects them to the course learning objectives.</li> </ul>
<b>Time management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Room and/or technology issues occur during class that could have been addressed before the start of class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The class session starts and ends on time.</li> <li>Planned sections of the class session are well-timed.</li> <li>Little or no time spent on non-instructional activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor utilizes and references educational technology for passive learning activities outside of class to support effective use of in-class time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor maximizes in-class time, using active learning or applications rather than passive learning.</li> <li>Instructor clearly indicates time limits for all student activities.</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor prepares the room and relevant technology before the start of class.</li> </ul>		
<b>Learning Environment</b>				
<b>Classroom climate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor raises students' stress or anxiety by using discriminatory, dismissive, or other abusive language.</li> <li>• Instructor minimizes students' struggle with material.</li> <li>• Instructor discourages student input.</li> <li>• Instructor violates confidentiality by publicly revealing students with accommodations.</li> <li>• Instructor ignores disruptive student behaviors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor consistently uses verbal and body language that is responsive to students' stress or anxiety.</li> <li>• Instructor encourages student participation.</li> <li>• Instructor treats all students equitably.</li> <li>• Instructor is responsive to students' different educational backgrounds and learning needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor has established classroom norms that foster a positive and inclusive environment.</li> <li>• Instructor encourages interaction between students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor uses practices that increase students' motivation and foster a growth mindset.</li> </ul>
<b>Presentation form</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor uses inappropriate or offensive gestures and/or speech.</li> <li>• Instructor displays a negative attitude in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor volume, pace, and diction allow observer to follow the class session.</li> <li>• Instructor faces students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor incorporates appropriate eye contact and effective non-verbal communication (e.g., hand gestures).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor is engaging, responsive, and constructive in both tone and content of their speech.</li> </ul>

	tone and/or content.	when speaking.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor avoids distracting mannerisms or speech patterns, such as filler words and nervous habits.</li> </ul>	
<b>Presentation substance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor does not use, or uses inappropriate, visual support for presentation and/or examples/illustrations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor provides visual support for verbal presentation and uses concrete examples/illustrations to clarify content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor cites sources for content discussed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor follows accessibility best practices by verbally describing and/or captioning any images used in presentation.</li> </ul>
<b>Instructional Content</b>				
<b>Knowledge of subject</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor does not appear to understand course content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor's factual statements are consistent with current knowledge in the field.</li> <li>Instructor correctly answers questions about course-level content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor answers questions confidently, clearly, and simply.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor ties current content to topics or knowledge from the profession and/or more advanced courses.</li> </ul>
<b>Discipline-specific language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor does not use, or incorrectly uses, discipline-specific and/or academic language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor uses discipline-specific and academic language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor explains use of discipline-specific terms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor facilitates the use of discipline-specific language by students.</li> </ul>
<b>Contextual relevance and transferability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor teaches content devoid of real-world scenarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor provides real-world applications of class session</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor has students provide real-world examples of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where appropriate, instructor uses examples where their</li> </ul>

	<p>and/or examples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor assumes unrealistic skill level of students in the class.</li> </ul>	<p>content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor explicitly builds on prior student knowledge.</li> </ul>	<p>class content or apply content to real-world scenarios.</p>	<p>discipline converges with other disciplines in addressing challenges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where appropriate, instructor addresses “<u>wicked problems</u>” identified by USC on a local, national, or global level.</li> </ul>
<b>Student Engagement</b>				
<b>Appropriate content or level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class content is too easy or difficult for student knowledge level.</li> <li>Instructor does not encourage higher-order thinking.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class content appropriately challenges students.</li> <li>Class content promotes mastery of course learning objectives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor engages students in higher-order thinking skills during class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The instructor spends the majority of class time leading students in higher-order thinking activities.</li> </ul>
<b>Active learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor uses no active-learning exercises.</li> <li>Instructor has unrealistic expectations for active-learning exercises.</li> <li>Instructor uses inappropriate or offensive active-learning exercises. Instructor uses active-learning exercises that are not accessible to everyone in the class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class session contains at least one active-learning exercise to apply course content.</li> <li>Instructor monitors and manages active-learning exercises.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor uses active-learning exercises after no more than 30 consecutive minutes of lecture.</li> <li>Instructor ensures that all students are on-task.</li> <li>Instructor is responsive to student engagement and adjusts strategy accordingly.</li> <li>Instructor facilitates student-led explanation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructor uses active-learning exercises after no more than 15 consecutive minutes of lecture.</li> <li>Instructor requires students to submit or present in-class work by end of class.</li> <li>Where appropriate, instructor leverages student use of electronic technology to facilitate active learning.</li> </ul>

			s and/or discussions.	
<b>Formative assessment/feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor violates FERPA by publicly sharing student grades.</li> <li>• Instructor provides non-constructive and/or discouraging feedback.</li> <li>• Instructor compares student work to an ambiguous or unrealistic standard.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor provides students constructive and encouraging feedback on how to improve their comprehension or performance in class.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor provides information to students about their performance on class activities compared to a pre-established standard.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor leads students in structured reflection on class learning activities.</li> </ul>

# Labeling the World: The 3P Framework for Critiquing and Reconstructing Our Categorization Processes

**Kara D. Brown**

*University of South Carolina*

**Payal P. Shah**

*University of South Carolina*

**E. Doyle Stevick**

*University of South Carolina*

*Scholars and students of comparative education routinely, and often reflexively, categorize places with labels that have complex and problematic histories, connotations and associations. Both comparative education classrooms and scholarship will benefit from reflecting on the dynamics of labeling places. We seek to provide a framework for analyzing the main issues and risks associated with labeling with a heuristic we call the 3P framework. It invites students and scholars to consider the ways in which power, perspective, and plurality are expressed through the terms we apply to places.*

*Through this framework, we identify common pitfalls in labeling. We provide a table with open access resources that critically examine many of the most important and common geographic labels in our field. To illustrate how these issues are manifested in particular contexts, we provide two vignettes, on South Asia and Estonia. The vignettes show how issues of power, perspective and plurality are manifested through the labels used and applied in specific places where we conduct research. Finally, we examine how the labeling process is situated in specific contexts and how meaning is culturally rooted; in doing so, we explain how the exclusive use of English-language labels in this piece is necessarily incomplete. The piece concludes with recommendations for teaching with this framework and for producing comparative education scholarship that deploys labels with greater reflexivity and intentionality.*

*Keywords: Labels, categories, states, regions.*

How do we label the world? By adulthood, we have absorbed a set of terms and categories for places, colloquial understandings that we carry into our roles as students and scholars of comparative education. While becoming socialized into shared professional discourses may partially reconstruct the meaning of these labels, the process by which we assign terms to places has not received much explicit attention. As former students and current researchers and professors in the field, we recognize that these terms play a fundamental role both in structuring our comparisons and in defining the contexts for our work: in other words, this is how we attribute meaning by creating associations with specific other places. Given the centrality of labels and

labeling in our field, it is important and illuminating to examine their use and history with care and depth.

This article focuses on how we label the world — in writing, understanding, researching, and reading comparative work in education. The complexity of these taxonomies and the impact of their use are often left unremarked, yet have important theoretical and practical implications as well as significant promise for teaching comparative education as a subject. We begin with the dynamics of power, perspective, and plurality in the imposition and diffusion of labels. Any label may shed light and cast shadows, and labels that persist are frequently dated while their shadows can perpetuate distortions. To illustrate these issues, we offer two resources: first, a table of common terms and popular resources (with links) that invite us—students and scholars alike—into a deeper consideration of their complexity and problematic aspects, and second, two vignettes from our research sites—South Asia and Estonia—that reveal the depth and situated nature of labels and how they are imposed, appropriated or contested. We advocate more intentional teaching of the labels we use to construct the world, and more reflection on their deployment in scholarship. Our aim with the 3P framework is to help readers take into account, through a deliberate consideration of power, perspective, and plurality, the complexity of labeling.<sup>1</sup> We advocate the application of the framework in both the reading scholarship in the field and in the crafting of one’s own research. The Table we include for reference flags several of the most common labels used regularly in our field along with the potential perils to consider as one engages with this category.

Labeling is not a neutral, descriptive process, but a choice about how to read the world. Berger and Luckmann (1966/1981) noted that (as cited in Lagerspetz, p. 52, 2003), “applying divisions and categorizations is a way of defining reality, of constructing ‘knowledge.’” These terms are used both by researchers and in society generally, often in different but interconnected ways, and are bound up with ongoing struggles over meaning and identity, as Platt (2009) demonstrated in his discussion of the label “post post-Soviet.” The phrase manages to allude to two temporal shifts, a political transformation, and a geographic region. Labelling reflects broader cultural responses to both anticipated and experienced changes in society: “the common apprehension of a new epoch means simply that the typical post-Soviet discursive mechanisms...have lost their dominance in the social construction of historical process and social identity, yielding their place to other visions of present situatedness” (p. 6). Labeling is therefore a window into ongoing conceptual and epistemological conversations about the world and how it understands itself; the categories function as powerful units of analysis that invite scholars into broader theoretical conversations.

For the purposes of this paper, we use labels and categories as related but distinct terms: labels include the proper names for places, such as Harare, Malawi, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sahel, while categories include particular units of analysis or cross-cutting groupings or clusters, such as megalopolises, Developing Countries, Third World or Global South. Rather than maintain a strict delineation, though, we hope to focus attention on the similar dynamics they reveal. These terms circulate both

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<sup>1</sup> The power and effectiveness of Katarina Tomashevski’s (2001) 4A Framework with our undergraduate and graduate students inspired the developments of this heuristic.

in general public discourse, where they deserve our attention, and among scholars. An example of the latter is the powerful turn to the label post-colonial, which, worked better [than other labels like non-Western, Emergent, Minority, and Third World]: it lacked the derogations of the former labels, it specified what unified its compass (a former subjugated relation to Western powers), it embodied a historical dimension, and it opened analytic windows onto common features of peoples who had only recently, and to the extent possible, thrown off their European chains. (Moore, 2001, p. 116).

Selecting labels, therefore, positions one's research in relation to as well as within existing understandings of the world.

Our shared concern with the dynamics of labeling the world emerged from our experiences with everyday discourse and media coverage of the globe, from our engagement with scholarship in the field of comparative and international education, and from teaching courses in this field at both the undergraduate and graduate levels for students at the University of South Carolina. As members of Comparative & International Education Society, we operate within academic special interest groups (SIGS) and terms that cluster societies in complex, cross-cutting ways.

The authors' experience has several shared elements, which surely helped us to identify patterns. We three grew up in Northeastern cities in the United States, and completed our doctoral studies in comparative education at Indiana University, which had strong language and area studies programs, before accepting positions at the University of South Carolina. Sharing a similar mix of students and the communities in which we lived provided the common ground. Our research interests spanned topics across language policy, citizenship education, gender and development, and education about the Holocaust, and our research sites included locations within the countries of Estonia and India and across Europe and South Asia, more generally.

### **The 3P's of Labelling: Power, Perspective & Plurality**

Labels in comparative education can be approached effectively by considering the 3 P's. The 3P's provide a heuristic for systematically thinking through some of the key issues raised by labeling, and it can be employed as a framework for--to name some examples--individual writing assignments or team presentations in comparative education courses, or by scholars and reviewers in considering why authors are making the choices they are making. The 3P's address critical issues of authorship, dynamism and circulation, and raise important questions such as: Who gets to name the world? Whose categories circulate globally? How are labels contested?

**Power** is broadly concerned with the relationship between those assigning the labels and those who are labeled. It considers the imbalance in authority or resources between them, including the ability to have one's own categorization embedded in policy concerning the other. The power "p" raises several questions: How are labels positioned in relation to one another? Who has the power to name?

**Perspective** takes into account the cultural situatedness of the labels, the discourses in which they are tied up, the connotations they have and the assumptions that carry. It addresses how culturally rooted the terminology is, its dominant academic field, and its potential for distortion. Perspective invites us to consider the socio-cultural and

political orientation that helped to produce the label and, in many ways, is embedded in the label itself.

**Plurality** acknowledges that the term may be contested. A label may mean different things in different contexts, to different people, and it may be embraced, rejected or contested by those to whom it is applied. To ask what a label means is no simple matter: there is the intention of the user, the perception of the audience, and the perception/reception of those to whom it is applied. “Meaning” too often presumes shared, intersubjective agreement, and it is abundantly clear that that is not the case, even within the same language and discourse communities. Plurality also acknowledges that there are many labels and categorizations that can be applied, and that readers and writers should consider systematically the range of options available in order to better assess one’s choice.

**Table 1. Common Labels & Concerns**

Label	Disciplinary Orientation	Perils
First-Second-Third-Fourth World	Geo-political	Clarity & Consensus; Datedness (Graves, 2017; Silver, 2015)
Developed- Developing- Least Developed	Economic	Datedness; Distortions (Fernholz, 2016; Gbadamosi, 2020; Khokhar, 2015; UN, n.d.)
Post-Colonial/ Soviet/Communist/ Socialist	Geo-political, Cultural	Datedness (Brians, 2006)
High- Upper Middle- Lower Middle- Low Income Country	Economic	Datedness
Global North- Global South	Geo-political; Economic	Clarity & Consensus (Clarke, 2018; Eriksen, 2015)
East-West; Western-non- Western	Cultural	Clarity & Consensus; Distortion (Capan, 2018)
Industrialized- Industrializing- Newly Industrializing	Economic, Political Science	Distortion

Majority-Minority World	Geo-political/ demographic	Clarity & Consensus (Emmanuel, 2009)
Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich & Democratic (WEIRD)	Psychology	Clarity & Consensus (Robson, 2017)
Political & Economic Organization affiliation/ Membership  Examples: OECD, EU, ASEAN	Geopolitical	Datedness
Unofficial economic grouping  Examples: Baltic/Asian Tigers	Economic	Datedness (O'Neill, 2019)
Region  Examples: Far East/Near East, MENA, Nordic, Sub-Saharan Africa, etc.	Geopolitical/ Cultural	Clarity & Consensus; Distortion
State/country name	Geopolitical	Datedness
Area of dominant language, religion, political orientation, etc. Examples: Lusophone, Anglophone, Francophone Muslim, Christian Democratic, Socialist, Communist	Geopolitical/ Cultural	Clarity & Consensus; Distortion (Leite, n.d.)

### The Problem of Meaning

In our experience teaching courses to undergraduates in our region, we find that a majority typically comes from a White/Anglo monocultural/monolingual background, and operates within an implicit positivist paradigm and worldview. Examining the process of labeling, in part by showing how labels and other concepts can be interpreted differently in different cultures and languages, creates opportunities to open up deeper conversations about interpretation and meaning and even epistemology. Meanings are bound up with contexts, so taking context seriously as a matter of concern (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2014) when reflecting on the terms we use to designate places requires that we address meaning too. Intended and perceived meanings may vary, but the encounter between the two creates a meaning that is co-constituted, co-constructed, or inter-woven (Sobe & Kowalczyk). As Sobe and Kowalczyk point out, the contexts cannot be neatly compartmentalized into “political,

social, economic" context, and so forth. By invoking cultural context here, we do not mean to suggest a tidy box that can be defined objectively from an omniscient perspective, but rather, to acknowledge that the act of labeling is part of a process of constructing and reconstructing meaning that takes place within historical relations of power and knowledge production.

Meaning also changes over time. Some important labels can be traced back to a single originator, though the way they resonate, are taken up and evolve as they circulate shows the living pathways of new terms. Bangladeshi photographer Shahidul Alam's "Majority World" (early 1990s; see Alam, 2008), French demographer Alfred Sauvy's "Third World" (in 1952; see Solarz, 2012), and Czech writer Milan Kundera's "Central Europe" (Kundera, 1984) stand out as examples of coinages that took hold among scholars and the society at large. Alam and Kundera rejected powerful, globally circulating labels like "Third World," "Developing World," and the East-West divide, crafting new categories in response. In this way, many labels carry forward traces of the problematic terms they were responding against.

Crucially for grappling with meaning, our geo-political labels--which are themselves concepts--are culturally rooted. For that reason, it is important to explore how the categorization of places that are implied by our labels is implicitly comparative and culturally rooted. Moreover, these concepts are particular to the English language, which itself is a language of power. As Alatas (2003) observed, many concepts are, passed off as universal when in fact they derive their characteristics from a particular cultural tradition.... For example, while 'religion' is presented as a universal concept, the understanding of what makes up religion in phenomenological, historical, and sociological terms is often derived from Christianity, resulting in what Joachim Matthes (2000:98), referring to Islam, calls the "'hidden' cultural *Christianisation*' of the Muslim world since it started to think of Islam as a 'religion.' (p. 460).

In this way, "the temple, mosque, and synagogue are all, sociologically speaking, "churches." The term "church" is generalized without the concept's being rendered universal or plural" (Alatas, 2003, p. 460). Applying this insight to the labels we use, we can see that labels objectify, containing the 'Other' safely within an apparently objective and stable term, rather than seeing those thus represented as "potential sources of concepts rather than just data," whose self-understandings in their own languages could productively unsettle the labels we use.

### **Vignettes**

#### ***South Asia***

South Asia illustrates the complexities and challenges around labeling within the comparative education world. The region is composed of former colonies of the European Empire that gained their independence between the late 1940s and the mid 1960s; they experienced many varieties of colonialism under multiple powers. At the core of labeling practices are relationships of power, perspective, and plurality. Examining how labels are applied, appropriated, and contested within individual South Asian countries, as well as across the region, enables us to rethink and reconsider the appropriateness and function of these labels.

Most multilateral international organizations (e.g. UNESCO, World Bank, UNDP) define the South Asia region as being bounded topographically and comprising eight distinct countries; India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, and Afghanistan (World Bank, 2020). Topographically, the region comprises the Sub-Himalayan Countries, bounded by the Himalaya, Karakorum, and Hindu Kush Mountains. The South Asia region also comprises the Indo Gangetic Plain and Deccan plateau, constituting “peninsular India”, and Sri Lanka. Economically and geopolitically, the region is organized by the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC was established in 1985 as a regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union that is focused on economic and regional integration between these eight South Asian Nations (SAARC, 2020).

Despite this relatively straightforward grouping of nation states, there are important historical, economic, and political factors that play into how the region is described. Many informational descriptions of the region describe the region in similar ways. For example, Trip Saavy, a digital travel platform, states, “South Asia can loosely be described as the eight nations around the Indian subcontinent, including the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives that are situated south of India” (Trip Saavy, 2020). This description provides a clear example of how within the region, India is placed as the primary frame of reference, around which the other countries are literally and figuratively “mapped”. This placing of India as the primary frame, or core, with other countries within the region as peripheral factors into general understandings of the region. Thus, we see that the core-periphery relationship (Wallerstein, 1974) most commonly used to describe the economic network where colonized nations are placed in peripheral positions in relation to the empire, or “core”, also exists, to an extent, *within* a “peripheral” region. With this example, we can see how power and positioning factors prominently between countries comprising this region.

Aside from geographical descriptors, other labels often applied to the region also allude to the core-periphery relationship described in World Systems Theory (Wallerstein, 1974). Some of these labels include “developing/developed”, “postcolonial”, the “global South”, and “Third World”. These labels have distinct epistemological origins as well as political implications, and have been applied, appropriated, and contested by scholars, practitioners, and activists on the ground - they illustrate the plurality around how labels are appropriated, negotiated, and contested. Below we explore how the frame of postcolonialism, and many of these other labels, apply to the South Asian region.

#### *Postcolonialism in South Asia*

Postcolonialism grew out of the fields of history, literature and cultural studies and provides critical analysis of European imperial power (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1961; Gandhi, 1998; Chakrabarty, 2000; Bhabba, 1994). In *Orientalism*, Said (1978) introduced an interpretation where the world was divided into the “orient” and the “occident”, with Western Europe as the “occident” and the rest of the world as the “orient”. This framing is often considered the genesis of the cultural concepts of the ‘West’ and the ‘East’, mutually constitutive constructs where the West represents the Oriental world pejoratively as inferior, backwards, irrational, and exotic, juxtaposed against the

rational, progressive, and modern West. The imposition of an East/West binary has led to the development of a subjugated colonial identity based on the dehumanization of colonized people of the East that continues on into the present day (Said, 1978; Fanon, 1961).

Postcolonial scholars also point out that this dichotomous classification of West/East, third world/first world, developed/developing, etc. serves to homogenize and suppress people from different regions across the “East”, i.e. the Middle East, Africa, Indian Subcontinent, from being able to represent themselves as distinct cultures. This homogenization, or essentialization, enables the “West” to *maintain power and control over* the homogenous “Other” (Said, 1978). As explained further below, this dichotomous domination continues to frame present day efforts of *development*, or assistance to countries with poverty – most of whom are peripheral nations and former colonies (World Bank, 2020). We can see how this dichotomous classification provides necessary perspective into how power has been maintained and deployed.

The emergence and legitimization of postcolonial theory has generated a sustained critical effort on processes and discourses of international or global development. From this critical perspective, *development* is defined broadly as “incorporating the whole complex of unequal material relationships and processes which structure engagement between the global South and the global North, as well as the primary discursive framework within which these relationships have been constructed for more than sixty years” (Wilson, 2012, p. 4). This definition of development emphasizes the relationship between current flows of global capital and historical processes of imperialism, so as not to render the ever-present legacies of imperialism invisible. Thus, the link between colonial processes and practices and current development practices and processes in the postcolonial time period is made explicit. Postcolonial studies and postcolonial theory thus center the logics and legacies of colonial practices that remain active in current day society and that order our current economic system of capitalism. This perspective enables postcolonialism to have a simultaneous temporal and ongoing material dimension.

As a means of challenging the essentialism of the “East”, postcolonial efforts include a reframing of the “East/West” into the Global North and Global South. “The use of the phrase “Global South” marks a shift from a focus on development or cultural difference towards an emphasis on geopolitical power relations” (Dados & Connell, 2012, 12). This shift provided alternative language for concepts like globalization, which tend to homogenize societies and cultures (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). This usage of the Global South is an illustration of what possibility and plurality with labeling can look like; that labeling practices can be harnessed as a tool to acknowledge and legitimate alternative cultural, historical, and political realities.

For example, in South Asia, postcolonial scholars built upon the North/South concept and formed a collective to study the oppressed classes within the region (Guha, 1982). These scholars focus upon illuminating the intellectual and material conditions of specific peoples and cultures within the East, or the various “subaltern classes” (Gramsci, 1978). The collective, known as the Subaltern Studies group, focuses on making visible the conditions of subalternity and historical instances of resistance to empire in the South Asian context (Gandhi, 1998; Dados & Connell 2012). Spivak’s

(1985) famous interrogation, “Can the subaltern speak?”, revealed the complexities of authority and representation and necessity to problematize the relationship between the “knowing investigator and (un)knowing subject” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 2). This has led subaltern scholars to develop a non-essentialized and nuanced investigation of the relationship between domination and subordination. In so doing, these theorists, (e.g. Chakrabarty, Spivak, Mohanty, Bhabba), provide critiques of development practices that serve to universalize notions such as “third world women”, “development” and “childhood” (Unterhalter, 2005).

Postcolonial critiques of development practices also challenge the idea that people within the global South are considered the “objects” of development. One example of the objectification, and subsequent homogenization, of people within the global South is the production of the “Third World Woman” (Mohanty, 1984). The category of “Third world Women” represents a singular or monolithic subject upon which “knowledge” about women is produced, by scholars in the West/Global North. The Third world Woman is frequently applied to refer to women from “underdeveloped/over-exploited geopolitical entities” (Johnson-Odim 1991). Illustrating the importance of plurality in labeling practices, Mohanty (1984), among other scholars, has reclaimed the term “Third World Women” as a political strategy that relies upon the commonalities of women across “the third world”. She contends that the emergence of a Third World women’s feminist politics grew out of colonialism and capitalism where “systemic socioeconomic and ideological processes position the peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, Middle East, and “minority” populations in the US and Europe” in a disadvantaged relationship with the state (Mohanty 2003, p. 44). This Third World feminist politics seeks to “pivot the center” (i.e., Europe and the United States) and illuminate the complex ground of the “intersecting lines of power and resistance” (Mohanty 2003, p. 42) that constitute the world as all people occupy it. Thus, this form of feminist politics explicitly challenges and reconceptualizes the interrelated histories of colonialism, capitalism, race, and gender (Willemssen & Shah forthcoming).

With attempts to “pivot the center”, Mohanty and other postcolonial scholars seek to address one of the critiques of postcolonialism – that centering colonialism as the primary frame of reference privileges a Eurocentric position (Chakrabarty, 2000). However, other critics of postcolonialism assert that postcolonial theory’s focus on history and culture, and critique of Eurocentrism, may result in a flattening of postcolonial manifestations of capitalism and end up essentializing the postcolonial experience (Chibber, 2013). This may have the very effect that postcolonial scholars seek to challenge - a silencing of power hierarchies within and across nation states and the region. Critics warn that scholars need to be cognizant that assuming a shared capitalist experience may ignore the nuances and power hierarchies within and across the region (Chibber, 2013; Robbins, 2014). Such critiques underscore the necessity to look at all of the 3Ps - power, perspective, plurality - as interrelated components of a holistic framework in order to more reflectively navigate our understandings of the world.

### ***Estonia***

In redirecting our focus from a region to a state, we discover a similar basket of labeling perils along geo-political, cultural, and economic lines. Estonia offers an example of

the importance of reflecting on the sensitivities around current and future categorizing particularly when foregrounding power, perspective, and the possibility of plurality. The country experienced profound political and culture upheavals in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from gaining independence from the Russian empire in 1918, experiencing two decades of independent statehood before dueling Nazi (1941-1944) and Soviet occupations (1940 & 1944-1991), regaining independence in 1991, and acceding to the European Union and NATO in 2004. How do efforts to label and categorize play out in such a context?

Linking Estonia to a geographic region presents the first set of complications. Locating the country within the broad “East” or “West,” labeling the country as “Eastern” or “Northern European” or imagining it as “Nordic” goes beyond strict geographic designations: these groupings carry significant cultural and political values, meaning, and norms. Regional labeling is shaped by perspective and in constant flux. The Estonian poet, Jaan Kaplinski (1987) speaks to the vagaries of these regular swings in geographic imaginaries as well as recognizing the uncertainty to border-knowing:

The East-West border is always wandering  
sometimes eastward, sometimes west,  
and we do not know exactly where it is just now.

This fluctuating identity, in part reflected by the country’s one-time location on the westernmost flank of the Russian empire and Soviet Union, but now (since 2004) serving as the easternmost border of the European Union, leads political scientists working in Estonia to consider it as “caught between East and West” (Schulze, 2010, p. 361). While the enduring geographic grouping with other Baltic states has had more regional staying power, even that label has, at times, expanded to include the Baltic region, inclusive of the states bordering the Baltic Sea.

As we turn to the cultural meanings carried by these regional labels, we find the “East-West” binary working to inform powerful lines. Feldman (2000), in his exploration of the major identities of Estonia, points to the ways the country gets caught in the problem of the East-West divide and its subsequent link to the concept of “Eastern Europe”:

"West" is defined as civil, rational, and supportive of individual rights and liberties, while the "East" denotes exclusive, ethnic-based societies clamouring for direction in the wake of the socialist collapse. This dichotomy sets up a paradigm for interpreting events in "East" Europe (p. 408).

Other modified versions of “East,” including the country as part of the “New East,” are likewise roundly problematized by Estonians. Former Estonian President, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, for example, spoke to the connotations of the term in his Twitter response to *The Guardian’s* 2014 launch of the newspaper’s “New East Network” to provide expanded coverage of the post-Soviet region, including the Baltic States: “We [Estonia] are no more ‘new’ than Finland, Poland, Austria, et al., all post WWI states. If those are relevant dimensions after 25 years, the rubric is just intellectually bankrupt” (16 June 2014, Twitter). Here we find the popular rejection of a label due to problematic temporal aspects intersecting with rejected geographic clustering.

Other geographic categories point to the importance of considering the fluidity of labels rejected, accepted, and sought. In short, a plurality of labels exist. The power to define one’s state and global affiliation works as a powerful undercurrent in these

discussions. In the case of Estonia, “Nordic” is such a label particularly since it suggests a much more progressive set of values and a sharp distancing from the country’s Soviet past. In an analysis of Estonian press from 1997-2017, Tammepuu et al. (2019) identified a regular theme of a label *in progress*—“Estonia as striving to become a ‘Nordic’ country” (p. 198). In this case,

the Nordics primarily represent the *telos*, the ultimate goal for Estonia, particularly for their high living standards and wealth. Underlying the particular motive is the idea of ‘catching up’ with the Nordics, that is, reaching the high level of socio-economic development and prosperity generally associated with them. (Italics original, *Ibid.*, p. 198).

The Nordic label likewise raises the issue of audience: categorization for whom? Lagerspetz (2003) highlights the ways the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs produced texts in the late 1990s directed toward international audiences that emphasized a Nordic orientation despite Estonia’s neoliberal economic policies. Lagerspetz (2003) reflects on this development that “it could be inferred that the ‘Nordic orientation’ of Estonia chiefly serves the foreign policy needs of creating an image, a brand, that would serve the country by dissociating it from the troublesome image of a post-Soviet country, thus paving the way towards Western structures” (p. 56). These examples point to the ways one label carries multiple meanings (i.e., signaling new identities, projecting associations, etc.) across a range of audiences over time.

The final set of geo-political labels—the “post-” categories--also present complicated issues of relevance and association speaking most directly to power and perspective. Estonia, is considered, since the country’s restored independence in 1991, at times post-Soviet, post-communist, post-totalitarian, post-colonial, and post-socialist along with a larger regional and global group of countries. One of the first problems concerns the applicability and analytical power of continuing to tether the county with the Soviet experience almost three decades after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Some scholars, such as Kevin Platt (2009), speak back to the relevance of this label by asserting that we are now in the post, post-Soviet era. A much less contentious “post-” label for Estonia is post-socialist. The growing, especially since 2010, and robust, area of comparative education research focused post-socialism (see Aydarova, Millei, Piattoeva & Silova, 2016; Silova, 2010) offers a dynamic use of the post-socialist label in part through identifying the particularity of the region and continued need for development. This scholarship recognizes, as Iveta Silova et al. highlight (2017) “the theoretical and analytical work that will allow for a more complicated, authentic, and accurate analysis of the post-socialist world” (p. 1).

The other major post-label applied to Estonia and the other Baltic states -- post-colonial--has fueled vibrant and ongoing debates within the humanities, particularly in the fields of comparative literature (Kelertas, 2006; Moore, 2001) and anthropology (Annus, 2017). Applying the post-colonial label to Estonia taps into larger questions about the post-colonial concept as potentially “too narrow” (i.e., by not traditionally including the post-Soviet area) and the field of post-Soviet studies being “too parochial” to include post-colonial analyses (Moore, 2001, p. 112). With these critiques in mind, considering Estonia as post-colonial could help to expand our scholarly understanding that “...all of Europe is postcolonial, *but* in different ways...”

(Pucherová & Gaáfrík, 2015, p. 14; italics original). Epp Annus (2017) has contributed to these diversifying efforts through her development of the concept of Soviet post-colonial. Yet still, the question needs to be considered of the ways this post-colonial label resonates on the ground. Violeta Kelertas (2006) points to the Baltic people's resistance to being labeled as "colonized"; that Balts reject the post-colonial label and "find being lumped together with the rest of colonized humanity unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the 'civilized' part of the world" (p. 4). The complexity of the larger theoretical debates within academic fields and the popular disassociation with the term on the ground call for careful consideration in its application and a recognition of the ways power works to determine a label.

### Next Steps

We must reflect on and reconsider labels and categorizations. Relabeling the world requires thoughtful, careful, and critical work. The first step is to take stock, to reflect on the labels we and/or our discipline within comparative education tend to use to categorize and compare the world. Given the perils reviewed above, do we continue to use them to read the world? Think critically about the ways in which power, position, perspective, and privilege—both our own and our disciplines'—lead you towards particular labels and away from others. Likewise, let us recognize which labels we can access given our linguistic and cultural worlds.

The second step is to reconsider the labels we use *and* the ways we employ them. One way to diversify the labels is to read *across* – across history, disciplines, and languages. In practice, this means to understand the historical development of a label by investigating its origin and alternative possibilities. Reconsidering also entails thinking across disciplines for alternatives and critiques. In writing this article, we incorporated insights from artists and scholars in anthropology, history, comparative literature, Slavic Studies, and political science among other fields. An interdisciplinary perspective can serve as a foundation for rethinking labels. Reading across languages also works to open worlds of alternatives. Though we chose to focus on English-language labels for this article, we recognize the ways that categories generated in languages and spaces outside of these dominant-languages and powers offer meaningful insights into alternative and important visions of state, regional, and cultural belonging. Area-studies specialization and local-language ability assists in these efforts. Finally, one can reconsider the ways to use labels in one's work and in the academy (and beyond). By avoiding a perspective of labels as context (as mentioned earlier in the essay) and addressing the conceptual and analytical value of the category (as well as any concerns), one can make headway in this area. Additionally, looking to the ways labels overlap and layer, while also recognizing the way categories shift and continue over time, helps one to recognize and take complexity into account.

**Kara D. Brown** is an educational anthropologist focused broadly on understanding schools as sites for, and of, language change. Her research broadly examines both teachers and administrators' socio-cultural orientations toward language and the ways governments imagine schools to advance language planning. Brown's fundamental concern with equitable access to plurilingual education informs her projects in Estonia and the US Southeast. Email: [brownk25@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:brownk25@mailbox.sc.edu).

**Payal P. Shah** (Ph.D., Indiana University-Bloomington) is associate professor of Educational Studies at the University of South Carolina. She conducts critical, feminist ethnographic research on gender, education, and development in India and has published across the fields of international and comparative education, qualitative inquiry, and women's and gender studies.

**E. Doyle Stevick** is an associate professor of Educational Leadership and Policies at the University of South Carolina, where he founded and directs the Anne Frank Partnership between the university and the Anne Frank House. His research address education about the Holocaust, democratic civic education, and the movement of international teachers.

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## Education post-'Covid-19': Re-visioning the face-to-face classroom

Paul Tarc

*University of Western Ontario*

For better and worse, the Covid-19 crisis will necessarily advance a number of instrumental responses for online education under the global shutdown of face-to-face classrooms. Unfortunately, it will also be employed as 'shock doctrine' (Klein, 2007) to advance a much more aggressive move to online education that would be hardly possible in more normal times, but that is a different story. Covid-19 has accelerated but did not begin the move to online education. Artificial intelligence (AI) will take us even further as new technologies not only deliver text, audio and visuals but interactively engage with student learning processes and do so across longer periods of the learner's development. How AI will or might transform education, also, is another paper.

*This* essay asks its readers to consider the online environment and the shutdown of face-to-face (f2f) classrooms as a condition that represents *a new vantage* for thinking, and particularly so for re-imagining and perhaps re-visioning f2f pedagogies. Beyond coping and learning anew under these changes, might we consider the dramatic crisis as a new vantage from which to better understand educational ideals, those we hold to and those we have yet to fully develop? As the eminent political philosopher Hannah Arendt (2006/1954, p. 171) reminds us, in times of crisis or dramatic transformation we must not forget that "the answers" we normally rely on, were originally answers to *questions*. As actors working inside institutions, we will no doubt spend considerable energy tweaking 'old answers' to adapt them to the changing conditions brought about by the move to online education.

However, as Arendt warns us, most important in a crisis is to return to the *questions* themselves. In education, this approach would press us to rethink educational ideals in light of changing technologies and changing human literacies. Our movements out of f2f teaching, thus, represent a 'vantage' from which to view and re-assess what education (and the human) is or might be. With an immersive experience in a foreign country we (may) learn about the geography, language and culture of the new country. However, the most profound learning, the *transformative* shift, is constituted in the de-naturalizing of internalized assumptions produced in *our own* culture and norms (Tarc, 2013). Similarly, 'seeing' from the online vantage can lessen our grip on 'the answers' and "forces us back to the questions themselves" (Arendt, 2006/1954, p. 171), in this case, on the purposes or essence of education under contemporary conditions. Rather than (only) lamenting upon how our methods are constrained in new teaching environments, we might discover altered and more generative purposes for education in our current worldly conditions, which guide us to *transformed* pedagogies in the formerly taken-for-granted 'bubble' of the f2f classroom.

Rethinking educational aims and pedagogies in light of changing conditions is a demanding endeavor, both challenge and opportunity. And it is also important to keep in mind that the current limits and possibilities of online education are inflected

by already existing f2f environments, learning, relationships and identities. Online enthusiasts leverage this condition to suggest that the advanced technologies are not the problem, but the slow-to-change mindsets of educators beholden to f2f settings. But the converse is also true here and much less acknowledged. We must also understand that current successes, so to speak, of online teaching may be supported by or founded on prior f2f interactions. Just as private companies sometimes parasitically and inconspicuously rely on public resources to generate their efficiencies, so too most online education achievements are still reliant on relationships and identities forged within f2f settings.

As we return to face-to-face teaching next term or next year, how might we take our insights developed from our current vantage of online teaching to prioritize and optimize what f2f pedagogies afford in relation to our updated understanding of educational ideals, methods and our values as educators? Beyond the practical solutions to make physical classrooms work (face masks, hand sanitizers in every classroom, temperature probes), how will we re-structure our face-to-face pedagogies? And, what will we, perhaps, continue to leave to the online environment so that we can best use the in-class face-to-face time? What does our (not so) new environment of online education teach us about the importance of face-to-face classrooms and productive pedagogies for this setting? These are the questions posed to the reader, as the main intervention of this paper. In the remaining paragraphs, I tentatively respond to these questions from my perspective as an educationalist with f2f classroom teaching experience in K-12 schools and in f2f and online teaching experience in Canadian higher education.

For me, as an educator in higher education with considerable autonomy of my curricular materials and teaching approaches, the greatest lack in the virtual classroom are the *greatly diminished* multi-sensory communication feedback loops. These feedback loops are crucial to the relational, and emotionally-laden, labour of educating. The capability to quickly read the body language, facial expressions, class dynamic and circulation of ideas and affects is greatly minimized in the virtual classroom; in turn, so is a spontaneity and capacity to engage and expand the intersections of teacher (identity, experience and knowledge), students (identities, experiences and knowledge) and curriculum. In online contexts, the *building of these relations*—teacher-student, student-student, student-curricular knowledge—seems much reduced. Educating is often reduced to the act of knowledge dissemination and reception, but educators know that this notion is very skeletal. Yes, *learning*, is ubiquitous, life-long and life-wide, and especially so in the digital era. But, *education* is about building these social, affective and epistemic relations and channeling students' desires for knowing and being with others in the world (Mishra Tarc, 2015).

My greatest anxiety in synchronous online teaching a class of students is this feeling of being *disconnected* and not literally, but again socially, emotionally, epistemologically. I am facing my two-dimensional screen, telling myself that all is good and to stick to my plan—delivering content, directing activities, facilitating turns to 'speak'—all the while wondering...

*Are you there? Can you 'see' me? Are you with me? Are you okay? Where are you? Are we okay?*

Despite my inadequacies in teaching and in online technologies, this anxiety is pointing to the *emergent* aspects of pedagogy that bring life and significance to a collective engagement and learning in the classroom. The social/peer dynamic and working and broadening the intersections of teacher, students and curriculum as a 'border' pedagogy would seem to require physical presence and multi-sensory communication, as suggested above. Relationality's constitutive role in education is particularly salient in the earliest years of education. Admittedly, adult learners may have the experience and developed capacities to build relations and make attachments to knowledge under the thinner features of the online classroom. For this reason, that virtual education must currently take place in elementary (and secondary) levels is much more problematic than in higher education. Still, in teaching graduate education, it is readily apparent that similar teacher-student and group dynamics of building relationships and emotional 'hand-holding' is vital with adult learners as well. Thus the altered and 'thinned out' qualities of online pedagogy, begs the question I have posed above, how might insights developed in the new vantage of online learning reframe my vision and practices as a f2f teacher?

In re-visioning my f2f teaching *after* 'Covid-19,' my sense is that I will be much more committed to using our class time to work on the building of relationships, to engage in those intersections/borders of teacher, student and curriculum to cultivate students' social, emotional and epistemic attachments. Concretely, I think this means slowing down, worrying less about getting through the curriculum. While articulating one's pedagogical theories or inclinations is one level, one's teaching practice is another level. One's own schooling and internalizations of being professional and responsible also shape one's classroom teaching practices, and sometimes unconsciously. Thus, a relation-building 'border' pedagogy can be challenging in practice, because one can feel the pressure to 'give the knowledge' and the 'correct' readings. Despite my own rhetoric, I may still be focused on 'covering curriculum' rather than fully taking the time to draw out the student's thinking and really invest in the student's articulation rather than to 'race back' to the (authority of the) text or my own reading.

Although attached to progressive modalities I have become somewhat dissatisfied with the 'student discussion mode' in my class where we sometimes get caught in discussions that run peripheral to the prescribed course reading. I have been compelled to more frequently lecture students with my own interpretations of the reading that I understand as potentially useful to their prospective research studies. A shifting emphasis between more or less teacher-directed pedagogies I think is common across one's teaching career. The point I want to make here is that I see that this dissatisfaction has been pressing me toward lecturing, which is *not* an optimal use of f2f teaching. Rather, this exercise of re-visioning has produced the insight that a better response is not to turn to more teacher delivery (nor to student talk/discussion for its own sake), but to slow down and really listen to students' dialogue and take the time with other students to relate it to our common curricular object and wider course goals. My 'teacher learning' needs to refocus on the tendencies and patterns (and effects) of students' diverse interpretations, resistances and refusals of the readings as vital in working in the 'borders' of students' thinking and feelings, the curriculum and my own interpretations. It is this relation building that is the best use of my time in the class with students, and not re-focusing on (improving) my delivery of my knowledge/interpretation. The text is already in students' hands; my interpretation,

as well, exists in publications and these are readily available. Availability is not the problem but the desire to seek out what these texts offer. What the f2f classroom affords are rich opportunities for individual and collective dialogue, careful listening, re-reading, unpacking and questioning in the 'borders,' which can truly inform critical understandings and uses of curriculum as well as (the channelling of desire to) stronger attachments to knowledge and knowledge seeking. Thus, it is researching and deepening the student-teacher-curriculum intersections and not improved content delivery that the f2f classroom can afford me. This is my *transformed* perspective.

**Paul Tarc** is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. He is coordinator of the online Master of Professional Education in 'International Education' and of the 'International Education' cohort specialization in the teacher education program. His research centers on progressive and critical modalities of education in global times. Email: [ptarc2@uwo.ca](mailto:ptarc2@uwo.ca).

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