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Class schedules from international practices to the Bhutanese context: A review of literature

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ABSTRACT

The class schedule is one of the most important determinants of students' academic achievement. In the face of a rising tide of competency-based curricula, there are calls that urge schools to reschedule class structure from a traditional mode to systems that can lend larger blocks of time. As Bhutan recently implemented competency-based curricula, it appeared quite reasonable that there should be a system that allows larger blocks of time in each class. This narrative overview was, thus, carried out to examine the trends of class schedules world-wide and provide insights, if any, to contextualize into Bhutanese setting. The study searched literature from Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar supplemented by random search from search engines and citations of the articles retrieved. 81 articles met the criteria for review and analysis after screening out using a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. The practices, including traditional schedule, 4×4 block schedule, A/B block schedule, hybrid block schedule, trimester plan, Copernican schedule, interdisciplinary block schedule, and one-subject-a-day schedule appeared in most of the articles reviewed. It emerged that 4×4 and A/B block schedules are far more popular than other class schedules practiced effectively with supporting empirical evidence. Findings from this review have implications to the way the class schedules are organized in Bhutanese educational settings. The implications that need urgent attention by relevant agencies are discussed.

Keywords: class schedule, block schedule, schools in Bhutan, narrative review, review of literature

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INTRODUCTION

The class schedule is closely connected with students' academic achievement (Comer, 2012; Cotti et al., 2018). It comes with a package of considerable influences and contributions towards students' learning (Benavot, 2004; Bonner, 2012; Carrington, 2010; Eugene, 2013; Nichols, 2005). The class schedule, as per Roberts (2016), was a subject of decade-old debates and continues to do so in today's education reform efforts. Think tanks and professionals from different circles of education often get engaged, perhaps in a heated discussion of differences, as to how to model a better classroom schedule (Mizhquiri, 2019; Nichols, 2000; Washington, 2011; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006). The classroom schedule is, therefore, considered as one of the cornerstone-matters of education that is just but second to none (Rice et al., 2002).

Many, if not most, schools around the world essentially remained in practice of the traditional schedule for most parts of the 20th century (Hackney, 2013). For various reasons, some schools even today remain closely adhered to the notions and practices of traditional schedules, conceivably, even without much merit. The first shot over the decade-long battles of traditional class schedules was, however, fired in the USA in early 1983 (Hackney, 2013, Washington, 2011). Despite its roots and origins that dates back to a long view of history, the faith over the traditional school structure and schedule was put into question when *A nation at risk* reported that American students were tacitly lagging behind their near-peer counterparts in other nations (Nichols, 2000; Queen, 2000). In 1994, the report by the National Commission of Education on Time and Learning, *Prisoners of time*, criticized the traditional schedule and challenged educators to use a time in new, different, and better way to enhance students' learning trajectory (Bottge et al., 2003; Cotti et al., 2018; Levy, 2020; Nichols, 2020; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006).

Typically, but not universally, many nations operated school schedules somewhat different from the traditional schedule, at least, since a couple of decades ago (Levy, 2020; Smith, 2011; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006); take, for example, at the turn of early 1990s, more than 40% of high schools in the USA operated a system that provided a concerted period of time for learning with little to fewer instructional fragmentation. In the USA today, as many as 72% of high schools focus on the routine that allows lengthy instructional time (Queen, 2009). This system that favors larger blocks of time is, of course, both pervasive and widespread across many parts of the world (Labak et al., 2020; Merchant & Paulson, 2001). Britain, Canada, France, and
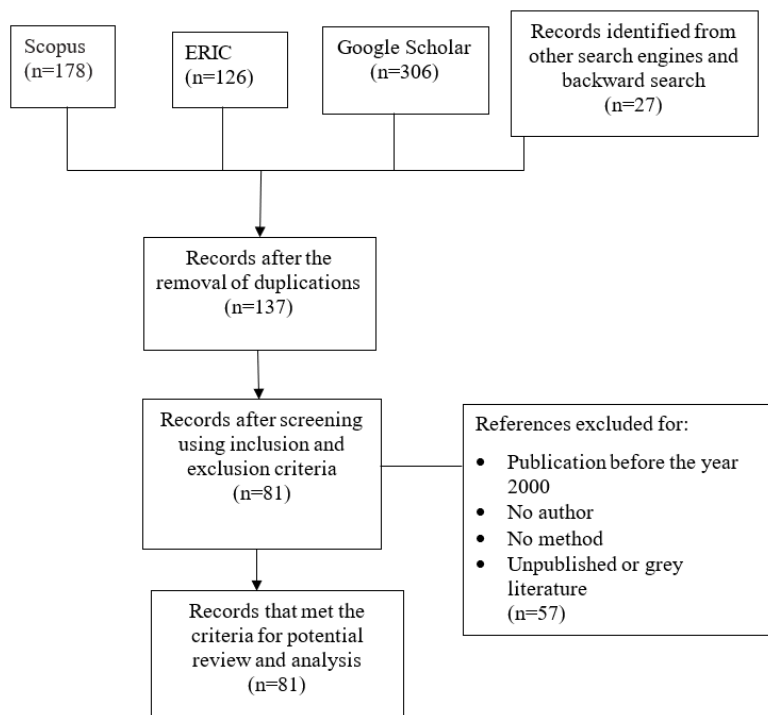
Figure 1. Flowchart of the literature selection of the present study (Source: Author)

Germany to mention just a few advanced nations, are amongst those countries where public education increasingly attempts to configure a school schedule that pays attention to larger blocks of time (Labak et al., 2020; O'Meara & Prendergast, 2018).

Not surprisingly, recent research on school schedule and time (e.g., Durwood et al., 2010; Evans et al., 2002; Labak et al., 2020, 2021; O'Meara & Prendergast, 2018) placed greater emphasis on allocating large blocks of time. Flynn et al. (2005), Labak et al. (2021), O'Meara and Prendergast (2018), Queen (2000), and Rice et al. (2002), to name a few, believe that the curriculum that demands learning in everyday life and application of knowledge requires larger blocks of time as it is almost impossible to implement things in a single period. Equally, there are claims that, oftentimes, associate extended blocks of time with popular educational theories. Childers (2018) and Hackmann (2004), for example, believe that the student-centered learning approaches associated with constructivism could benefit from an increased period of time. Quite recently, the Department of Curriculum and Professional Development (DCPD), Ministry of Education (MoE), Bhutan implemented competency-based curricula that demand extended period of time to carry out an in-depth learning connected with real-life situation. As per the informal feedback and comment from the field, the traditional class schedule practiced by Bhutanese schools does not do much justice in the delivery of the curriculum intentions demanded by competency-based curricula. This pointed out the need to examine the trends of class schedules practiced in the global landscape of education and provide direction, if any, to customize into Bhutanese school setting. This narrative overview was, thus, examined class schedules practiced in education and determined possibilities to contextualize into Bhutanese school setting. This narrative review was informed by the following research questions:

1. What are the trends of class schedules practiced in education?
2. Is there an effective trend of class schedule practiced in education?
3. What is the effectiveness of the class schedule practiced in education?
4. What is the class schedule that can be contextualized into Bhutanese educational setting?

METHODS

The literature search on the global trends of class schedules was performed based on the lines of searches for a narrative overview. The literature search, however, included the features of systematic review methodology in order to reduce potential selection bias that remains associated with most of the literature selection (Ferrari, 2015). The electronic search, for this study, included three prominent bibliographic databases of social sciences, namely Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The literature search from these databases were mostly, but not only, research articles-original and review articles, books or book chapters, approved dissertation, or technical reports published in journals, repository databases, or printed by publishing houses from 2000 to 2022. The literature search from these databases were carried out using the scoping processes of both the SPIDER and PICO search tool. Free-text search terms or keywords, such as "period schedule", "school timing", "instructional hours and effectiveness", "class schedule", and "block period" were combined in any form of possible combinations to construct proper search or query strings (Gregory & Dennis, 2018). This was carried out using Boolean's logic operators, such as "AND", "OR", or "NOT".

The literature search was also carried out from other search engines and through the references or citation search of the articles retrieved. The literature search from the databases and random searches using search engine or citation searches generated 1,231 articles. These articles, as follow up, were screened out using a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria; and based on other evaluative points to build up a "map" of relevant studies (**Figure 1**).

81 articles met the criteria for review and analysis. After the screening process, each article was read to not only summarize but also to analyze and synthesize information on the trends of class schedules practiced in education. During these processes, notes were kept in a summary table against each article in terms of purposes of the study, a synopsis of the content, the research design or methods used in the study, and a brief review of the findings. The notes were, then, consumed for drafting synthesis of the narrative review.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the literature search on the accounts of school structure and class schedules are summarized and discussed in the following themes as:

Traditional Schedule

The traditional schedule predates all forms of school structure and class schedules. It is, perhaps, the oldest form of school structure and class schedules that has been put into effect (Queen, 2000). Significantly, it is also, by far, the most prevalent form of schedule practiced in many parts of the world, including the USA (Hackney, 2013; Huebner, 2012; Rice et al., 2002). The traditional schedule, aka single-period schedule, refers to the practice of students attending the same classes on a daily basis for equal, but shorter time periods for the duration of the course (Levy, 2020; Queen, 2000; Washington, 2011). In the format of the traditional schedule, school days mostly experience short seven or eight classes, each with 45 to 55 min, meeting on a daily basis (Rice et al., 2002; Roberts, 2016; Smith, 2011). The traditional schedule, like anywhere else, is also quite common in Bhutan. This, as per Royal Education Council ([REC], 2019), the daily schedules in almost all the Bhutanese schools are divided in either seven or eight classes with 40 min recommended time.

Despite being quite common in effect, the traditional schedule is almost completely shrouded with many uncertainties. There is, indeed, a growing body of research that points out that there are not many advantages or merits associated with traditional schedules (e.g., Bottge et al., 2003; Childers, 2018; VanWeelden; 2015). The traditional schedule, therefore, draws a lot of fire from educators and parents (Ellerbrock et al., 2018). The criticism against the traditional schedule includes, but are not limited to, fragmentation of the instructional time, lack of adequate time to make a concerted effort and deeper learning; reduction of the opportunity to use innovative and active learning strategies, or reduced effort to use or loss of time as a result of frequent changes in period.

Block Schedule

Block scheduling is an alternative and supposedly the only recommended method in place of a traditional schedule (Gullatt, 2006; Zepa & Mayers, 2006). It is, oftentimes, employed as a quick fix recipe for ineffective traditional schedules. It is typically known as the organization of a daily school schedule into blocks of time over an extended period (Bryant & Bryant, 2000). Many schools in the USA, a few Flounder and Nordic countries, and Australia today, to mention just a few, today have shifted from traditional schedule towards a practice that provides blocs of time or extended period of time (Ellerbrock et al., 2018; Heltzel-Ward, 2013; Huebner, 2012; Labak et al., 2020). The term "block" does not refer to a specific period of time but denotes a schedule that is flexible enough to allow a lengthier period

of instruction (Comer, 2012). As per Ryan and Cooper (2004), the "block scheduling is a 'less is more' approach, where students spend less class in each school day but spend more time in each class" (p. 133). The detail of block schedules are, as follows.

Four-by-four block schedule

The 4×4 block schedule is, in fact, the most popular block schedule of all. Quite many schools (in Australia, Finland, and the USA for example) operate based on 4×4 block schedule (Brannon, 2020; Ellerbrock et al., 2018; Mattox et al., 2005; Rettig & Canady, 2001; Rice et al., 2002; Smith, 2010; Thomas, 2001). The organization of the daily class schedule, as per the 4×4 block schedule, is divided into four blocks with 90 min in duration in each block (Ellerbrock et al., 2018; Heltzel-Ward, 2013; Huebner, 2012; Labak et al., 2020; Pettus & Blosser, 2013).

The 4×4 block schedule, as per Labak et al. (2020) and Zepeda and Mayers (2006), is practiced with little to moderate variations. The 4×4 skinny block schedule, for example, is one of the modified versions. As Mizhquir (2019) put it, teaching of core academic subjects notably takes place in the first two, three, or in all the blocks. The last few blocks of time or in-class time after lunch remain usually, but not exclusively reserved for non-academic programs or elective subjects (Hackma, 2002). The other version that is quite noteworthy is the 4×4 flex schedule. While related to the 4×4 skinny schedule, its last few blocks of time or in-class time after lunch are slated more for assignments, homework, literature search, or otherwise (Gill, 2011; Smith, 2010; Spence, 2020). These schedules, though not necessarily, appear much relevant to key stage 1 in Bhutanese settings. This is, due, in part, that the class schedules, such as these, are convenient if there are four subjects offered in a year.

This schedule, as per the growing body of literature, holds promising benefits. These are, but not only,

(a) extended periods of time to fully develop concepts and themes,

(b) fewer transitions during the day,

(c) more time for individual interaction between and among teachers and students, and

(d) increased opportunities for teachers to use varieties of innovative strategies (Ellerbrock et al., 2018; Labak et al., 2020; Labak et al., 2021; O'Meara & Prendergast, 2018; Rice et al., 2002; Yesil Dagli, 2010).

As per Nichols (2005), a larger block of time should be allocated to teach a topic in its depth, e.g., to focus on one topic where innovating teaching practices, e.g., lab-work or collaborative peer-based learning could take place (Marchant & Paulson, 2001; Nichols, 2005).

There are records that substantiate the effectiveness of the 4×4 block schedule. For example, in a comparative study conducted by Childers (2018), the USA students from 4×4 block schedule groups outperformed their counterparts from traditional schedules in mathematics achievement tests. Likewise, in a recent study conducted by Landry (2016), both teachers and students felt that students were more productive and experienced greater academic growth in block scheduling. These findings, in fact, mirrored the findings from the past research by Adrain (2009), Comer (2012), Evans et al. (2002), Forman (2009), Hueber (2012), Nichols (2005), Nogler (2017), Norton (2010), and Smith (2010, 2011).

Alternating day block schedule

The A/B schedule, which is also referred to as the alternating day schedule, is another form of block schedule. This schedule, like the 4×4 block schedule, is common in Australia and the USA for example (Ellerbrock et al., 2018). It operates by the way, wherein students take four classes on A days and another four classes on B days (Botthe, 2003; Ellerbrock et al., 2018; Hackma, 2002; Hackney, 2013; Heltzel-Ward, 2013) or a teaching schedule where students and teachers meet in four classes every other day for extended blocks of time (Clark, 2021). According to Heltzel-Ward (2013) and Hickman (2006), this schedule per se is compatible with a school that runs on a six-day cycle, wherein students take four classes on day 1, 3, and 5 and other four on day 2, 4, and 6. This schedule, as per Hackney (2013), is an alternating pattern that repeats all the while in a year. This schedule, as per Williams (2011) and Williams and Shapiro (2918) is also practiced as ABC model, where A and B days are reserved for blocks of time, while on a C day, schools practice traditional schedules. Needless to say, this schedule as it seems though, appears convincingly operational at key stages 2 to 3, if any, in the Bhutanese contexts. This is because the alternating schedule, as Hackma (2002) says, can best run the school that offers up to eight subjects in a year with four subjects on every alternating day. On the whole, it is by no means that the A/B schedule is as rigid as one might assume occasionally. There is no denying, as such, that the A/B block schedule can be modified in numerous possible ways to suit the need and interest of schools that offer six to eight or more subjects (Dickson et al., 2010).

The A/B block schedule also shares similar patterns of perceived benefits like the 4×4 block schedule. In a recent study conducted by Brannon (2020), students from A/B block schedule had significantly higher scores in algebra concepts than the students from traditional schedules. Similar results were also recorded by Childers (2018), Clark (2021), Hackney (2013), and Pedersen (2001). The comparative finding between 4×4 and A/B block schedule is, however, mixed and shaky. Many, therefore, argue that there is no clear advantage of one over another (Bottge et al., 2003). The study conducted by Lewis et al. (2005), on the other hand, found out that US students from 4×4 block schedule performed better than their peers from A/B schedules in reading and mathematics standardized tests.

Copernican schedule

The Copernican schedule, for VanWeelden (2015), is a form of block scheduling. Zepeda and Mayers (2006) describe Copernican scheduling as typically following one of two formats. Either students enroll in one "four-hour macro class each day" for core subjects and then "two or three shorter classes each day" for electives for a period of approximately 30 days (or six weeks); or students enroll in "two classes lasting approximately two hours each and receive new schedules every 60 days" (p. 137). The first configuration of the Copernican schedule, of course, looks quite similar to the 4×4 skinny schedule. While they share some similarities, the Copernican schedule allows schools to run seven or eight subjects in a day. In the face of such rising tides of claims, it looks convincingly rational that the Copernican schedule is somewhat relevant to customize to key stages 3 or 4 in Bhutanese education settings, at least modestly. This is because as for key stage 3, students on average, learn at least three core subjects in addition to a few minor subjects in a day (REC, 2019). Theoretically, the Copernican schedule might also work for key stage 4. In principle, this schedule, as per Queen (2000), can be modified by certain folds to suit the need of the changing

hour. Therefore, like most of the other block schedules, Copernican schedule does not have any rule of fixed schedules as it does not remain confined in the likes of "one size fits all".

The Copernican schedule, as per Rettig and Canady (2001) and Zepeda and Mayers (2006), allegedly holds benefits similar to that of 4×4 and A/B block schedule. While this in itself is largely pleasing, empirical reports around its effectiveness are both scanty and shadowy. Often enough, educators (e.g., Nichols, 2000; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006; Veal, 2000) who advocate this block schedule per se still believe that the schedule, both by and of itself, is more effective than the traditional schedule, at least modestly.

Hybrid block schedule

As its name implies, hybrid block schedule is a blend of single-period schedule and block schedule (Mizhquir, 2019). In this school day schedule format, some classes are held in the block format, while others, depending on need or preference, are held in the traditional format (Smith, 2010). Usually, schools operate five classes a day as opposed to four in other block schedules and seven to eight in traditional schedules (Dickson et al., 2010). According to Queen (2000), classes in hybrid block schedule can be scheduled in various combinations, according to subject content or desired flexibility. Correspondingly, many schools in Bhutan follow a hybrid block schedule-like format. The case in Bhutan is, however, quite different. This is because the frequency of blocks of time offered, oftentimes, comes less both in a day or in a week.

Hybrid schedules, like other block schedules, result in better student performance. In a recent study conducted by Childers (2018), the USA students from hybrid block schedule demonstrated better understanding of concepts from physical sciences in their end-of-course tests. Moreover, the students from this block schedule exhibited equivalent performances with students from 4×4 block schedule or A/B block schedule. While these are the claims, reports surrounding hybrid block schedule are quite scanty and shallow when compared to 4×4 and A/B block schedule. Nevertheless, hybrid academic schedules are still believed to provide an academic schedule type that meets the needs of students, course content, and school goals. The hybrid allows a school freedom to utilize a combination of both the traditional and block academic schedule at its discretion (Washington, 2011).

Trimester schedule

Trimester schedule, as per large anecdotal information (e.g., Hackney, 2013; Pettus & Blosser, 2013; Reinke, 2018; Washington, 2011; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006), is prominent in colleges. This schedule per se allows the school year to be divided into three trimesters (60 days per term), each of which includes four or five blocks of time (Bair & Bair, 2010; Stanley et al., 2007). This schedule, both by and of itself, stands quite promising if contextualized into Bhutanese setting. While it seems to hold some degree of promises, it might draw some degree of critique as it runs in a pattern of three semesters, which is not the case in Bhutanese educational setting.

This schedule, though prominent in colleges, is rarely acknowledged and poorly studied in school settings. Its effectiveness regarding students' academic performance is, therefore, largely surrounded in mystery. As it would be so, this schedule might still work out to be effective if it is operated based on the modes of other block schedules. A period of three semesters, for instance, might supposedly turn out to be an effective turn of the lessons, if filled up with either a 4×4 block schedule or A/B block schedule.

Flexible interdisciplinary schedule

The flexible interdisciplinary schedule is one of the forms of block schedule (Caplinger, 2013). As its name implies, the flexible interdisciplinary schedule is not as rigid as other block schedules. Take, for example, the language arts and social studies are taught in one block of time just as maths and science in another (Olsen, 2020). Its strength lies upon its ability to help students understand the connection between and amongst subjects (Brown, 2001; Daniel, 2007). This schedule, in itself, looks quite relevant to what is being desired by current curricular reforms in Bhutan. The Bhutanese science teachers, for example, are increasingly encouraged to apply epistemic processes of STEM education during science lessons (DCPD, 2022). The flexible interdisciplinary schedule, therefore, seems to hold great promise if implemented in the Bhutanese contexts. It, if any, may possibly help to break download-bearing walls that exist amongst related subjects, either wholly or partially.

This schedule, though quite prevalent in the school system, considerably lacks empirical data that substantiate its effectiveness. Therefore, up to this end, it looks quite apparent that there is virtually no study that has empirically tested its effectiveness. While this is quite certain, there is enough literature that supports the case of interdisciplinary approach of teaching. Integrative and transdisciplinary approaches of STEM education, perhaps, are interdisciplinary approaches that are increasingly backed both by growing bodies of theoretical foundations and increasing deposits of empirical data.

One-subject-a-day schedule

This block schedule, as evident, is quite common in elementary schools and home schools. It is nested on the idea of providing one-subject-a-day for a certain period of time (Blair & Blair, 2010). It typically breaks a traditional school day into several blocks of time, but exclusively for one subject a day. Take, for instance, students might do maths on Mondays, English on Tuesdays, science on Wednesdays, social studies on Thursdays, and electives or anything else on Fridays (art, music, foreign language, etc.) (Faulconer, 2020). The order and length of the blocks might vary from school to school, but the idea is to focus on one subject more thoroughly and in-depth each day. In Bhutanese contexts, this schedule, both by and of itself, looks quite doable at key stages 1 and 2. This is due, in part, to the number of subjects offered at these key stages (e.g., as per REC, 2019) appears increasingly doable to follow the mode of one-subject a day.

One-subject-a-day schedule though may appear quite radical, there are schools and families that still prefer to focus on a daily basis instead. While there is little to less studies carried out in this regard, there are some explanatory groundings that give due regards regarding the suitability of the one-subject-a-day schedule. In a school with littles, children often spend an unlimited amount of time on a fascinating reading or a time-consuming project without the pressure of having to pack up and move on to another (Marie-Claire, 2019). Moreover, students at the lower grades, at least by their needs, require repeated routine or extended periods to form habits or soak in basic information and concepts (Briggs, 2012).

Overall, all types of block schedule, including one-subject-a-day schedule, have their own share or fair amount of concerns. Critiques, for the most part, argue that children in larger blocks of time, oftentimes, fall off from the pace of learning as a result of cognitive overload, tedious and monotonous nature of learning, or pressure related to the need to attain for an extended period of time. Moreover, it is almost entirely harder to make up for the absences and missing works for both teachers and students (Keny, 2003; Levy, 2020). While these claims are quite certain, they can be averted, however, by planning the lesson carefully. Issues related to the monotony and boredom nature of the learning, for instance, can be minimized by incorporating a multitude of teaching strategies or various range of stimuli.

CONCLUSIONS

This narrative overview carried out literature search from three electronic repository databases, namely Scopus, Eric, and Google Scholar. The literature search was also carried out from other search engines and citation searches from retrieved articles. As per the literature search, many schools around the world still practice traditional class schedules. While this is common, there are quite many schools that practice 4×4 block schedule and A/B block schedule in place of traditional schedules. Block schedules, such as hybrid, trimester, interdisciplinary flexible, or one-day-a-subject schedule, are other types of class schedules practiced in place of a traditional schedule.

The block schedules have perceived advantages, including less fragmentation of classroom instruction; extended periods of time to fully develop concepts and themes; fewer transitions during the day; more time for individual interaction between and among teachers and students; and increased opportunities for teachers to use varieties of innovative strategies. Into all these alleged benefits, block schedules also have a few shares of concerns. These include cognitive overload, tedious and monotonous sessions, or pressure related to the need to attain the same or similar stimuli for an extended period.

Recommendations and Implications

The education reform initiatives and proponents today make a concerted call for a greater emphasis on larger blocks of time. While this sort of call might appear quite dramatic, those that argue in favor of such educational reforms do not make a case in point simply by jumping on a bandwagon out of a mere passing fad (e.g., Gargis, 2013; Levy, 2020; Zepeda & Mayers, 2006). A growing body of research (e.g., Dickson et al., 2020; Pettus & Blosser, 2013; Labak et al., 2020; Smith, 2011; Randler et al., 2008), for the most part, lend both plausible and intelligible credence to such claims backed by educational psychology, explicit chain of reasons, and empirical evidence. Into all these types of urges, the demands are that competency-based learning, such as abstract reasoning, application of knowledge, and development of lasting imprints and values requires larger blocks of time as it is near to impossible to implement things in a single period. As the DCPD, MoE implemented revised competency-based curricula in all standing subjects quite recently, to move from a traditional schedule to a system that provides larger blocks of time appeared more than just necessary. Therefore, based on research findings, this study proposes the following recommendations:

1. The key stage 1 may have a 4×4 block schedule, that is either 4×4 skinny schedule or 4×4 flex schedule. The first two, three, or all four blocks of time may be devoted for core academic subjects, while the remaining few blocks or time-in class after lunch may be reserved for elective subjects; enrichment programs; coding and technology; recreational activities-painting, arts, or crafting; literacy activities- theatre, drama; or

for homework and assignment. This corresponds to most of the theoretical assumptions, neuroscience developments, and empirical evidence (e.g., Dimitrova, 2016; Peaton & Ordway, 2016; Pope, 2016; Sjosten-Bell, 2005) that substantiates that learning occurs at the max often during the morning sessions or the sessions just before the afternoon.

2. The daily school schedule at key stage 1 might also be worked based on a one-subject-a-day block schedule. A school day can possibly be divided into several blocks of time, but exclusively for one subject a day. Take, for instance, students might do Dzongkha on Mondays, English on Tuesdays, maths on Wednesdays, and coding on Thursdays. The afternoon classes on every weekday can be reserved for electives or anything else (art, music, foreign language, etc.)

3. The key stage 2 might also be operated based on the modes of 4×4 block schedule. It can be based on either a 4×4 skinny schedule or a 4×4 flex schedule. The first two, three, or all four blocks of time may be devoted for core academic subjects, while the remaining few blocks or time-in class after lunch may be reserved for elective subjects, enrichment programs, coding and technology, vocational traits, literature search, literary activities, recreational activities such as painting, arts, crafting or for homework and assignment.

4. The key stage 3 or even 4 may have an A/B block schedule in which four subjects can be scheduled on A days and the other four subjects can be scheduled on B days. The days can also accommodate electives or enrichment programs during the in-class time after lunch.

5. The key stage 5 may have a 4×4 block schedule in which there are four blocks of time offered for four subjects over an extended period of time.

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Research Article

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Youthful curiosity as a predictor of substance use among students

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Notwithstanding, the reasons that make the youth consume substances at young age are very complex, and many studies conclude that youthful curiosity is a major determining factor that drives them into such behavior. This current study investigated curiosity as a predictor of substance use among senior high school students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipality. The study was guided by three research questions.

Method: It adopted the quantitative descriptive survey design.

Population: A sample of 260 senior high school students were selected using a probability sampling technique for the study.

Instruments: It adopted questionnaires on curiosity, substance use risk profile and substances and choices to collect data from respondents.

Data analysis: Data gathered were analyzed descriptively using frequencies, percentages and Pearson product-moment correlation.

Results: The study found that students were having low levels of alcohol and substance use curiosity. Also, the study revealed that the students' substance use risk level was moderate. Furthermore, the study revealed a moderate relationship between alcohol and drug use curiosity and substance use risk among students.

Recommendations: It was recommended that among other things the management of senior high schools in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipality should provide guidance and counselling services on substance use and its effects on the youth.

Keywords: abuse, curiosity, dependence, drug use, substance use, youth

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INTRODUCTION

An alarming percentage of substance use among the youth in the high school is a reality that, if unchecked, might harm the youth who are in their formative years. The effects of substance use include school dropouts, accidents, fatalities, property damage, moral decadence, improper resource allocation, indiscipline, and worse academic standards.

In general, using drugs that alter a person's mood, thinking, or mental processes is referred to as using substances (WHO, 2019). Psychotic drugs have the potential to cause dependency syndrome, which is a collection of behavioral and physiological symptoms that develop over time. WHO (2020) defines a drug as a chemical that, when smoked, injected, consumed, sipped, or inhaled as powder or vapor, alters a person's mood, perception, and cognitive behavior. WHO

(2014) classifies drugs namely alcohol, tobacco (cigarettes), cannabis, and opioids as illegal drugs.

According to WHO (2014), the negative impact of substance use among the youth, particularly in developing countries is a worldwide health issue. WHO estimates that there are two billion regular drinkers, 1.3 billion marijuana and cigarette smokers, and 185 million illicit drug users worldwide. The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Bank, and WHO all have positions on the issue of injecting drug users (WHO, 2014), drawing on the most recent data available, jointly estimated that those who inject substances is close to 12.7 million. This corresponds to a prevalence of 0.27% of the population from 15 to 64 years. Based on the most recent information available, it is estimated that 12.7 million persons inject drugs worldwide. This is equivalent to Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, where the prevalence is much high and severe, with the rate of drug use

by injection hovering around 4.6 times greater than the worldwide average. Africa has a substantially higher rate of cannabis use than the rest of the world (5.2%-13.5% of those between the ages of 15 and 64). In most of Sub-Saharan Africa's nations, cannabis usage has become a common occurrence, especially among adolescents in South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Ghana (WHO, 2019).

In Ghana, statistical data from the Ghana Narcotic Control Board showed that 35,000 out of the country's 50,000 substance users are adolescents (NACOB, 2017). This position agrees with a study conducted by Doku (2012), which shows that the prevalence of substance use in Ghana is high among adolescents. WHO (2019) report on substance abuse in Africa showed that negative repercussions of drug and other substances are common traits of substance use. This includes sexual assault, for instance, rape, physical assault, criminal activity, disregard for social obligations, sicknesses, harm, and fatality. It has been demonstrated that the young people of Africa are at risk from using marijuana, tramadol, alcohol, and cigarettes. There are 12.7 million substance users worldwide.

Ghana, like many other developing countries, is bedeviled with substance use among adolescents as a consequence of social change. A study conducted in Serenity Place, a rehabilitation center in Ghana on inmates revealed that psychological and socio-economic factors were the causes of substance use (Olurishe, 2019). Another study conducted among university students in the Greater Kumasi Area, showed that peer influence was the major contributor of cannabis use among the students, which mostly occurs while in the second cycle schools. As much as 64% of the respondents admitted that they obtained their supply from outside the school, and 66% of users of marijuana claimed that its use has a positive effect on their studies. This claim provides a good ground for peer pressure as well as peer influence (Olurishe, 2019). The study conducted by Olurishe (2019) in Cape Coast, Ghana, revealed that curiosity and peer influence were the most likely reasons why adolescents engaged in substance use. The work of Ganu (2013) among 554 adolescents in Ghana revealed that 80% never used any illicit substance. While nine in ten of the sample were familiar with the position of their church or religion regarding substance use such as alcohol and the use of tobacco. However, a fifth of the students (20%) admitted using illicit substances- a mixture of alcohol and or with cannabis as the most abused substances.

Using the most recent information available, it was collectively assessed that the number, for instance, rape, physical violence, criminal activity, and social neglect are all examples of sexual violence. According to Ganu (2013), the majority of conventional drugs are frequently abused because there is no dose information available to show how much the users actually need. Additionally, the expiration date is not specified. Drugs that are used today were once derived from plants, animals, minerals, and other natural sources. Adu-Mireku (2019) stated that substance use has both positive and negative effects on the user. In the view of Adu-Mireku (2019), when a substance is properly used or taken into a living organism's system, it produces the desired results and allows the organism to function effectively. He however argued that the use of un-prescribed substances, as well as the misuse or overdose of prescribed substances, can have negative effects on the organism. Some of the negative effects of substance use include loss of intelligent quotient (IQ), irrepairable, school dropout, unplanned sexual activities, accidents, domestic violence, increased

sexually transmitted infections (STIs), high level of crime and unemployment, which in turn affect the economy of Ghana.

In view of what the literature presents, it is difficult to ascertain the particular cause of substance use among adolescents because various causes or possible reasons have been catalogued by numerous scholars. However, it is possible to attribute substance use behaviors of adolescents to their acts of exploration in this golden period of development (adolescence). The act of exploration among the youth is nothing but an aspect of curiosity.

Curiosity is made of cognition and internal motivation that is inherent in the information processing in a person (Stupple et al., 2017). Generally, curiosity is an intense desire to explore new and challenging events, that motivates people to get into, behave and think in new ways.

> "Curiosity is a state of increased arousal response promoted by a stimulus high in uncertainty and lacking in information. When compared to existing knowledge, the novel, uncertain, conflicting, or complex properties of external stimuli create a conceptual conflict that arouses the internal state of arousal called curiosity" (Berlyne, 1966).

According to Loewenstein (1994), curiosity is a crucial motivational force that influences people's behavior, especially among the youth. Some studies have related that curiosity increases the brand recognition of a person at critical moments in a person's social and other aspects of life, at times, it prompts people's experimentation with substance use such as alcohol, drug, sex, and street violence (Fazio et al., 1992; Green, 1990).

Curiosity is identified as one of the critical factors that influences behaviors in a dual relationship, positive and negative ways, at different stages of the developmental cycle. In addition, curiosity seen as a driving force in exploratory behaviors, scientific discovery, economic gain, academic success and substance use (Kwofie, 2018; Loewenstein, 1994). Curiosity is undoubtedly one of the reasons why adolescents engage in substance use.

Statement of the Problem

Substance use is a social problem that appears to be constantly increasing at an alarming rate in Ghana. Substance use has many negative effects on the nation's economy. Socially, it leads to increase in crime rate and school dropout. Health wise, it leads to STIs, lungs and liver problems. Economically, it increases government expenditure on rehabilitation of victims of substance use and reduces productivity. Substance use leads to the death and destruction of many people in the Ghanaian society.

A study conducted by Nkyi (2014) among senior high school students in Cape Coast indicated that students in the senior high school are the majority when it comes to substance use. Another study by Kwofie (2018) in the Kwahu East District using senior high school students as respondents, also concluded that substance use in the senior high school is increasing at exponential rate. Several factors such as availability of substances, peer group pressure, child abuse, neglect, and curiosity contribute to the use of substances in the youth in the second cycle schools. Spooner cited by Braunstein et al. (2014) identified genetics, gender, family, economy, tribe or ethnicity, traumatic life events, environment, level of knowledge of substances, psychological health, peer pressure, and the school as some of the elements that lead to adolescent substance use in the school system, that collaborates other

works such as Kwofie's (2018) findings. A research conducted by Mission of Hope Society (a non-governmental Organization) in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana (cited by Fosu, 2018), outlined the following as some of the reasons why adolescents engage in substance use; low self-esteem, stress, poor coping skills, pressure, poor communication, and poverty.

However, in Ghana, the role of curiosity in adolescents' substance use is less reported in literature, thereby creating a gap in literature. In view of this, the researchers explored the predictive ability of curiosity on substance use among adolescents in senior high schools in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana.

Objectives

To explore the problem further, these objectives were formulated to guide the study:

1. The level of curiosity of alcohol and substance use among the youth,

2. Substance use risk among the youth,

3. Relationship between alcohol, drug curiosity and substance use risk.

METHOD

Before the data collection, approval from the university's Institutional Review Board was acquired. A day prior to giving the questionnaire, the researchers received approval from the lecturers whose students were chosen for the study.

The researchers adopted the descriptive survey design in surveying a sample of 260 respondents out of a total of 1,376 students. A descriptive study establishes the range and distribution of some social and psychological characteristics such as education and training, location, curiosity, occupation, and intelligence and to discover how these characteristics may be related to other behavioral patterns and attitudes (Saru, 2019). The researchers settled on a descriptive survey design because it provides a good opportunity for measuring participants' opinions, attitudes and behaviors concerning the two variables (curiosity and substance use). The sample size was based on G-power calculation, G-power is a broad power analysis program for determining the sample size and analyzing power for scientific studies, (Verma & Verma, 2020). The proportionate stratified sampling technique was used because the population had varied numbers therefore there was the need for fair representation of the sample size, hence, the choice of proportionate stratified technique suited the current study. Proportionate stratified technique gives the researchers the opportunity to select the sample size that is proportionate to the accessible population of each school. Selection of individual respondents was based on a systemic sampling procedure, where the Kth term was calculated by dividing accessible population by sample size.

Instruments

The substance and choice scale (SACS) is a four point Likert scale used for gathering the data for the study has 23 items, developed by Christie et al. (2001). The scale is in three sections, section A (12 items), section B (10 items), and section C (one item). Sections A and C measures the level of agreement and disagreement thus did not use=1, once a week or less=2, more than once a week=3, and most days or

Table 1. Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	157	60.4
Female	103	39.6
Total	**260**	**100.0**

Table 2. District distribution of respondents

District	Frequency	Percent
Gomoa West	218	83.8
Effutu Municipality	42	16.2
Total	**260**	**100.0**

more=4. In case of section B, not true=1, somewhat true=2, and certainly true=3.

To assess the substance use behavior of the participants, the researchers adopted the substance use risk profile scale (SURPS) a four point Likert scale, developed by Woicik et al. (2009). The SURPS contained 23 items with four dimensions such as introversion/hopelessness (H)=7 items, anxiety sensitivity (AS)=5 items, impulsiveness (IMP)=5 items, and sensation seeking (SS)=5 items and it is also a Likert type, that is scored as none of the time=1, a little of the time=2, most of the time=3, and all of the time=4.

Finally, to assess the respondent's curiosity on substance use, the researchers adapted the adolescent substance curiosity scale (ASCOS) developed by Khalil et al. (2018). The scale contains seven items that are scored based on agreement and disagreement, where strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, somewhat agree=3, agree=4, and strongly agree=5.

Data Analysis

Data from the research questions were answered quantitatively. Research question one was answered using Pearson-product moment correlation because the aim was to establish a relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. Research question two was answered using frequencies and percentages because the aim was to establish the prevalence of substance use in the youth in senior high school. Research question three was also answered with frequencies and percentages because the researchers wanted to know the level of curiosity in the youth in senior high schools.

RESULTS

Presentation of Demographic Results

Part of the questionnaires collected the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of their gender. **Table 1** presents the information on the demographic variables of the respondents, which indicates that the majority of the respondents were males (n=157, 64.4%) and the remaining were females (n=103, 39.6%).

Table 2 shows that 218 (83.8%) representing the majority of the respondents were senior high schools students in Gomoa West District while 42 (16.2%) respondents were senior high school students in Effutu Municipality.

Research Question One

This question sought to determine the levels of alcohol and drug curiosity among senior high school students in Gomoa West District

Table 3. Levels of alcohol and drug curiosity among students

Level	Frequency	Percent
Low curiosity	91	35.0
Somewhat low/high	85	32.7
High	84	32.3
Total	260	100.0

Table 4. Levels of substance use risk among students

Level	Frequency	Percent
Low substance use	86	33.1
Moderate substance use	90	34.6
High substance	84	32.3
Total	260	100.0

Table 5. Relationship between alcohol & drug curiosity (ADC) & substance use risk (SUR) among students

Variables		ADC	SUR
ADC	Pearson correlation	1	.396**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	n	260	260
SUR	Pearson correlation	.396**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	n	260	260

and Effutu Municipal District. In answering the question, 7-items on the questionnaire were used. **Table 3** presents the findings.

The findings indicated that 91 respondents (35%) reported a low level of alcohol and drug curiosity whereas 85 respondents (32.7%) of the respondents reported their level of alcohol and drug curiosity to be moderate. High levels of alcohol and drug curiosity was reported among 84 respondents, which represent 32.3% of the total respondents. This implies that alcohol and drug curiosity levels among senior high school students in the two selected districts is low, therefore they are likely not to experiment with substances such as cannabis, cocaine and tramadol as a result of curiosity.

Research Question Two

The question sought to determine the levels of substance use risk among senior high school Students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipal. In answering the question, 22 items on the questionnaire were used. **Table 4** presents findings on substance use risk among senior high school students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipal.

The findings indicated that 86 respondents representing 33.1% reported being at low risk of substance use with 34.6% constituting 90 respondents reporting moderate substance use. High substance use was reported among 84 respondents, which represents 32.3% of the total respondents. This implies that the majority of the senior high school students in the selected districts moderately engaged in the use of substances such as marijuana, shisha, amphetamine, heroin and ecstasy.

Research Question Three

This question sought to determine the relationship between alcohol and drug curiosity and substance use risk among senior high school students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipal. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was computed to find the relationship between alcohol and drug curiosity and substance use risk among students. **Table 5** presents findings on the relationship between alcohol

and drug curiosity substance use risk among senior high school students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipal.

Table 5 shows that there is a significant, positive and moderate relation between alcohol and drug curiosity and substance use risk among students (r=.396, p<.05). This means that as alcohol and drug curiosity increase, the risk of substance use among students also increases. This implies that a surge in substance use curiosity leads to a corresponding surge in the risk of substance use among adolescents. In other words, the higher an adolescent's curiosity about substances, the higher the likelihood of his or her substance uses explorative behaviors.

DISCUSSION

Research Question One

The focus of research question one was to find the levels of alcohol and drug curiosity among Senior High Students in the Effutu Municipality and Gomoa West District. The result of the study indicated that the majority of adolescent students in Effutu municipality and Gomoa West district were having low levels of alcohol and drug curiosity. This result disagreed with an earlier finding by Pascal, Evans, and Sylvester as cited by Held (1989), which indicated that high curiosity was the most widely reported reason for the use of alcohol and other drugs among senior high school students.

Research Question Two

The question aimed at finding out the levels of substance use risk among senior high school students in Gomoa West and Effutu Municipality. The result indicated that most of the senior high school students in Gomoa West and Effutu Municipality were moderately involved in substance use. They are moderately involved in the use of substances such as cannabis, amphetamines, cocaine, heroin, shisha, alcohol, and ecstasy. These students stood the chance to use new substances or increase their current use of substances as their curiosity levels increased. This finding was not in agreement with an earlier finding by Nkyi (2104), which indicated that the use of psychoactive substances and other drugs in senior high schools appears to be widespread and varying across African countries. In Ghana, for instance, senior high school students' substance use behaviors were found to be at a lower level than what pertains in other parts of West Africa and the African continent at large (Nkyi, 2014). The finding also contradicted an earlier finding by Rudatsikira et al. (2009), which showed there was a high level of substance use among senior high school students with 57.9% had consumed substances. The finding again refuted a study conducted by Adelekan (1989) and Peltzer cited by Nkyi (2014), which indicated that the use of alcohol and other substances such as cannabis, opioid, tramadol and inhalation of glue among senior high school students are at low level than the level reported by students in some of the other African countries.

Research Question Three

The focus of this question was to determine the relationship between alcohol and drug curiosity and substance use risk among senior high school Students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipal. The study revealed a noteworthy and unequivocal moderate relation between alcohol and drug curiosity and substance use risk among students in Gomoa West District and Effutu Municipal. This finding supports the argument of Kelso (2020), that many adolescents engaged

in substance use because they are curious about what they were told concerning the sensation (high) associated with substance use.

This finding further confirmed the position of Fazio et al. (1992), Green (1990), and Loewenstein (1994) that curiosity is a crucial motivational force in influencing human exploratory behaviors such as sexual activities, substance use, learning and increased brand recognition.

CONCLUSION

The following inferences were made in light of the results: Senior high school students have low levels of alcohol and drug curiosity. This could mean that these students are not very exposed to some of the substances stated on the questionnaire. With such behaviors, students stand the chance not to engage in substance use. The students are moderately engaged in substance use. This moderately engaged substance use level could be as a result of the fact that students are exposed to substances such as alcohol, cigarette and cannabis at home or at school.

The high school students exhibited moderate relation between alcohol and drug curiosity and substance use risk behavior. This is as a result of the fact that some of the youth are eager to explore the feeling associated with substance use. It could also be the fact that these students engaged in substance use to confirm the stories they might have heard from their peers as far as substance use is concerned.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Management of senior high schools should provide guidance and counselling services on substance use and its effects on the youth. This could be implemented as part of the annual orientation program for freshmen and final year students. To help the students to be aware of the consequences of substance use and the youth must choose good friends who will help them to further good course to achieve their aims in life.

2. The management of senior high schools in the country should ensure strict enforcement of school rules and regulations that prohibit the use of substances by students and stiffer penalties given to those caught in the act to deter others not to engage in drug or substance use.

3. A multi-dimensional preventive activities encouraging anti-substance use behaviors in the youth, peers, parents, should be activated in pre-tertiary schools and in the catchment areas in the school comprising of the Ministry of Education, religious leaders and other stakeholders to stop or reduce substance use.

4. Alcohol and other hard substances must not be advertised in the media during prime time (from 6 to 9 pm) when children are likely to be near the sets.

5. The Ministry of Health and its allied agencies must increase their surveillance of drug and substance use, abuse, sales and the distribution channels or routes to prevent the involvement of the youth in the distribution chain.

6. Parents must not introduce the youth to the use nor sale of hard drugs as children copy from their parents. Parents must also set good examples to the youth by avoiding the use of substances while children are around.

7. Alcoholic beverages must be kept away from the youth and stored under locks at home.

8. Clubs and societies must be formed at all levels of the school system to educate on the youth on ill practices of drug use. Such clubs can pay visits to rehabilitation centers and prisons for them to have first-hand knowledge of drug abusers at the centers.

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Building awareness, interest, and readiness towards college course through work immersion

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ABSTRACT

Work immersion is required before graduation for senior high school students that aims to prepare the students for college life, particularly for humanities and social sciences (HUMSS) students. Despite the restriction in face-to-face classes and prohibiting industry-based experience, teachers need to build the students' awareness, ignite their interest and uplift their readiness for college courses. So, teachers decided to implement work immersion via a blended modality wherein students experience school-based and online work immersion. This study aimed to build the HUMSS students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses. A practical action research design was utilized to measure the variables before and after the work immersion implementation. Hence, survey questionnaires and interviews were the data collection tools employed to collect both quantitative measures and qualitative descriptions of experiences. The findings show that the students have low awareness, interest, and readiness for their preferred college courses before implementing work immersion in a blended modality. However, after two months of implementation, all variables become high and significant differences exist before and after the implementation. The work immersion using a blended modality effectively increased students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses. However, they suggested having more webinars and activities, more learning materials, frequent face-to-face interactions, parents' involvement during the webinar, and a student committee for communication.

Keywords: awareness, college course, interest, readiness, work immersion

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INTRODUCTION

Work immersion as a required subject before graduation must be appropriately delivered to secure the work-related experience of the graduating students so that they are equipped with competencies and ready to face college life or job-related activities. However, industry-based work immersion is impossible due to the continuous spread of mutated coronavirus. Hence, the Philippine government permitted face-to-face school activities, limiting students' attendance. However, the Department of Education (DepEd) mandated the school to implement a flexible setup in the conduct of work immersion experience for the graduating students utilizing the available resources (DM-CI-2020-00085, 2020). Hence, high school students must undergo work immersion despite a health crisis.

Grade 12 students must experience work immersion in the second semester as part of the Philippine basic education curriculum. Work immersion provides a learning experience for the graduating students in the field of work related to their preferred college course on school premises relevant to the job market needs. Also, it develops relevant

students' skills (Acar, 2019; Mahaguay & Mahaguay, 2020) by giving them opportunities to apply their acquired knowledge, skills, and values from school. Also, work immersion is a realization of gained competencies and values learned from schooling that they use in real work experience (Victory Christian International School, 2016). Also, work immersion provides social interaction and application of learned competencies from school that the students need to face real-life situations (DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017, 2017). It enhanced students' competence when they experienced work-related activities.

DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017 (2017) mandates the school to implement 80 hours of work immersion activities under the guidance of the teacher and partner institution. However, due to the government restriction, DepEd restricts the implementation in school or at home. This situation is a tremendous challenge for the work immersion teachers to maximize work-related experiences following the government restrictions. Implementing work immersion under the blended modality is another challenge to face and deal with. Hence, education must continue whatever the challenge arises, utilizing the available resources and collaboration among stakeholders.

Through work simulation experiences, work immersion allowed the students to develop their professional competence (Lozada, 2017). These experiences teach the students to become proficient in their chosen field of interest. Experiencing work immersion is vital for the holistic development of the students (Rex Bookstore, 2018). So, work immersion, aside from being one of the specialized subjects in senior high school, must give valuable learning experiences aligned to the main goal of the K to 12 curriculum exits such as tertiary education, technical-vocational education, entrepreneurship, or work. On the other side, continuous improvement must be placed to increase the involvement of stakeholders in work immersion implementation (Onte, 2019).

Literature Review

Gafoor (2012) defines awareness as a person's ability to perceive, feel, or be conscious of an event, object or pattern. Awareness of a college course and career is essential to build among high school students. For instance, Ibrahim et al. (2014) made a descriptive study on the status of career awareness for public high schools in Kenya. They found that students aware of their preferred career so that they can make the right career decision. Career awareness in secondary schools is related to career decision-making. It shows that the student must be aware of their future career so that they can make a good decision toward it. Similarly, Glaser and Warick (2016) and Kroboth (2016) said that college awareness enables young people's minds to create expectations they might experience in college life.

Meanwhile, Gracida (2019) integrated college awareness in elementary schools using a capstone project. She used pre-survey and post-survey methods to measure the gained awareness and knowledge. She found that it was crucial to integrate college awareness at an early age. Students became more engaged and developed a positive attitude toward their future careers. So, if college awareness benefits elementary students, it will benefit more senior high school students. Hence, teachers must open the minds of the students about college courses so that they become aware of what kind of decisions they need to make relevant to their preferred profession someday.

On the other hand, Hidi and Renninger (2006) defined interest as an intention to engage or have a predisposition to the content. Students' interest is essential to consider in choosing a college course. Salonen et al. (2018) studied students' career awareness and interest promotion through career-related instruction. They found that students could acquire knowledge and skills in future careers and be aware of expectations, the learning environment, and the importance of what they learned in high school. Hence, students became more interested in their college and careers.

College readiness, as defined by Common Core State Standards (CCSS), pertains to "readiness to take college-level classes" (Klasik & Strayhorn, 2018, p. 2). In the study context, college readiness means preparing and equipping the students with the knowledge, skills, and attitude to enter their chosen college courses to face the challenges. It is vital to develop the college readiness of high school students because they are unaware of the skills necessary for college (Leeds & Mokher, 2019). So, it is the task of the work immersion teacher to prepare the graduating high school students in entering college life by equipping the students with the skills and right attitude towards higher education. Students must know what college course skills and attitudes they need to pursue tertiary education.

One of the curriculum exits the K to 12 graduates may take is entering a college course. However, students must be ready and prepared before they pursue higher education. That is why work immersion has been created to guide the students and prepare them to become ready to face the challenges. Students' readiness for college courses requires much preparation and building cognitive strategies, including contextual awareness such as the college environment that will prepare the high school students (Gee et al., 2019). The school must early expose the students to career options and prepare them for college and careers (Jimenez, 2020). So, work immersion is an excellent avenue to open the students' eyes to the world of higher education. Work immersion teachers must prepare students to face challenges in any college course.

The literature above justified the relevance of work immersion in the student's college life preparation. Thus, work immersion must prepare the students for college admission by increasing their awareness, interest, and readiness levels. However, limited studies have been conducted on the extent of work immersion implementation (Vecino & Doromal, 2020). Previous research on work immersion focused on technical vocational livelihood (TVL) track (Catelo, 2020; Figueras & Mendoza, 2020; Mahaguay & Mahaguay, 2020) and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) track (Acar, 2019; Acut et al., 2019). Fewer studies have been conducted about how work immersion builds the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses, particularly among humanities and social sciences (HUMSS) students. The said students intend to pursue college-level education. Hence, work immersion for HUMSS students aims to create learning opportunities to integrate what the students acquired from learning areas through culminating activities that exhibit authentic performances and products like creative portfolios, concept papers, and reflections (DM-CI-2020-00085, 2020).

On the other hand, the San Pedro Relocation Center National High School–Main Campus offers a senior high school program under academic and TVL tracks. Under the academic track, HUMSS is one of the strands offered. The students in this strand were expected to have a work immersion in the partner institutions. However, based on the restriction imposed by the Philippine government, work immersion must be done in school and online. The big issue was how to implement work immersion properly so that the student's college awareness, interest, and readiness are boosted despite the current situation.

The researchers sought how the work immersion implementation under blended learning helped the students increase their awareness, interest, and readiness in their preferred college courses. This study measured the variables before and after the implementation and interviewed the students to get their actual experiences. Hence, students' suggestions for improving the work immersion implementation were sought as a basis for refining the intervention.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study leaned on the experiential learning theory that posits that learning happens through experiences (Stirling et al., 2016). The students need to experience work immersion to acquire the knowledge, skills, and values that professionals must possess, which can be gained through concrete experiences (Roberts, 2012). Most students plan to pursue higher education, giving them better employment opportunities and higher salaries (Catelo, 2020). So, the work immersion teacher must keep the students aware of what college courses they need to take aligned with their professional dreams.
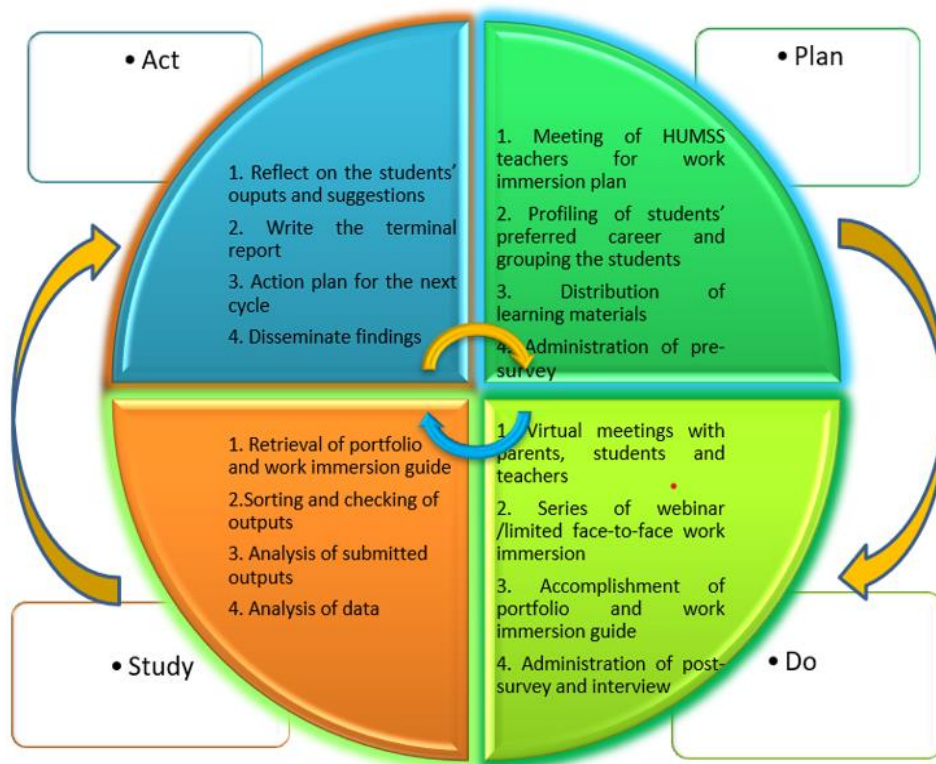
Figure 1. Conceptual paradigm (Source: Authors)

Hence, they must be ready for college admission and face challenges in pursuing college courses. The student's interest and passion for pursuing a degree course are enhanced during work immersion implementation. On the other hand, work immersion experiences are concrete experiential learning that capacitates the students in the field of work, higher education, or skills development (Dela Cruz & Permejo, 2020). Work immersion experiences make the students gain skills of communication, punctuality, proactivity, reliability, and professionalism (Acut et al., 2019)

Figure 1 presents the plan-do-study-act (PDSA) model of action research employed in the study originated from the work of Walter Shewhart and Edward Deming (Taylor et al., 2014). It started with the HUMSS teachers' meeting to plan the work immersion implementation, including the learning materials. Then, profiling students' preferred college courses and grouping them were considered. Work immersion materials were distributed immediately, and the pre-survey was administered via Google Form.

During implementation, virtual orientation was done with the parents, students, and teachers to disseminate how the work immersion would go on and what was expected from them. Then, a series of webinars were conducted for those who chose the online modality, while a series of face-to-face school-based work immersion experiences were given to those willing to go to school. Also, the students were instructed to accomplish the work immersion portfolio and guide activities by the end of the implementation. Post-survey questionnaires and interviews were administered to elicit data on how work immersion increases students' awareness, interest, and readiness in their preferred college courses.

In the post-implementation, the work immersion portfolio and guide were retrieved in school by the end of the fourth quarter period or via Google classroom submission. Students' outputs were sorted and

checked by the teacher. Then, submitted outputs and data analyses were done immediately to arrive a reliable data. Teachers' reflections were done based on the students' outputs and suggestions. A terminal report was written accordingly, and an action plan was crafted for the next action research cycle, considering the dissemination and advocacy plan.

Research Questions

This study aimed to build the awareness, interest, and readiness of grade 12 HUMSS students toward their preferred college courses through work immersion under a blended learning modality.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How can students be described in terms of sex, age, and preferred college course?

2. What is the level of awareness, interest, and readiness of grade 12 HUMSS students for their preferred college course before and after work immersion?

3. Is there a significant difference in the level of awareness, interest, and readiness on preferred college courses before and after work immersion?

4. How work immersion increases the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for their preferred college course?

5. What are the students' suggestions to improve work immersion in increasing students' awareness, interest, and readiness for their preferred college course?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilized a practical action design following the PDSA model to determine if the student's level of awareness, interest, and

Table 1. Reliability indices using Cronbach's alpha

Variable	Number of items	α	Interpretation
Awareness	7	.930	Excellent
Interest	7	.927	Excellent
Readiness	7	.944	Excellent

readiness increased before and after the implementation of work immersion under blended learning. Practical action research was the most appropriate design to determine how a work immersion influences the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for a preferred college course, which is one of the objectives of work immersion for grade 12 students. Practical action research focuses on addressing the specific problem experienced by the practitioners (Creswell, 2009).

Participants of the Study

The participants were grade 12 HUMSS students who underwent work immersion under blended learning for the second semester of the school year 2021-2022. The said students were expected to have industry-based work experience, but due to health crises, this was done in school and online via a blended modality. So, work immersion teachers devised how to deliver work immersion experience among students by utilizing online platforms, printed materials, and school facilities. The survey respondents were 181 grade 12 HUMSS students who underwent work immersion under blended learning in San Pedro Relocation Center National High School–Main campus. Instead of having work immersion in the partner industry, online and school-based work immersion were implemented. Hence, twenty participants voluntarily joined in the interview to have qualitative data purposively selected via phone or face-to-face.

Research Instrument

The study employed a survey questionnaire via Google Form to elicit student's student's awareness, interest, and readiness level in their preferred college course. Some items were adopted from Salonen et al. (2018), DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017 (2017), and DM-CI-2020-00085 (2020) with some modifications to make statement suited to our study. Hence, permission was secured as part of the protocol. The first draft has eight statements per variable answerable on a scale of 1 to 6, plus three questions about the level of awareness, interest, and readiness. Also, demographic profiles such as sex, section, age, area of interest, and preferred college course were included. The three head teachers validated the said questionnaire to establish the content validity. Their suggestions such as removing unnecessary statements, simplifying sentences, grammar and parallelism were strictly followed. Then, the revised version was submitted to validators again to seek their approval.

The final version has seven demographic variables such as name, section, age, sex, area of interest, preferred college course and work immersion teacher, three questions for the level of awareness, interest, and readiness, and seven statements per variable answerable by a scale of 1 very strongly disagree to 6 very strongly agree.

Table 1 shows the reliability indices of the questionnaire. The said questionnaire was excellent to use since the internal reliability indices exceeded .900, which means the responses were consistent. Onyefulu and Roofe (2019) claimed that the acceptable value for Cronbach's alpha lies between 0.7 to 0.95. Also, the reliability indices show a positive correlation among the items per variable (Cristobal & Cristobal, 2017).

To sum up, the survey questionnaire was valid and reliable, which were good characteristics of a research instrument.

Also, the teachers conducted semi-structured interviews via phone calls and face-to-face modalities to elicit qualitative data on how the work immersion increased the level of awareness, interest, and readiness of the students toward their preferred college course and suggestions to improve the work immersion implementation. Seven-item interview guide questions were constructed and validated by the three head teachers. They carefully examined each item and suggested improvements to the questions, like making them simple but powerful. All suggestions were considered in the final version of the interview guide questions.

Data Gathering

Permission from the school head was secured first before the conduct of action research. After the grant of permission, a pre-survey was administered online for two weeks to measure the students' prior awareness, interest, and readiness in their preferred college courses. Work immersion teachers were asked for their assistance in the distribution of the survey link. Their voluntary participation was highly appreciated since they directly interacted with the students. After the two months of work immersion implementation under blended learning, a post-survey was administered online to see the increment in the students' awareness, interest, and readiness in preferred college courses for two weeks with the assistance of work immersion teachers. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit qualitative data in response to research questions five and six. Moreover, to establish the credibility of data, member checking was done to ensure the accuracy and completeness of qualitative data.

Birt et al. (2016) claimed that member checking could be done by returning the data analysis and transcript to the participants to seek their conformity. Hence, the participants were instructed to check the completeness and truthfulness of the data based on what they experienced during work immersion.

The first researcher was not an immersion teacher assigned to administer the survey questionnaire, conduct data analysis, and write the whole research report. In contrast, the last two researchers were the work immersion teachers who implemented the program and collected data through interviews. Their personal biases, such as students performing well in the implementation, total students' participation, and insights, were set aside to avoid data contamination. Similarly, their influences were not used to require the students to finish the students' participation and render good answers in the interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations such as informed consent and assent, data confidentiality, voluntary involvement, secured permission, and justice must be established in any research (Stockemer, 2019; Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007). So, the researchers sought the school head's permission before the study and secured parental permission by sending informed consent and assent form.

The students' participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw without consequences. Also, they did not receive any favor in exchange for their participation. Hence, participants' identities and data collected were treated with the utmost confidentiality for their protection. Moreover, the research report, including the data, was restored to the researcher's computer for three years only. However, the research

Table 2. Homogeneity of variances using Levene's test and normality test using Shapiro-Wilk

Variable		Levene's test				Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df$_1$	df$_2$	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-survey	Awareness	.002	1	179	.968	.900	181	.000
	Interest	1.362	1	179	.245	.892	181	.000
	Readiness	.003	1	179	.954	.896	181	.000
Post-survey	Awareness	3.204	1	179	.075	.948	181	.000
	Interest	4.186	1	179	.042	.920	181	.000
	Readiness	3.324	1	179	.070	.939	181	.000

Table 3. Demographic profile of the respondents in the survey

Variables	Frequency	%
Sex		
Female	111	61.30
Male	70	38.70
Age		
17-19	155	85.60
20-22	23	12.70
23-25	3	1.70
Preferred college course		
Business management	22	12.15
Criminology	43	23.77
Communication arts	13	7.18
Education	40	22.10
Hospitality management	9	4.97
Information technology	9	4.97
Political science	6	3.31
Psychology	28	15.47
Tourism	11	6.08
Total	181	100.00

report was committed to sharing in school meetings, conferences, and journal publications.

Data Analysis

For quantitative data analysis, the study used frequency, percentage, and median to describe the quantitative data, Shapiro-Wilk for normality of data, Levene's test for homogeneity of variances, Wilcoxon signed-rank test test for the significant difference in the student's level of awareness, interest, and readiness before and after the work immersion implementation, Kruskal-Wallis H test and Mann-Whitney U test for significance difference based on demographic variables. Statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used for computation, while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative data from the interview. Qualitative data were reduced to find patterns in the experiences as descriptions called themes (Given, 2008).

Table 2 depicts the homogeneity of variances using Levene's and normality tests using Shapiro-Wilk as requirements before using any inferential statistics (Hanusz & Tarasińska, 2015). It shows that the quantitative data did not resemble a normal distribution by looking at the p-value (.000), which is lower than the significance level of .05. However, the variances are homogeneous since the p-values from Levene's test are more remarkable than alpha .05. Since the normality of data failed to hold, it justifies the use of non-parametric tests of difference, notably the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, Kruskal-Wallis H test, and Mann-Whitney U test for a significant difference. These non-parametric tests were used to determine the significant difference in the pre-survey and post-survey responses, which shows discrete variables that do not ask for normality of data (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Figure 2. Student's level of awareness in preferred college courses before & after work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)
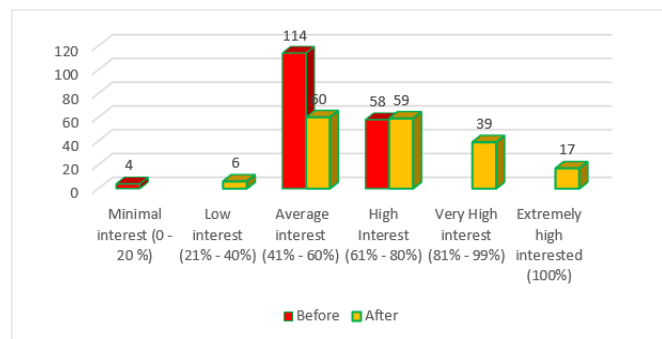
Figure 3. Student's level of interest in preferred college courses before & after work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)

RESULTS

Table 3 shows the participants' frequency in terms of sex, age, and preferred college courses. Most of the participants were female aged 17 to 19 years old. They preferred to take criminology, followed by education and psychology. A smaller number of students wanted to take political science, information technology, and hospitality management in college.

Figure 2 shows the students' awareness level of their preferred college courses. It can be depicted from **Figure 2** that work immersion under blended learning increased the students' level of awareness of college courses. They became highly aware of the college course, one of the goals of work immersion implementation. Building college awareness makes students' minds anticipate expectations about college life (Glaser & Warick, 2016; Kroboth, 2016), which is vital for them to be more prepared for possible challenges they might face someday.

Figure 3 presents the student's level of interest in their preferred college courses. It shows that their interest level increased after the work immersion implementation. Before the work immersion implementation, most students had average interest, while their
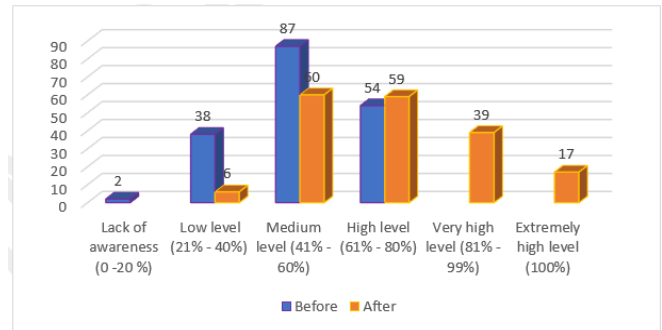
Figure 4. Student's level of readiness in their preferred college courses before & after work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)
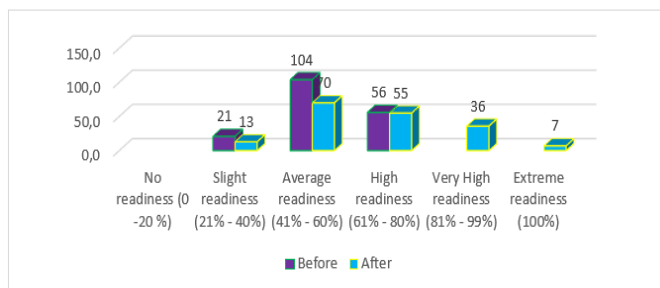
interest increased after the implementation. It implies that the work immersion helped the students to become more interested in their preferred college courses. Many of them have a high interest in pursuing college courses after graduation. The career-related instruction during work immersion promotes college interest, similar to the findings of Salonen et al. (2018).

The student's level of readiness in their preferred college courses is presented in **Figure 4**. As depicted in **Figure 4,** the student's level of readiness increased after the implementation of work immersion. Before the work immersion implementation, many students had average readiness, while after the implementation, many of them increased their readiness. It means that work immersion under blended learning helped the students to become ready to face college life. Work immersion experience exposed students to various career options and prepared them for college, similar to Jimenez's (2020) findings.

Table 4 shows students' awareness of preferred college courses. It shows that the work immersion implementation helped the students to increase their awareness. They gained clarity about the courses they want to pursue, including their expectation from them, the learning environment in college, and what precisely the college course is all about. Also, they were aware of the importance and application of what they learned from senior high school, which they can use in college. Hence, they were aware of ethical principles in dealing with the college requirements. If the students know a college course, they can make a good career decision (Ibrahim et al., 2014). The findings above justify the effect of work immersion in uplifting the students' awareness of college courses.

The student's interest in their preferred college courses is presented in **Table 5**. It shows their interest in their preferred college course increased after the work immersion implementation. Students were highly interested in seeing themselves as competent professionals someday since they were interested in their preferred college courses. They were passionately dedicated to learning, developing skills and knowledge relevant to the job market, applying what they have learned in school, and experiencing relevant training. All of these were manifested through their active involvement during work immersion. It means that the work immersion implementation helped the students boost their interest in college courses, similar to the findings of Salonen et al. (2018).

It can be gleaned from **Table 6** that the students were ready for their preferred college courses. Their readiness was increased due to the work immersion implementation. They demonstrated their knowledge

Table 4. Student's awareness in preferred college courses (PCCs) before & after work immersion implementation

Statement	Before		After	
	Median	Interpretation	Median	Interpretation
1. At this moment, I know what all about my PCC is.	3	Disagree	4	Strongly agree
2. It is clear to me what course to enroll in college.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
3. I am aware of expectations concerning my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
4. I am aware of learning environment related to my college course.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
5. I am aware of importance & application of what I learned in senior high school concerning my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
6. I am aware of how I will apply my knowledge & skills in performing college course-related activities.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
7. I am aware of proper way of applying ethical principles dealing with requirements of my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree

Table 5. Student's interest in preferred college courses (PCCs) before & after work immersion implementation

Statement	Before		After	
	Median	Interpretation	Median	Interpretation
1. I participated actively in work immersion activities as a sign of my interest in my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
2. I am interested in my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
3. I showed my passion & dedication to learning more in my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
4. I am highly interested in applying theories & principles learned during work immersion.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
5. I am highly interested in experiencing relevant training in an actual work area as part of college course.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
6. I am highly interested in developing my knowledge & skills relevant to job market needs of my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
7. I am highly interested to see myself in future as a competent professional in my PCC.	2	Strongly disagree	6	Very strongly agree

Table 6. Student's readiness in preferred college courses (PCCs) before & after work immersion implementation

Statement	Before		After	
	Median	Interpretation	Median	Interpretation
1. I can demonstrate my knowledge & skills in communication & human relation related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
2. I can show good attitudes, work habits, & an appreciation for work related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
3. I can demonstrate practical & relevant skills under guidance of my work immersion teacher.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
4. I can apply my skills learned & values based on ethical work principles relevant to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
5. I can create a comprehensive portfolio as evidence of my acquired competencies related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	4	Agree
6. I am ready to face challenges of college life related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree
7. I am ready to prepare my credentials for college admission related to my PCC.	3	Disagree	5	Strongly agree

Table 7. Wilcoxon signed-rank test for significant difference in student's level of awareness, interest, & readiness before & after work immersion implementation

Before vs. after	Test statistic	p-value	Decision
Awareness	-10.682	.000	Significant
Interest	-11.392	.000	Significant
Readiness	-10.786	.000	Significant

and skills in communication and human relation, showed proper work ethics, and applied skills and relevant values. The students gained communication skills and professionalism similar to the findings of Acut et al. (2019). Also, they were prepared to face the challenges of college life. They can produce a creative portfolio to prove their competence and prepare credentials for college admission. Developing college readiness is crucial in making the students aware of the necessary skills for college (Leeds & Mokher, 2019). Equipping the students with the skills vital in college life is like empowering them to survive with hindrances and roadblocks that need to pass.

Table 7 shows the significant difference in the student's awareness, interest, and readiness level in their preferred college courses using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test before and after the work immersion implementation. The p-value of .000 signifies the existence of a significant difference before and after. It means the work immersion implementation increases the students' awareness, interest, and readiness levels in their preferred college courses, which is one of the objectives of the senior high school curriculum. It implies that the implementation was influential in helping students prepare for their preferred college courses.

Figure 5 presents the effect of work immersion on the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses. Through work immersion, students acquire knowledge and skills relevant to their preferred college course, broadening their perspectives on the college. Building college awareness makes the students more engaged, which creates a positive attitude for a future career (Gracida, 2019). Hence, online and face-to-face interactions increased their communication and social skills. Also, they became motivated to pursue their preferred college courses and decided to finish a degree, hoping to experience more relevant work immersion in college. In terms of readiness, students become prepared to face college courses since they know what is expected from them once they enroll in a specific course. Similarly, they were inspired to pursue their dream course and ready to face challenges.

The words of the participants support the findings above.

Figure 6. Students' suggestions for improving work immersion implementation (Source: Authors)

"Lessons from work immersion helped me become more knowledgeable in a college course I will choose. The webinar was able to inspire us from the speakers' experiences"– Participant 9.

"Work immersion prepared me for what to expect from a college course, motivated me, and challenged me that my preferred college course is not easy to learn about"–Participant 17.

Figure 6 depicts the students' suggestions to improve the implementation of work immersion under blended learning. Students suggested more webinar sessions and activities increase their awareness and readiness for their preferred college courses. They ask for more learning materials focused on the area of interest that will boost the eagerness to learn more about college life. Hence, they ask for frequent face-to-face interactions to improve their social and oral communication skills and a student committee that will reach out to every student in group activities aside from the teacher. In addition, they requested to involve the parents during the webinar to enlighten them about the college courses suited to their children and aligned to the senior high school track and strand.

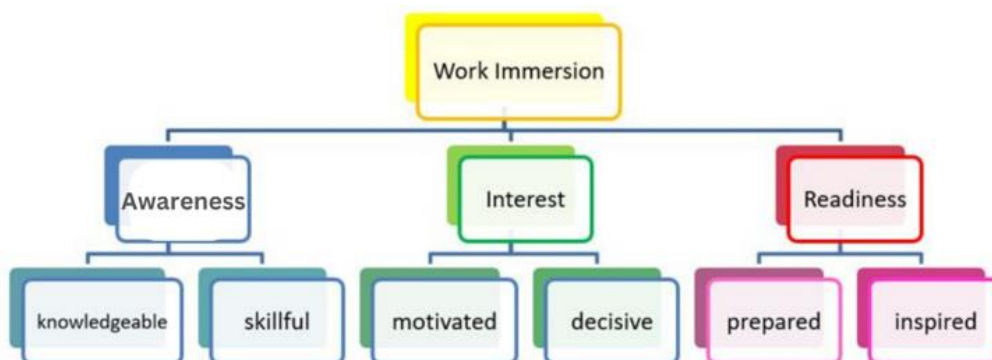The words of the participants support the findings above.

Figure 5. Effect of work immersion in increasing students' awareness, interest, & readiness in the preferred college courses (Source: Authors)
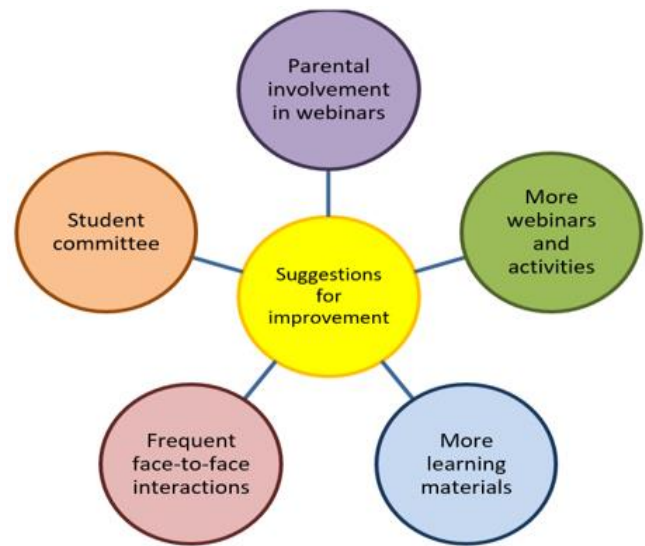
"There must be more face-to-face classes when the interaction between the teacher and students is possible. The students become engaged, and at the same time, it will lead them to take the college course they want"–Participant 3.

"I suggest the parents/guardians involved in the discussion about the possible course for the senior high STEM, HUMSS, or TVL. So, if they have an incoming grade 11 child, they can discuss it with their child. There are meetings where the parents must also be involved even in webinars so that if they are confused, they can also receive knowledge regarding the college course"–Participant 14.

DISCUSSIONS

Work immersion under blended learning aims to prepare the students to experience the work environment with the guidance of work immersion teachers. Also, it aims to prepare the students for tertiary education for those who choose to pursue degree courses. As implementers of work immersion, the teachers must effectively deliver this program (Vecino & Doromal, 2020) while dealing with the demands brought by the global pandemic. Through the work immersion implementation under blended learning, HUMSS graduates became more knowledgeable and skillful about the college courses, more interested in pursuing their dreams, and ready to face challenges. The students' competencies and skills were developed by work immersion (Gamboa et al., 2020). The work immersion experiences honed the students' values and skills (DepEd Order No. 30 s. 2017, 2017). They produced creative portfolios and concept papers and conducted their planned webinar as the manifestation of their acquired competencies. Students' awareness of a college course enlightens their minds about what college course they need to pursue and what skills and the right attitude are needed to excel. Building college awareness means opening the student's minds to various courses and expectations from them as college students. It is crucial for high school students since most of them plan to pursue tertiary education, which opens them to better employment opportunities with higher salaries (Catelo, 2020). Thus, through the work immersion experience, college awareness becomes higher due to student-teacher interactions and webinars with speakers from the fieldwork.

On the other hand, building college interest increases the students' passion for learning more, development of skills, and eagerness to experience training. Through active involvement in work immersion activities, students become highly interested in building their knowledge and skills related to their preferred college courses. Their passion and interest in pursuing college courses are enhanced after the work immersion experience. Also, students' college readiness prepares them for college life. The work immersion experience prepares the students to face challenges once they enter the college environment.

The researcher admitted some of the lapses they need to improve for the subsequent work immersion implementation. First, there must be more time for implementation, especially in face-to-face interactions. Second, an immediate online meeting must be done frequently to assess whether students have acquired the target competencies. Third, specific activities should be based on the student's area of interest rather than general activities for all HUMSS students. Fourth, review and revise the work immersion portfolio and guide

aligned to a specific area of interest. Fifth, encourage more frequent consultation with parents and possible industry partners. However, in the lens of experiential theory, work immersion capacitates the students in skills development and higher education (Dela Cruz & Permejo, 2020). Through work immersion, students experienced how to deal with the client, proper work ethics, planning and conducting webinars, and simulated work experience. Their experiences equipped them with knowledge, skills, and proper attitude toward college life and ignited their interest in finishing a degree.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to build the awareness, interest, and readiness of grade 12 HUMSS students toward their preferred college courses through work immersion under blended learning. The student's awareness, interest, and readiness for college courses were low before the work immersion implementation. However, after the implementation, they all increased, and significant differences exist before and after. It means that the students' awareness, interest, and readiness for college were built through work immersion, which is one of the end goals of the senior high school curriculum. Also, a significant difference in awareness and interest levels was established based on a preferred college course. Students who preferred an education course got the highest awareness and interest levels, while those who preferred a criminology course got the lowest awareness and interest levels.

The work immersion experiences made the students knowledgeable about the college course requirements, expectations, and skills needed. They became skillful in communication and socialization, which are essential attributes of HUMSS graduates. Hence, they became more motivated and decisive to pursue a degree course and expected to experience more work immersion in college. Moreover, they were ready and inspired to face the challenges of college life. Meanwhile, to increase the student's awareness, interest, and readiness, the students suggested having more webinars and activities with parental involvement, more learning materials, frequent face-to-face interaction between the teacher and students, and a student committee that constantly communicated with each student.

The study was limited to one school with four sections since the study's nature was action research. The work immersion implementation under blended learning was done for two months. So, it is suggested to have a similar study in other schools for the more extended implementation period considering different research designs to investigate the students' benefits from work immersion. Hence, more face-to-face interactions, if possible, and all student suggestions will be considered for the next study cycle.

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Ethics declaration: Authors declared that the study had no ethics committee approval since it was action research implemented in one school with the approval of the school head.

Declaration of interest: Authors declare no competing interest.

Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the authors on request.

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Organizational commitment and interpersonal relationship of library personnel as determinants of work performance in Nigeria universities

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ABSTRACT

This study was originated to scrutinize the effects organizational commitment and interpersonal relationship of library personnel as determinants of work performance in Nigeria universities. This study employed descriptive survey method. Total enumeration or census survey techniques were used to cover all the library personnel in the partaking Nigeria universities. This study employs two research hypotheses to guide the study. Findings revealed that there is significant relationship between organizational commitment and work performance, while there is also a positive significant relationship between interpersonal relationship and work performance.

Keywords: organizational commitment, interpersonal relationship, work performance, library personnel, university libraries

INTRODUCTION

Humans are, by nature, social beings. Our social, emotional, and physical health depends on the relationships we form with others. Understanding strategies used in maintaining interpersonal relationships can assist in establishing a solid support network that can provide resilience as individuals face difficulties in life. Interpersonal connections or relationships involving more than two individuals are referred to as interpersonal relationships. The spouse, family, close friends, acquaintances, coworkers, and a wide variety of other people who are a part of the human social network can all be considered interpersonal relationships (Cherry, 2021). Kemoni (2004) sees Interpersonal relationships as the kind of interaction between more than two people. Interpersonal relationships might occur explicitly, secretly, in person, or even discreetly. Relationships influence how we learn and behave (McCarthy, 2016). It suggests that interpersonal relationships significantly determine our attitudes, behaviors, success, and level of dissatisfaction or failure.

An interpersonal relationship is a human-to-human connection that works in the same organization. An individual spends approximately seven to eight hours at his job, so working alone is nearly impossible. At work, one needs others to converse with and discuss various problems. According to research, working in groups boosts

productivity significantly more than working alone (Juneja, 2018). It takes reciprocal giving and taking when it comes to information sharing for relationships to grow and stay healthy. People must open up and be willing to share details about their experiences, emotions, and opinions (Sprecher et al., 2013). Cherry (2021) discusses strategies for maintaining good interpersonal relationships with family, friends, coworkers, and others: open, maintaining boundaries, listening, showing respect, and being empathetic.

Organizational commitment is the level of employee affiliation with a specific firm and its objectives and wishes to continue participating (Robbins & Judge, 2011). Organizational commitment, as defined above, is when a worker is prepared to carry out organizational responsibilities and desires to keep their position within the company. Organizational commitment is thus defined as an individual's psychological connection to an institution, which includes a sense of dedication to their work, loyalty, and faith in many aspects of the workplace (Sethi, 2014). George and Sabapathy (2011) stressed that organizational commitment is among the most crucial requirements for every educational establishment. It is the critical aspect determining an employee's performance, values, and attitudes; it also significantly affects employee loyalty (Sadoughi & Ebrahimi, 2015). Additionally, it is crucial for determining a worker's contribution or purpose for leaving a company (Hafiz, 2017).

Employees are the cornerstone of an organization's ability to succeed and function efficiently; therefore, developing organizational commitment is unquestionably necessary. Farrukh et al. (2016) said that organizational commitment had been initially elucidated as an intelligent strategy that ties employees to a company to reduce turnover. The definition of organizational commitment that is most frequently used, according to Zaraket (2017), is "the level of an individual's participation in his or her institute." Additionally, a worker's capacity to attain success in a company and his desire to maintain the connection without wanting to leave for another organization serve as indicators of loyalty (Zaraket, 2017).

Employees committed to the institution put in more effort to achieve its goals and show that they share its ideals (Cheah et al., 2016). Farrukh et al. (2016), with this approach, it is clear that many beneficial behavioral outcomes, such as better employee retention, efficacy, drive, commitment to excellence, and willingness to make sacrifices for an organization's reputation and performance, are connected with personnel commitment

Idiegbeyan-Ose et al. (2019) asserted that work performance is the aspect of the work behavior domain related to the job and the organization's goals. Organizational performance varies. Library jobs include, for example, material selection, acquisition, cataloguing, and classification, as well as borrowing and returning library materials to users. Fattah (2017) defined work performance as the conclusion of primary duties based on employees' areas of expertise toward accomplishing organizational goals. The skills and knowledge that library personnel ought to possess and exemplify while performing their responsibilities can be used to evaluate their performance. Intellectual capacity, technical knowledge, techniques, and behavioral attributes are competencies (Librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria, 2014). Anyim (2021b) uses librarian work performance to gauge the efficient delivery of library service in the library system. Individual performance is primarily determined by individual characteristics such as abilities, needs, beliefs, determination, willingness, experience, knowledge, and expectations. Motivation grows from the attitude of an employee who faces a work situation (Thoha, 2017). Parashakti et al. (2020) declared that the capacity of an employee to do the task assigned to them and the degree to which that task contributes to the achievement of the organization's objective are factors in work performance. Ubagu and Gbuushi (2020) concluded that respondents agreed that salary payment affects the library personnel work performance at Benue State universities.

In a study, the researchers used an ethics code to predict organizational commitment among public sector professionals and discovered a substantial positive relationship between the two (Kumasey et al., 2017). Uncommitted workers have many adverse effects on the company and the public, such as public sector organizations performing poorly, a lack of job security, a lack of trust, etc. Gupta et al. (2016) and Santos et al. (2016) stated that the most critical outcomes of work engagement are a practical organizational commitment. Work performance is impacted by organizational commitment. It signifies that if organizational commitment and strong confidence in the institutional standard and acceptance of principles and goals are improving, employees' work is characterized by their abilities, efforts, and working conditions. Consequently, organizational equity can be said to be consistent with what a person would expect (Suharto et al., 2019). Additionally, Suharto et al. (2019) recommended

strengthening organizational commitment, which entails firmly believing in the organization's values and objectives to increase abilities, effort, and the nature of working conditions. Also, according to some academics, organizational commitment directly influences employees' performance, making it a crucial concern (Nguyen & Tu, 2020; Sungu et al., 2020).

As said by Ahad et al. (2021), emotional intelligence and organizational commitment were discovered to have a significant positive correlation. It discloses that solid organizational commitment can result from emotional intelligence that is in the positive range. Additionally, Ahad et al. (2021) affirmed that emotional intelligence and work attitudes influence organizational commitment in a mutually beneficial way. An individual's behavior when executing the work assigned to him can be well predicted by his ability to develop emotional intelligence. Valaei and Rezaei (2016) study buttressed the correlation between work satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Shafaee and Bahramzadeh (2019) show a solid and favorable relationship between work performance and organizational commitment. Additionally, there is an effective and favorable correlation between employee performance and organizational commitment. The findings of Hur and Perry (2019) regarding the favorable effects of the repeal of the rules are consistent with the idea that traditional civil service protections increase employees' sense of security about their jobs and will increase their commitment to the company. Although there is a significant factor in achieving high performance, interpersonal relationships must be more readily taught (Burns et al., 2018). The outcomes of this study demonstrate that the working environment significantly positively impacts organizational commitment. As a result, the working environment significantly impacts how committed individuals are to the public sector. Therefore, the practical impact of this finding is that people in charge of organizations in the public sector should be mindful of the significance of fostering an atmosphere that encourages organizational commitment among their workforces (Ahakwa et al., 2021).

The Objective of the Study

The purpose of this research was to scrutinize the effects of organizational commitment and interpersonal relationships of library personnel on work performance in Nigeria universities.

Hypotheses

The null hypotheses listed below are framed and analyzed, and the significance level of p=0.05 guided it.

1. There is no significant correlation between interpersonal relationships and library personnel's organizational commitment to work performance in Nigeria universities.

2. There is no significant effect of interpersonal relationships and library personnel organizational commitment on work performance in Nigeria universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal Relationship

Strong ties between personnel in the same organization are known as interpersonal relationships. A direct relationship between employees is necessary for optimal performance. Employees must be truthful to

one another to maintain constructive interpersonal interaction and, ultimately, a positive work environment (Juneja, 2018).

Good relationships can lead to physiological changes that boost stress tolerance and performance (Coan et al., 2006). More so, Coan et al. (2006) discovered that the availability of physiological and neural responses to a threat or stress was changed by social resources, highlighting the capacity of relationships to minimize traumatic situations (Coan et al., 2006). Developing mutually beneficial interpersonal relationships is a dynamic activity that develops and develops as the athlete advances along their development path rather than being a passive activity (Burns et al., 2018).

Relationships between people are described as "interpersonal relationships." The relationships between an organization's stakeholders can also be identified as interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal relationships are described by Muhammed et al. (2018) as a potent association between people cooperating in the same organization. Therefore, interpersonal relationships in the context of the secondary education system refer to the connections between members of the secondary school organization. Therefore, a principal's interpersonal relationships include interactions with other school community members, including teachers, students, parents, administrators, and supervisors. In the same vein, Koula (2015) disclosed that interpersonal relationships between the principal and the subordinates are crucial to efficiently running the classroom and the community since they promote job satisfaction among teachers and student's academic success.

According to research, interpersonal relationships can have various significant physical and psychological health benefits. Some examples are loneliness management, improving stress resilience; reducing the likelihood of distress and suicidal behavior; reducing cardiovascular disease risk; and increasing vitality (Alvord et al., 2019; Grav et al., 2012).

It is necessary to understand how to interact with coworkers. According to Juneja (2018), some interpersonal relationship skills to cultivate a positive working relationship with coworkers include remaining positive at work; respecting your colleagues; being cheerful at work; ensuring that your coworkers feel valued; standing by your colleagues in times of crisis; being honest to others; being a patient listener; being friendly and kind to everyone; the personal interests of individuals should be put aside at work; and gaining the confidence of coworkers is facilitated by your reliability. In addition, in order to maintain positive working relationships, a worker must possess strong communication skills (both verbal and written).

According to Abari et al. (2016), the most influential individuals are motivated by their beautiful relationships with their staff members. It improves their morale and work performance. João and Portelada (2016), it is essential that all businesses try to prevent these actions so that interpersonal relationships can serve as a source of fulfilment and happiness based on reciprocal attention and respect. Njoku et al. (2020) discovered that respondents' work satisfaction in the Imo state is only slightly positively correlated with interpersonal relationships and institutional environment. It suggests that any alteration in the institutional environment, whether favorable or unfavorable, will inevitably impact the respondents' job satisfaction.

Major traumatic events can magnify interpersonal relationships' good and destructive features, giving rise to opposing narratives of harm and improvement (Goodwin, 2009; Joseph, 2013). In a study,

dyads dynamically gave meaning to their interpersonal relationships and contained consistently shifting elements during this time. Therefore, throughout the COVID-19 lockdown, vital elements of their interpersonal relationships influenced the formation and destruction of those bonds (Philippe et al., 2020).

Organizational Commitment

Saudi et al. (2016) defined organizational commitment as a person's attachment to the organization, as evidenced by the number of private time employees devote to the organization's task. Individuals' organizational behaviors are primarily influenced by organizational commitment (Sow, 2015). Numerous types of research have revealed that organizational commitment is beneficial to performance. Organizational commitment is a worker's interpersonal connection to their employer (Wertheim, 2016). Similar to this, organizational commitment is the degree of a person's loyalty, the extent to which they identify with and participate in a specific organization, as well as their acceptance of its values and commitment to employ much effort in carrying out their assigned tasks (Azeem & Akhtar, 2014). According to Hafiz (2017), organizational commitment is crucial for determining how much an individual contributes to their employer.

An individual dedicated to an organization believes in it and pursues it fervently, consciously, voluntarily, aggressively, and unceasingly (Akinyemi, 2014). However, it is conceivable for commitment to diminish, especially if the primary reason for commitment needs to be upheld or improved in alignment with one's perception and understanding (Akinyemi, 2014). Ethics is the foundation for establishing a solid working relationship, which is related to workers' intellectual capacity to behave in the organization. It is distinct from other types of commitment, such as workplace ethical endorsement, work performance, professional participation, and cooperative loyalty, which stress ethics, profession, and employment (Dajani, 2015; Rahman et al., 2015; Srivastava & Tang, 2015). A person's level of adoration for organizational values to detect issues and carry out their duties can be characterized as organizational commitment (Mohammed & Eleswd, 2013). Employees' capacity to assess how different cultures perform is based on their strong commitment to the firm's aims and beliefs, readiness to put in much work on their behalf, and desire to stay with the organization (Azeem, 2010; Stinglhamber et al., 2015).

The importance of how employees perceive their employer's support is highlighted by Pattnaik et al. (2020), which in turn helps to increase organizational commitment. It describes elements that make employees more devoted to their employers when their contributions are recognized and encouraged. At Oyo State academic and research libraries, Nigeria, Tella et al. (2007) discovered a substantial connection between employees' organizational commitment and work motivation.

Work Performance

Work performance describes the degree of output realized while carrying out a specific task or assignment. It may also be referred to as an activity, a process of carrying out a duty or function, or accomplishing a specific task concerning recognized accuracy criteria at the time, completeness, and cost (Billikopf, 2014). Completing tasks and performing well can provide individual workers with feelings of superiority and prestige. Unsatisfactory work performance and goal failure may be interpreted as personal failure. Poor organizational performance may result from various causes.

Popoola and Fagbola (2020) suggested that when library staff receives training, especially training designed to give them a chance to grow, they may feel that the enterprise appreciates them as people, strengthening their esteem and aiding in the building of more robust work engagement. Librarians' motivational factors working in libraries in Northeast Nigeria did not influence their work performance (Ikonne & Fajonyomi, 2019). Anyim (2021a) lists the contributing factors as job satisfaction, comprehension of their duty, a lack of necessary resources and facilities, domestic issues, physical conditions, and managerial errors.

Library Personnel Organizational Commitment

Al Zefeiti and Mohamad (2017) opined that organizational commitment is described as target groups' readiness to contribute their effort and allegiance to the societal structure, the social system's engagement of personal relationships that are seen as expressiveness. Mohammed and Eleswd (2013) also explained organizational commitment as the intensity with which someone accepts an organization's aims and principles and strictly adheres to them in carrying out their work obligations. Azeem (2010), Sharma and Sinha (2015), on the other hand, stated that organizational commitment is characterized by a deep commitment to the objectives of the organization and ideals, a readiness to put forth much work on its behalf, and a desire to continue as an organization member. Neubert and Halbesleben (2015) and Zachary (2013) said that unwavering faith in, acceptance of, and readiness to put forth a large part of the organization's part of the effort, as well as an intense urge to maintain the relationship with the firm, are all examples of organizational commitment. Organizational commitment refers to employee attachment to an organization.

Organizational commitment is the level to which people adopt the organization's mission and principles and identify with them when carrying out their duties (Mohammed & Eleswd, 2013). Al Zefeiti and Mohamad (2017) and Azeem (2010) expressed that employees seem to work better and more effectively when they have a powerful commitment to the organization's mission and values, are prepared to put forth significant effort on its behalf and want to stay with the company. The findings of Soomro and Shah (2019) reveal how committed employees are to helping their companies succeed, and the solid organizational commitment of the surveyed participants demonstrates the ingenuity and steadfastness that go into creating a successful business.

According to Lapointe and Vanderberghe (2018), the social actors' readiness to exert themselves and allegiance to the social system is known as organizational commitment. Jayaweera (2015) and Platis et al. (2014) expressed that affiliation with the social interactions personality system allows for expressiveness, which raises employee morale, encourages improved work habits, and results in work accomplishment. Yahaya and Ebrahim (2016) averred that organizational commitment is crucial because, once formed, it may be helpful in several positive company outcomes. It is critical to foster organizational commitment among employees because workers fervently committed to their organizations are more liable to remain longer, provide higher outcomes, and seem very active at work (Yahaya & Ebrahim, 2016). Additionally, committed employees show devotion to their employers and take an active role in society (Dey et al., 2014). Employee retention, involvement, efficiency, job quality, and personal dedication to accomplishing organizational goals are all associated with employee commitment (Hanaysha, 2016).

Udofia and Ibegwam (2019) affirmed that organizational commitment is linked to whether and why people stick with their company. Greater focus must be placed on organizational and human issues influencing librarian dedication in the Nigerian university library setting. Additionally, as low commitment is linked to high levels of employment agility, earnings, transactions, and decreased effort expenditure, deliberate efforts should be undertaken to encourage more substantial commitment among library personnel to improve staff loyalty, retention, and utilization. Dominic and Salim (2018) stated that it is possible to say that commitment is equivalent to an employee's membership in the company. The link between a worker and the organization best represents an organizational commitment. It is a mental state that affects whether or not an employee decides to remain an organization member. Organizational commitment has consistently been the most crucial determinant factor status of corporate citizenship behaviors (Grego-Planer, 2019). Also, gender diversity has been firmly supported by Hsu and Lawler (2019) as a factor in organizational commitment at high job difficulty. Performance is not enhanced by gender diversity, even when the task complexity is low at the workplace level.

Consequently, Engelberg et al. (2011) and Widyaningrum (2011) demonstrated that organizational commitment favors both employee and organizational performance. The primary factor in determining an organization's competitiveness is organizational commitment, which boosts staff self-esteem and loyalty (Hayat et al., 2019; Hendri, 2019; Yousef, 2017). Ahmad et al. (2019), Joe-Akunne and Ezeh (2019), and Karunarathne and Wickramasekara (2020) emphasized that employee behavior and performance are frequently clearly correlated with organizational commitment. Personnel turnover and absences are alike if they are passionate about the organization. Thus, it is essential to routinely assess staff members dedicated to addressing any potential problems and ensure they keep a positive outlook on the job that is required for the organization's overall success.

Library Personnel Work Performance

Kibichii et al. (2016) contended that, contrary to what employers want from training, training outcomes should emphasize performance rather than merely learning. When librarians identify a lack of supervisor recognition of their operation as a hindrance to work performance, It suggests that they are unmotivated to do their best. Additionally, Nwokike and Unegbu (2019) stated that if librarians receive regular training or learn new skills, they will be able to meet the demands of a demanding work environment. A researcher indicated in a study that training has a constructive influence on the work performance of library personnel; the perceived impact of training on library personnel's work performance at universities is felt to a greater extent than at other universities in the state (Ubagu & Gbuushi, 2020).

Library personnel may work more effectively when they receive recognition from library management, are compensated for their efforts, are sponsored to participate in workshops, conferences, and seminars both within and beyond the library, receive their remuneration in the stipulated time and are frequently promoted for their excellent work performance. As a result of their moderate motivation, the librarians in these libraries performed their jobs moderately well. However, this strengthens the correlation between motivation and work performance (Ikonne & Fajonyomi, 2019). Happy

workers are commonly portrayed as having high job satisfaction scales. Moreover, several meta-analysis studies have investigated predictions of a strong correlation between work performance and job satisfaction (Salgado et al., 2019). Olusadum and Anulika (2018) concluded that motivation positively impacts organizational staff performance and helps reduce or minimize inefficiency. Thus, organizational management must implement adequate measures to improve motivation, as this helps attract employees and increase organizational productivity.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research employed a descriptive survey method. The descriptive survey method, which enables the use of a questionnaire as a data-gathering tool, was considered acceptable for this investigation. The ability to explore and analyze correlations amongst that significant number of participants or a geographically scattered focused population was one of the key justifications for using this method. It made it possible to measure interpersonal relationships, organizational commitment, and work performance on a precise and objective basis as perceived by library personnel.

Study Population

The population represents the entire population that will be studied. According to Burns and Grove (2010), a population is an entire group meeting the sampling criteria for a research study. This study's target population consists of librarians and library officers working in the nominated six Nigerian university libraries.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample is a discrete segment of the population chosen for investigation. One can draw certain conclusions about the features of the population from which the sample was drawn by looking at the sample's demographics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The total enumeration technique selected 89 librarians and 66 library officers in the six partaking Nigeria university libraries. The target population for the study is not too big for the researcher to cover; hence the total enumeration method was employed.

Instrument(s) for Data Collection

This study's data collection instrument was the interpersonal relationship, organizational commitment and work performance of library personnel (IROCWPLP) questionnaire. It was developed for the library personnel at all six Nigerian university libraries participating in the study. The questionnaire items were explicitly created to achieve the research objectives. The survey was broken down into four segments 1-4. Section 1 contains demographic information, including the respondents' bio-data, like marital status, educational qualifications, age, gender, work experience, and professional status (six items). Section 2 covers items on interpersonal relationships. The researcher self-designed 18 items in this section. Section 3 comprises items on organizational commitment. 15 items scale in this part was adapted from Popoola and Fagbola (2021). Section 4 contains items on work performance. It is a five items scale adapted from (Tella & Ibinaiye, 2020). All items in the whole questionnaire comprised 38 in all. Sections 2-4 adopted a five-point response format ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Table 1. Test-re-test for the research instrument's analysis output

Segments	Numbers of items	Cronbach's alpha
Segment1	18	0.928
Segment2	15	0.770
Segment3	5	0.763
Overall reliability	**38**	**0.820**

Table 2. Distribution of the questionnaire at each participating library

University libraries	Librarians	Library officers	Total
A	24	20	44
B	14	9	23
C	10	8	18
D	10	1	11
E	24	10	34
F	10	15	25
Grand total	**89**	**66**	**155**

Validity of Instrument

Abbas (2015) opined that validity and reliability are essential in determining the worthiness and acceptability of research findings. The instrument was given to library and information research experts to guarantee the validity of the data collection tool utilized in this study. The instrument was modified based on the expert's observations, suggestions, and comments. This determined that the instrument had face, content, and constructs validity, confirming its suitability for this study.

Instrument Reliability

Reliability of the instrument refers to how consistently an instrument measures the things it says it measures. This questionnaire was administered to 15 library personnel working at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, to ensure the reliability of the questionnaire used to collect data. A test-re-test method of two weeks intervals was employed. Afterwards, the replies gathered were tested using Cronbach's alpha. The entire 38-item instrument's overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was determined to be r=0.820. This is deemed sufficient, confirming the questionnaire's reliability for use in the study. **Table 1** shows the reliability coefficient for each sub-scale.

Data Collection Procedure

To ensure a high response rate, the researcher and two research assistants administered the questionnaire on interpersonal relationships, organizational commitment, and work performance of library personnel to the respondents in their respective libraries. Because the best time to interact with library personnel is during opening hours, copies of the surveys were distributed during that time.

The respondents received copies of 155 questionnaires. Responses were gathered right away after they were distributed to the participants. The respondent's support and the research assistants' efforts ensured that the exercise went off without a hitch. Out of the 155 copies questionnaire administered, 150 copies were returned and correctly filled, amounting to a response rate of 96%, which was used for the analysis. **Table 2** summarizes the distribution of questionnaires in each of Nigeria's partaking university libraries. The breakdown of the sample is presented in **Table 2**.

Table 3 shows the aministration and retrieval of questionnaires by library personnel in each participating library.

Table 3. Administration and retrieval of questionnaires by library personnel in each participating library

University lbraries	Total population	Administered questionnaire	Number of responses	Rate of response (%)
A	44	44	44	100
B	23	23	22	97
C	18	18	18	100
D	11	11	11	100
E	34	34	32	94
F	25	25	23	92
Grand total	**155**	**155**	**150**	**96**

Table 4. Pearson's zero-order correlations between study variables

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3
Interpersonal relationship	2.77	0.79	1.000		
Organizational commitment	3.13	0.45	.463 (p=.000)	1.000	
Work performance	1.66	0.41	.195 (p=.017)	.215 (p=0.008)	1.000

Methods of Data Analysis

The respondents' biographical information was examined using frequency counts and percentages as descriptive statistics. Furthermore, inferential statistics were used to analyze the research hypotheses 1 to 4 at an alpha level of significance of 0.05, including PPMC and multiple linear regression.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Results revealed the respondents' bio-data. The results showed that out of 150 respondents, 44 (29.3%) were from the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, while 22 (14.7%) were from the Federal University of Technology, Minna, 18 (12.0%) were from Federal University, Lokoja, and 11 (7.3%) were from Kwara State University, Malete. This is followed by the respondents from Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai and Kogi State University, Ayingba, represented by 32 (21.4%) and 23 (15.3%), respectively. In summary, most respondents were from the University of Ilorin, Ilorin. Furthermore, the results showed that 80 (53.3%) were male, while 70 (46.7%) were female. This implies that the vast majority of respondents were male. In the same vein, the result revealed that 15 (10.0%) fall between the ages of 20-29, while 89 (59.4%) fall between the ages of 30-39. This is followed by the respondents that fall between the ages of 40-49, represented by 30 (20.0%), while the least of the respondents fall between the ages of 50 and above, represented by 14 (9.3%). In summary, it can be deduced that most respondents fall between the ages of 30-39. Based on the educational qualification of the respondents, 23 (15.3%) are ND holders, while 42 (28.0%) hold HND degrees. More so, 56 (37.3%) were BSc/BLIS holders while 26 (17.4%) were MSc/MLIS holders; next to this are the respondents that were PhD holders represented by three (2.0%). The distribution of years of work experience of the respondents revealed that 59(39.3%) have six-10 years of work experience, 39(26.0%) have one-five years of work experience, 25(16.7%) have 11-15 years of work experience, 19(12.7%) has 16-20 years of work experience, 6(4.0%) has 21-25 years of work experience, while two (1.3%) has 26-30 years of work experience. This suggests that most of those surveyed have six-10 years of work experience. The professional status distribution of respondents showed that 65 (43.3%) of the respondent's library officers, i.e., paraprofessionals staff, while 85 (56.7%) were librarians, i.e., professionals staff. This implies that the vast majority of those surveyed were librarians.

Table 4 displays the correlation matrixes for zero-order Pearson of respondents' interpersonal relationships, organizational commitment, and work performance. It is presumed that there is a significant correlation between interpersonal relationships and work performance (r=.195, p<.05); organizational commitment and work performance (r=.215, p<.05). Additionally, there is a significant correlation between interpersonal relationship and organizational commitment (r=.463, p<.05) of the respondents.

The result in **Table 5** displayed the interpersonal relationship, organizational commitment, and work performance of library personnel regression results. Regression analysis results reveal an adjusted R^2 value of 0.145 ([a] in **Table 5**) and an F-ratio of 13.677 ([b] in **Table 5**); the latter is significant at the level of 0.05 (0.000<0.05). According to these findings, the two independent variables—interpersonal relationships and organizational commitment—together explained or projected 16% of the variations in the work performance of library personnel as indicated by the R^2 value. The F-ratio suggests that the foretold is also significant.

Table 5 (c) shows the individual contributions of the two factors in determining library personnel work performance. Firstly, the results show that every factor significantly influences the forecast, as shown by the significance of the t values, which are higher than 0.05, as shown in the "t" column of the table. Furthermore, the standardized coefficients (β values), which demonstrate the relative significance of each variable influencing library personnel work performance, showed that interpersonal relationships contributed to the determinant of work performance (β value=.375), followed in positive increasing order of strength by organizational commitment (β=.389). These outcomes indicate that the two factors (interpersonal relationship and organizational commitment) significantly contribute to determining library personnel work performance.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study revealed a significant correlation between interpersonal relationships and work performance, thus suggesting that a rise in the interpersonal relationship will result in a rise in work performance. This is in line with Abari et al. (2016) that the most influential individuals are motivated by their beautiful relationships with their staff members, thus improving their morale and work performance. Furthermore, the study also revealed a significant correlation between organizational commitment and work performance, thus denoting that

Table 5. Analysis of respondents' work performance using hierarchical regression

(a) Model summary

Multiple R	.396
R^2	.157
Adjusted R^2	.145
Standard error of the estimate	.37723

(b) ANOVA

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	3.892	2	1.946	13.677	.000
Residual	20.918	147	.142		
Total	24.811	149			

(c) Coefficients

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients		
	B	Standard error	β	T	Sig.
(Constant)	2.239	.220		10.187	.000
Interpersonal relationship	.195	.044	.375	4.391	.000
Organizational commitment	.357	.078	.389	4.552	.000

a rise in organizational commitment will result in a rise in work performance. This agrees with Shafaee and Bahramzadeh (2019) study that there is a solid and favorable relationship between work performance and organizational commitment. Also, this result aligns with Nguyen and Tu (2020) and Sungu et al. (2020), who reported that according to some academics, organizational commitment directly influences employees' performance, making it a crucial concern.

Similarly, this study found that interpersonal relationships and organizational commitment are essential factors in work performance among library personnel. The relationship that occurs in this study among interpersonal relationships, organizational commitment, and work performance corresponds with that of Ahmad et al. (2019), Joe-Akunne and Ezeh (2019), and Karunarathne and Wickramasekara (2020) emphasized that employee behavior and performance are frequently clearly correlated with organizational commitment. Additionally, this supports the conclusions of Njoku et al. (2020), which ascertained that respondents' work satisfaction in the Imo state is only slightly positively correlated with interpersonal relationships and institutional environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study's findings demonstrate how variables, including interpersonal relationships and organizational commitment, affect work performance. Conclusions are drawn that there is a significant relationship between library personnel's interpersonal relationships, work performance, and organizational commitment based on the study's findings. This finding explains why an increase in the organizational commitment of library personnel and interpersonal relationships tends to influence their work performance positively.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Managers and heads of libraries are urged to try to persuade library staff to enroll in international courses on interpersonal relationships by providing funding through the tertiary education fund.

Library staff members should receive internal training on interpersonal relationships to support efficient service delivery every three months.

In order to improve library staff commitment patterns pertinent to organizational objectives, it is crucial for university library administrators and supervisors to identify these patterns.

To improve abilities, effort, and the nature of work, organizational commitment—which consists of faith in the organization's values and goals—should be strengthened.

Finally, a provincial and national comparison of organizational commitment, interpersonal relationships, and employee work performance in other state and private organizations needs to be addressed.

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Research Article

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Online learning support to reinforce motivation of university students during homeschool exodus

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ABSTRACT
Due to the perplexity of students' experience during online learning, they are demotivated in the current academic set-up. The support that they receive is crucial for their academic journey. This study aimed to determine the learning support to reinforce students' motivation during homeschool exodus. It also examines how they deal with emergency remote education and the learning support they need to maximize their motivation during their exodus to homeschool classes. Guided by the principles of content analysis, analysis of the transcripts elucidate that students desire for digital empathetic language, relational, financial, familial, environmental, and technological learning support to reinforce their learning motivations and engage them for academic continuity during this emergency education. Drawing on motivation through context-specific materials, scholarship support, positive feedback, socialization strategies, and group dynamics during online learning can encourage students to persevere academically in times of radical changes.

Keywords: COVID-19, online learning, learning support, engagement, motivation, reinforcement

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INTRODUCTION

A crucial difference in principles, pedagogy, and practices is seen between online learning and emergency remote education (ERE). Hodges et al. (2020) pointed out that online learning is well-planned and is qualitatively different in instructional delivery during a crisis or disaster. Hence, educational institutions should demarcate these distinctions when evaluating their ERE. Bozkurt and Sharma (2020a) stressed that online learning is a flexible alternative to learning that considers the context, engagement, and needs of the students and is more than simply uploading educational content on the Internet. The comprehensive process of online distance education involves meticulous planning, design, and goal determination to establish an effective learning ecology that empowers students with "agency, responsibility, flexibility, and choice" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020, p. ii).

In contrast, what the educational organizations are pursuing during this massive online experiment can be rightly termed as ERE, which is a temporary solution (Hodges et al., 2020) to prevent disruption of learning during the sudden transition to the virtual environments. ERE is the development of a rapid curriculum (Crawford et al., 2020) that is mandatory and indispensable during these critical times. It is a pedagogical obligation that involves practices such as uploading of teaching materials or sharing of online or offline tools (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020b). Hence, ERE or which some authors termed as

emergency online learning (EOL) (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Hussein et al., 2020) cannot equate the established rigors, effectiveness, and standards of online education as pointed out in previous studies (Patrick & Powell, 2009; Pozzi et al., 2019; Yuwono & Sujono, 2018).

Transitioning to virtual mode of learning is inevitable during pandemic, which has its opportunities and drawbacks. Part of the opportunities is not causing disruption to the learning of the students (Huang et al., 2020; Karalis, 2020) despite the emergency. In contrast, some students experience strident inequalities in the educational horizons (Grewenig et al., 2020; Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020) due to the heightened increase of neoliberalism during the pandemic.

Students experience educational challenges during the shift to ERE. They encounter pedagogical, technological, psychological, and social challenges, etc. (Ferri et al., 2020; Khlaif & Salha, 2020; Maqsood et al., 2021) that cause nuanced to their learning endeavors in ERE. For instance, a study (Ferri et al., 2020) revealed that online learning problems of the students include the abundance of online resources and learners' lack of interactivity and motivation, among others. Spatial separation, self-isolation, quarantine, social and economic discord, and misinformation (particularly on social media) are all significant contributors to unusual sadness, fear, frustration, helplessness, loneliness, and nervousness (Ahorsu et al., 2022; Sakib et al., 2020) among students during online learning.
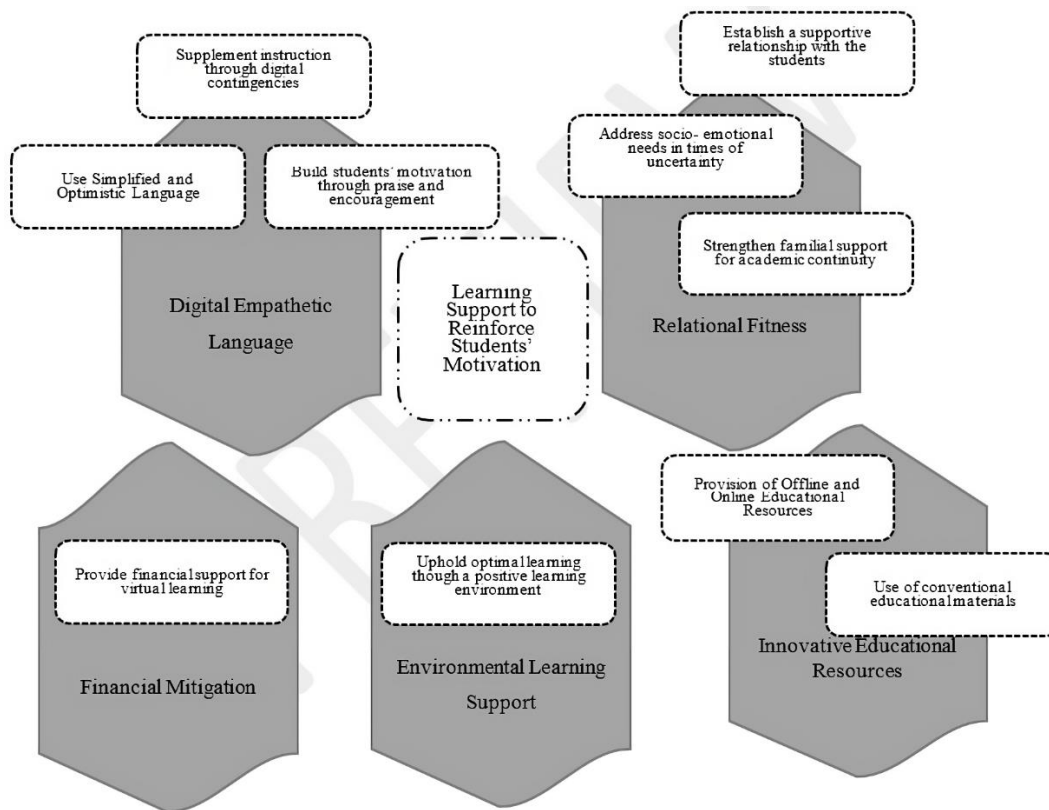
Figure 1. Themes and categories on online learning support to reinforce students' motivation (Source: Author)

Due to these experiences associated with learning online during pandemic, academic motivation among students has deteriorated (Gustiani, 2020; Smith et al., 2021), which calls for an increase attention to examine students' motivation. It is of critical importance for students to receive appropriate intervention and learning support to augment their motivation for scholastic achievement despite the setbacks in the current online context of learning. Hence, this study aimed to determine the learning support to reinforce students' motivation during homeschool exodus. Students perceived that these academic and psychological support can serve as strategies to motivate them during online learning. The transcripts revealed the significant strategies that teachers and parents can derive from this article to create a human-centered pedagogy during online learning.

METHODS AND DESIGN

Design and Sampling

This study employed a conventional content analysis to determine the online learning support to reinforce students' motivation during homeschool exodus. The use of document review was also employed to interpret textual data that the students have provided in their learning modules. Most of the students have intermittent connections so the interview method was not possible in gathering the data. However, the researcher chatted some of them for follow up questions about their answers on the modules.

Participants who participated in the study included 35 college students. These students did not experience meeting their classmates and instructors face-to-face since they started at the university. They were tasked to provide the learning support that they need during their online learning through modules. They consented of the nature of this

study and volunteered to participate in the study. The participants were chosen regardless of their economic, cultural, and religious affiliations. This study made use of the data from the participants who gave their consent. Out of 132 students, only 35 students were qualified for the inclusion criteria, which was the submission of one completed module. Other students did not complete the module since it was not a requirement to do so.

Collection of Documents

The instructor gave the modules to the students through the Telegram application. The students find the platform convenient since it requires less cost for mobile data and storage space. The participants of the study submitted their modules in the Telegram application. The module was part of the introductory topics. The students answered the lesson hook/motivation activity. They were given enough time to answer the module since the instructor needed to consider their situation. The module asked the students to provide the learning support that they need during that may help them improve their motivation for online learning during the pandemic.

Data Analysis

The researcher applied a conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An initial reading of transcripts was done for possible codes, which came from qualified selection of modules and based on students' consent. Subsequent coding was done based on the initial reading of module transcripts. These written transcripts were read line by line. To prevent drifting from the coding strategy, a code book helped the researcher in the analysis. The codes were sorted based on similarity of content and themes were formulated from the categories. Final step was done when researcher finalized the structure and selected themes and categories. The analysis resulted in 10 categories divided across five themes, as shown in **Figure 1**.

Table 1. Digital empathetic language as learning support to reinforce students' motivation

Supplement instruction through digital contingencies	S26. Providing video in replace of online lecture
	S24. Provide models or scenarios related to the topic.
	S12. Performance activities that encourage the students to recall prior knowledge
	S28. Encourage students to evaluate new information and modify prior knowledge
	S29. Encourage group work and the use of peers as resources
Use simplified & optimistic language	S1. Simplify language, repeat words and clarify meanings.
	S11. Simplified lessons for better understanding with examples from different views
	S13.Use hopeful and optimistic language
	S24. Learning with positivity and enhanced teaching strategy for better online learning
	S5. Use hopeful and optimistic language. This will help students look forward to coming back to the campus.
Build students' motivation through praise & encouragement	S1. Include praise and encouragement as part of the student's learning and teaching experience
	S12. Provide learning to students & let them enjoy process practicing competence & considering different situations in midst of pandemic
	S9. Giving words of encouragement such as positive affirmations … This might push students to engage themselves more in learning
	S22. Motivate the students with the inspirational experiences of a teacher
	S23. Encourage the students to be socially aware

FooterWillBeHere

Table 2. Relational fitness to reinforce students' motivation

Establish a supportive relationship with the students	S3. Facilitating student to create a strong bond and connection with each other.
	S5. E-mail your students to remind them that you are still there for them.
	S13. Let your students know that you are there for them & that if they need help to reach out to you. Ask each of your students what they learn & how you can help them.
	S11. A reciprocal relationship between teachers & students. Teachers have duties to students and that students have duties to their teachers
Address socio-emotional needs in times of uncertainty	S4. Increasing student interaction
	S25. Socialize with friends through social media platform
	S3. We need to connect emotionally especially in times of anxiety and uncertainty, emotions are key to learning.
	S34. Equitable support and guidance from educators and parents for every students' physical and emotional well-being.
Strengthen familial support for academic continuity	S3. Open communication with my family members at home as well as my blockmates [classmates].
	S12. My parent should support me emotionally that interrelate to my studies to effectively gain learning.
	S35. Motivations and moral support of family are needed.
	S14. Nowadays support from the family is the most important that we would ever want rather than any other things.

RESULTS

Motivation is crucial for learning especially in the realms of the new normal. The students need all the support that they may obtain from their personal and educational circles to expand their repertoire during the transition to ERE. Themes, categories, and sample excerpts were derived from the data analysis.

Teachers necessitate to make the learning possible for the students through the application of digital technology. The students articulated the value of digital assessments, meaningful learning, and inspirational experiences of their teachers to encourage them to learn (**Table 1**). Teachers should "encourage and motivate students that despite the difficulties of home and online based learning, instructors are ready to give support and hope to the students to continue fostering [their] skills, knowledge and competencies" (S26). To ensure that students learn from the topics, "educators may provide infographic videos and articles" (S37). Due to the Internet connection hindrances, teachers need to supplement the learning of the students such as through online assessments. However, teachers should not neglect the integration of values in discussions. In that case, pre-service teachers reiterated to design activities that will foster empathy to help the students "understand and learn from underlying situations and allow them to integrate rules that will later help them" (S36).

A strong relational support given to the students can assist them for academic continuity despite the pandemic (**Table 2**). One student commented of trying to brainstorm alone (S11) but still looked to the social support of peers and teachers (S5: "I need to ask help and

questions from my teachers and classmates to grow"). Evidently, teachers should communicate with their students and reach out to them to offer words of comfort given the opportunity to do so to lessen the students' psychological stress. Likewise, teachers need to address the social and emotional needs of the students for greater online classroom involvement (S19). As one student commented, giving emotional support is crucial since "emotions can help students to engage with learning longer because they are motivated" (S18).

Student 36 also added familial, spiritual, and mental support as part of the learning support to continue learning (She said: I'm losing my faith to continue this kind of system but I'm so happy to have spiritual family that are always there for me to continue and move forward.). Teachers should communicate with the parents to remind them of their children's education and request understanding of their children's situation at home (S35: "There are times that I want to give up so just a little encouragement from them well help me to continue"). Moreover, the students also call for financial learning support aside from the socio-emotional support (**Table 3**) (S8: "Methods of providing financial support to students such as scholarships, work study programs and etc."). Inequalities arise in the educational ecosystem when students cannot access the Internet due to financial constraints within the familial settings. Studies confirmed that economic conditions affect student learning (Castleman & Meyer, 2019; Moneva et al., 2020). In that case, it is a pivotal role of the academic community to mitigate this inequality. The university's need to arrive of financial programs to assist the students' financial needs particularly supporting their need for load allowances, mobile devices, and others to alleviate their predicaments.

Table 3. Financial mitigation to reinforce students' motivation

Share financial support for virtual learning	S4. Financial and emotional support from my family and friends in times uncertainties
	S30. I need financial support especially now, because our internet connection is not **available,** so my resort is to go to the store and to register my sim to have access in data
	S33. Financial support is essential. To survive amidst this COVID-19 pandemic, our mobile loads will be our bridge in learning aside from our determination to study
	S34. Family support by giving me time for me to read & answer my module also through financial assistance especially money for my load

Table 4. Environmental learning support to reinforce students' motivation

Uphold optimal learning though a positive learning environment	S29. Positive learning environment
	S34. A quiet comfortable place, where I cannot be distracted by unnecessary noises thus making me focused on the task given greatly
	S20. Little consideration from teachers when problem in connection arises
	S3. Simple study space at home for a comfortable study environment.

Table 5. Innovative educational resources to reinforce students' motivation

Provision of off-line & online educational resources	S21. Platforms for synchronous and asynchronous sessions (Zoom, Google Meet, Messenger, Telegram, Facebook, etc.)
	S16. Better communication through social media
	S13. Educational videos on YouTube or personally made educational videos
	S32. Films, multimedia, recorded lecture, movies, videos, and slides
Use of conventional educational materials	S3. Writing materials including pens, pencil, notebooks, and papers
	S7. Story Books that the students can engage with, and they can learn/ reflect from it
	S5. Self-Learning modules provided by the teachers
	S1. My own bullet journal to keep my schedule and tasks on track

Studying through synchronous and asynchronous settings present challenges for the students. As a solution, teachers would need to make EOL classroom conducive for the students (**Table 4**). The educators should make the online classroom optimistic, engaging, and interactive for the students to rid them of boredom and pandemic fatigue (S15: "I believed that a teacher should make the online learning environment as interactive, intimate, and enjoyable as possible. An interactive curriculum is more memorable to students as they were surrounded by the language of loneliness because of the threat of COVID-19"). Likewise, some students may experience the difficulties of having to study at home due to the demands of taking care of some members of the family, environmental distractions, home chores etc. These issues are confirmed from studies (Barrot et al., 2021; Kapasia et al., 2020) that these beset the home learning of the students. They desire for a "stimulating educational environment … [to] grow and be able to meet their full potential" (S6).

Students' motivation for EOL may increase when they have technological support for their classes online (**Table 5**). Based on the analysis, students expect the utilization of online platforms and social media during this educational emergency. They added that teachers can introduce offline learning apps for those students who lack regular internet connection in some location. They also emphasized having self-learning modules, writing materials, and visual organizers to support their learning (S32: "Introducing different offline options and application;" S34: "Yellow pad and pen. This is also needed because occasionally I need to write to have some notes and to have a paper in case there are activities;" S7: "Visual aids that helps the students organize their knowledge").

DISCUSSION

Students face technological challenges such as unreliability of the Internet connections and lack of necessary electronic devices (Cleofas & Rocha, 2021). Whilst the social and pedagogical challenges they encounter are mainly related to the lack of human interaction between teachers and students, lack of physical spaces at home to receive lessons, lack of motivation, and lack of support of parents who are working remotely in the same spaces (Ferri et al., 2020). These samples of prevailing challenges among the students during ERE need appropriate attention and intervention. As a response to reinforce their motivation for learning, this study aimed to determine the learning support that students need during their emergency remote learning.

Analysis of the transcripts illustrated that students want teachers who are empathetic toward their individual situations. Due to multiple functions at home and inevitable distractions in their current learning arrangements (Baticulon et al., 2021), they call for understanding and use of empathetic language among teachers. In the new normal, they need educational materials that would provide insightful learning through group works, reflection tasks, or performance activities. They also call for engaging teaching strategies that would supplement their learning without sacrificing quality of content. Since the students are also dealing with voluminous learning modules that teachers require from them, they stressed for the use of simplified language in educational materials and sporadic encouragement from teachers so that they are motivated in accomplishing their learning modules and participating in virtual classes. Students value praises and encouragements especially during this time in which they are submerging in a highly complex educational setting with numerous multifunction roles and responsibilities at home. Hence, teachers should continue to use empathetic remarks and encouraging words that show they provide human-centered pedagogy and pedagogy of care towards the students (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2021).

Likewise, students emphasized the value of a supportive climate whether at home or in school. They want their teachers and family to understand their situations. To address their socio-emotional needs, the university should foster strong linkage to the family unit so that the parents will know how to assist the scholastic and psychological support

to their children. Parental support during homeschooling is valuable for home-based students (Nantwi & Boateng, 2020).

Amidst the pandemic, the connectivity between the universities and stakeholders are important more than ever to survive the adverse educational hindrances and to reinvent education in the context of the learners rather than the curriculum (Zhao, 2020). The interdependence of the teachers as supervisors and the parents as home educators is indispensable to the socio-emotional needs of the children. The undivided efforts to amplify students' motivation for learning throughout the global crisis need to thrive since "knowledge and solidarity are the key to long-term survival and flourishing of the human race" (Jandric, 2020, p. 237).

Since numerous students at the university under this study are from lower income or middle income families, they asked for financial support for ERE. Although they are all government scholars upon entering the university, and a few students have other standing scholarships, many students reiterated that that they needed financial support for their virtual learning so that they can have the determination to carry on with their studies through ERE. They have to spend their allowances to access mobile data for the Internet connection for at least five hours a day for one week. It is a financial struggle for many students, so they cannot attend emergency online classes daily. Aside from that, some of their parents are also struggling economically, so they are also affected with the existing predicaments. This is similar to the study (Moneva et al., 2020) that parents' financial support is associated with the motivation of students in their school tasks, and that low income interferes with their engagement in their studies (Castleman & Meyer, 2019).

Prior to the pandemic, the students are used to the actual classroom, so they remain focused and motivated while learning. However, it is a different learning arrangement at home. Realistically, some students do not have a separate learning area for their studies. Others even have to travel in distance to secure internet connection during their virtual learning. Nevertheless, the students yearned for a positive learning space at home such as having an environment free from distractions and noises. On the other hand, a noisy and complex environment is a cause for distraction in home learning (Lischer et al., 2021), so students need to find conducive spaces for learning at home. Students can focus on their lessons and are motivated to learn despite the new normal curriculum when they are supported with a modified learning area suited for their learning needs. They learn better when their learning environmental needs are met according to their learning styles (El-Sabagh, 2021), so a consideration of psychological and physical home learning environment is valuable for them to stay engaged during ERE.

> "It is high time for higher education to renew, recalibrate, and reposition itself in the educational landscape. This would require the institution of higher education to regenerate itself and be born again. Like the Phoenix (also known as: anqā, sīmorgh), it needs to rise from the ashes, but to do this, it must first face the flames" (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020b, p. v).

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Online learning during the pandemic has presented hindrances among students in a complex home environment. To cope with the challenges, appropriate motivation given to the students can support their learning experiences. A provision for financial mitigation, digital empathetic language, relational fitness, environmental learning support, and innovative educational resources can motivate them during these complex emergencies. When students learn internal locus control, they are empowered to view success despite complexities. Teachers should apply the pedagogy of care and a human-centered pedagogy such as praise, encouragement, and empathy during academic exchange with students. The emotional and mental well-being of students should be a priority, especially during times of distress. External and internal motivation can drive them to academic resilience. Drawing on motivation through context-specific materials, scholarship support, positive feedback, socialization strategies, and group dynamics during online learning can encourage students to persevere academically. With reference to social and curricular implications, educational systems should ensure the future of every student to create a better post-pandemic world.

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Media framing and construction of socio-political issues in Nigeria: (Dis)connection between theory and professional ethics?

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ABSTRACT

For decades, the socio-political environment the press operates in had conditioned it to always build prominence around phenomena and people, using language as a strong carrier. Knowing full well that the press can escalate or de-escalate the salience of events through news reportage, media scholars saw the necessity for the institutionalization of some regulatory principles for the press. This is known as social responsibilities. This position paper interrogates the connection or disconnection between two media theories (framing and identity construction) and Nigerian journalism practice as codified by Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) code of ethics, using the farmer-herder crisis and Independent People of Biafra's (IPOB) call for secession as cases. Having identified a plethora of negative frames and constructed identities around the two cases selected from 19 empirical papers conducted between 2015 and 2021, the findings show that the Nigerian press (newspapers) lean more towards war and ethnic journalism than peace/solution-driven journalism while reporting issues related to the two cases. The paper argues that the journalism practice of the Nigerian press, most times, aligns with the propositions of framing and identity construction theories, but largely disconnects from its ethical principles. In order to have a socially responsible journalism practice in Nigeria, this paper joins the conversation on advocacy for peace/solution-driven journalism.

Keywords: framing-identity construction, NUJ code of ethics, farmer-herder & IPOB, war-peace journalism, social responsibility

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INTRODUCTION

Similar to other countries of the world facing certain challenges peculiar to their territories, Nigeria too cannot be excluded from challenges peculiar to her socio-political environment. Prominent among the socio-political issues retarding Nigeria's growth and development include corruption, poverty, unemployment, insecurity, political instability and bad governance (Obamuyi & Fapetu, 2016). To inform Nigerians about these socio-political challenges and call the attention of political actors (such as governments and politicians) to the challenges, the mass media is expected to perform the multiple roles of information dissemination, education, sensitization and surveillance of its environment. Traditionally, these are the social responsibilities of the mass media.

In most societies, the mass media perform different functions, influenced by the different sociopolitical philosophies or ideologies they operate with (Deuze, 2004) and the political atmosphere where they operate (Center for Democracy, 1999 & Mungiu-Pippidi, 2008). For example, the agenda-setting function of the media primarily places the direction in which public discussions take in the hands of the media to

the extent that the media determine and/or influence issues that become "prominent in the public mind" (McCombs, 2011). While performing this function, the media uses their platforms to "focus on public attention" (public agenda) (McCombs, 2011). In setting the public agenda, *objects* are given *attributes* to be discussed by the public through the same media or off the media. According to Valenzuela and McCombs (2014), the public agenda is largely dependent on journalistic norms and decisions of the final gatekeepers. With Valenzuela and McCombs's (2014) position, it becomes insightful to submit that the agenda-setting function of the media develops into media framing-- the second level of agenda-setting theory.

In addition, other functions of the mass media can be viewed from the perspective of the social responsibility theory of the press. Drawing from McQuail's (2013) list of the expected social obligations of the media and the provisions of the Nigerian Union of Journalists' (NUJ) code of ethics (NUJ, 2019), one concludes that the social responsibility functions of the media promote peace journalism (De Michelis, 2018; Hanitzsch, 2004; Oluoch et al., 2017) rather than the war-inciting practice common to contemporary journalism. What then are these peace-focused responsibilities of the media as entrenched in the NUJ code of ethics? They include avoiding editorialization of facts;

promoting accurate, objective, balanced and fair journalism; avoiding abusive or vulgar expressions in news reports; refraining from pejorative inferences to people's ethnic groups and religions, which will amount to discrimination; promoting national unity, peace, human rights, equity and public good through news reports; and enhancing responsible press (NUJ, 2019).

However, evidence has shown that many Nigerian mass media (newspapers in this context) hardly consider the ethical principles inherent in their code of ethics while reporting socio-political conflicts that have little or no relationship with the religions and ethnic backgrounds of conflict actors. This position paper argues this point using two socio-political issues in Nigeria as case studies–

(1) farmer-herder crisis and

(2) Independent People of Biafra's (IPOB) call for Biafran Republic.

Previous findings on the two issues (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Akanni & Ibraheem, 2018; Amenaghawon, 2017; Folayan et al., 2021; Gever & Essien, 2019; Igwebuike, 2020; Kolawole, 2021; Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2019; Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020) show a media system that throws away its code of practice and leans towards episodic and thematic framing (more negative, less positive) as well as identity construction of the conflict actors–herders (most whom are of Fulani tribe), pastoral farmers and IPOB members/agitators. As such, labeling an entire ethnic group or profiling them as criminals, armed invaders, armed agitators, saboteurs, terrorists, murderers, rapists, among other negative frames and identities by the media because very few of them commit certain crimes is both unethical and capable of escalating conflicts, hatred and stereotypes of the ethnic group/movement being hastily profiled and labeled (Adeyanju, 2018; Dunu et al., 2018) in the media. Cited by Akanni and Ibraheem (2018), Abdu and Alabi (2009, p. 150) specifically accuse the media:

> … of repeating deep-seated prejudices" and "exhibiting traits of inflaming and inciting one party in the conflict against the other … of lacking sensitivity to the ethnoreligious sensibilities of people and through this not only contribute to escalating conflicts but also creating new ones."

Therefore, this position paper argues that a wide disconnection exists between the Nigerian newspapers' use of theory (framing and identity construction of actors of farmer-herder crisis alongside IPOB and its agitation for Biafra) and professional ethics (NUJ code of ethics). Structurally, this paper demystifies framing and identity construction theories, identifies emerging frames and constructed identities from 19 purposively selected empirical studies on farmer-herder crisis and IPOB conducted between 2015 and 2021, and builds a critical conversation around the 19 studies, focusing on connection or disconnection between the two media theories and the expected obligations of journalists. The paper then builds a model for better coverage of socio-political issues in the Nigerian media.

DEMYSTIFYING FRAMING AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THEORIES

"Frame" as a term was first used by Bateson in 1955. His context of usage was that assumptions influence how humans interpret situations they find themselves. 19 years later–1974–, Erving Goffman's argument followed by showing how humans think and make decisions based on a myriad of consistent narratives that enable them to process such narratives they are exposed to (Feste, 2011; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In 1993, however, framing theory took another dimension when scholars began to observe that happenings around communication and its processes pointed in the direction of the non-static nature of communication. The main observation then was that as people communicated, they built and set frames around the messages they did communicate to media audiences. Concepts such as frame building and frame setting then emerged. Thus, when frames are built, some factors (like editorial policies/newsroom politics) influence the narratives the news media (journalists and media organizations) adopt to report news stories. On the other hand, frame setting involves "interaction between media frames and individuals' prior knowledge and predispositions" (de Vreese, 2005, p. 52) that shape behavior at the individual or the societal level. It was around this time that Entman (2007) observed that frames could be identified in different four subsets: the communicator, the text (communicative messages), the receiver and the culture (de Vreese, 2005).

As one of the media effect theories (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009), framing theory assumes that the mass media has the power to "shape and alter audience members' interpretations and preferences through priming" (Entnman, 2007). In other words, the mass media can heighten the salience of an issue to the extent that the narratives from the media influence its audiences in a way on how they think, feel, and process the framed issue. Whenever the media frame issues, they also tend to show the audiences what they need to think about (Entman, 2007). That is, framing describes:

> the power of the journalists to select what to discuss and how to discuss them; and audience perception of what media discuss may align or contradict the media's frames (Kolawole, 2021, p. 635).

Moreover, the media frame issues by including or removing some keywords in news stories, using stock phrases, labels and name-calling, stereotypical and metaphorical expressions, among others (de Vreese, 2005; Kolawole, 2021). This agenda-setting power of the mass media makes scholars regard framing theory as a subset of agenda-setting theory (Feste, 2011)–second-level agenda setting. It is noteworthy to state that framing takes two dimensions: episodic and thematic. Succinctly, episodic frames concentrate on individual events with a portrait view, while thematic frames focus on issues using a landscape view (Frame Works Institute, 2017). The Institute argues:

> The more episodically social issues are framed, the less likely it is that citizens will hold government and other civic organizations accountable for solving the problem. The more thematic and contextual the coverage, the more likely it is that citizens will see the issue as one appropriate for collective action.

The second theory being considered in this paper is identity construction. This theory develops from the self-theory or socio-cognitive model, as identity is viewed as a self-image that regulates the socio-cognitive approaches people adopt to construct, maintain or re-construct individual identity (Berzonsky, 2011). According to Taylor (2015, p. 2), this theory, like other identity or social construction theories, proposes that "identity is produced, and changed, at least in

part by a person's interactional, situational, socio-historic, and cultural contexts". Tailor (2015) further submits that to construct identities, terminologies such as "gender, age, class, nationality, race and ethnicity" remain paramount themes to consider, thereby creating an aura of "other(s)" around the person or group whose identity is being constructed. Generally, in social construction theory, knowledge is produced or constructed around a phenomenon through the knowledge creator's rationality that presents a narration and representation through language (Galbin, 2014). This created identity then builds some frames around the victims, thus devaluing their goodwill. Therefore, language use or word choice is a vital tool that helps researchers identify framed schemas and instances of identity constructions and labelling in news items.

EVIDENCE FROM SELECTED CASES: FARMER/HERDER CRISIS AND IPOB'S CALL FOR THE BIAFRAN REPUBLIC

As stated in the introductory section, the two socio-political issues considered are the herder-farmer crisis and IPOB call for Biafran Republic. In this section, these cases are discussed by evaluating 19 purposively-selected scholarly and empirical findings on how the Nigerian newspapers framed these issues and constructed identities around them. Then, scholarly positions are taken on what the mass media (journalists, editors and media owners) are professionally expected to do while reporting such cases, as stipulated by the NUJ code of ethics. The positions try to respond to the overarching question this paper raises: What connection or disconnection is there among the two theories, journalism practice, and the expected professionalism?

Case 1: Herder-Farmer Crisis

For this case, 10 different empirical articles are analyzed, using purposive and available sampling approaches. These articles focus on the farmer-herder crisis, and specifically investigated how newspapers framed the crisis, its victims and actors as well as the identities created around these concepts. For recency, the selected articles were streamlined to studies conducted from 2015 to 2021. **Table 1** contains the media frames and the identities created for farmers and herders as found out by the ten studies.

The frames in **Table 1** have proven the propositions of framing and identity construction theories, which argue that the mass media, through their reportage, construct and heighten frames and labels around events and people through the use of language. Although two actors–farmers and herders–are always grouped together while discussing the farmer-herder crisis in the Nigerian media, herdsmen are more negatively framed and labeled than farmers. Generic labeling and episodic framing of herdsmen as killers, attackers, violent invaders and rapists (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Ciboh, 2017; Igwebuike, 2020; Kolawole, 2021; Nwachukwu et al., 2021; Nwankwo, 2021) are frames capable of inducing fears in people whenever they come in contact with a herder, whether he is a Fulani or he is from other ethnic affiliation. It is more possible that consumers of the news items where Fulani herders are labeled with such negative frames and constructed identities in **Table 1** would have activated some cognitive interpretations of the Fulani tribe. The moment the experience (exposure to the negative content) is stored, news consumers are now left to selectively retain (selective retention) or avoid (selective avoidance) such frames and

identities (Camaj, 2019). By implication, those who decide to retain the frames and identities in their cognitive repository as represented in the media will begin to view and perceive the Fulani tribe as an ethnic group that condones killing, violent invasion, attack and rape–which may not be the true representation of the tribe.

It is understood that journalists and editors might be motivated by some salient propositions of framing and identity construction theories while writing and editing news stories respectively on the farmer-herder crisis, their inability to remain silent on the ethnic affiliation of conflict actors and victims and douse potential ethnoreligious tensions–since ethnicity hardly adds newsworthy value to news stories–will only breed war journalism practice (Suntai & Ishaku, 2017). According to McGoldrick (2006), war journalism comprises every form of journalism practice whose direction of reportage has some biases that can incite war or conflict among people of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. War journalism practice, I argue, breaches the social responsibility theory of the press. This media theory proposes that the mass media is charged with the obligation of reporting accurate and credible information in a manner that does not promote actions capable of leading to crimes, hatred, conflicts, among others, and carrying out their information-dissemination responsibility under self-regulatory guidelines (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The question now arises: Are the negative frames and identity reconstruction of an ethnic group coming from media discourse (as represented in **Table 1**) pro-war practice or anti-war practice? Are those frames and labels capable of inciting one ethnic group against another? If we consider the provisions of the NUJ code earlier highlighted, they certainly are, and this position is further argued in the subsequent paragraphs.

The media practice of creating negative frames around an ethnic group, perhaps for a reason that very few members of such an ethnic group commit crimes, makes it essentially vital to briefly talk about NUJ code of ethics, a document that self-regulates print journalism practice in Nigeria. The code contains 15 points also known as articles that every print journalist should be wary of while reporting news stories. For this present case, articles 1, 6, 11, and 12 (editorial independence, discrimination, public interest, and social responsibility, respectively) are the main driving points. Labeling and demonizing a tribe with fear-inducing generic labels such as "killer, invader, and rapist" breaches article 6–d*iscrimination*–of the Code. This article states that every journalist should always refrain from making a pejorative reference to an ethnic group while reporting stories. Pejorative reference is an attempt to insult someone or a group or even show disapproval, which might lead to incitement. As succinctly put by Finkbeiner et al. (2016), pejorative is a "negative evaluation" of a concept through language manipulation. Therefore, describing those who attack farmers on their farms or destroy their produce as "Fulani murderers, invaders, attackers" and so on, amounts to pejorative reference, for such labeling will portray all members of the Fulani tribe as attackers, killers and invaders whenever the name *Fulani* is mentioned. This is the first disconnection between the two media theories and the expected professional practice of journalists.

By the frames and constructed identities in **Table 1** again, it also becomes apparent that framing Fulani herdsmen as "gun-carriers" (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Ciboh, 2017), "blood-thirsty terrorists" (Gever & Essien, 2019; Igwebuike, 2020) on ethnic cleansing and jihadist missions (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017; Nwankwo, 2021; Nwankwo et al., 2020) is pejorative and can instigate hatred and

Table 1. Literature-driven frames and constructed identities around the farmer-herder crisis

Author	Thematic	Episodic	Generic identity	Ethnic-inclined identity	Religion-inclined identity
Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017)		Killer herdsmen, gun-carrying herdsmen, greedy farmers, intolerable farmers	Killers, gun carriers, greedy, & intolerable	(Fulani) killer herdsmen, gun-carrying herdsmen	Jihadists
Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020)	Terrorism; foreign media frames: clashes, deadly battle for scarce resources	Massacre, carnage, bloody campaign, savagery	Aggressor, attacker, & invader (violence)		
Ciboh (2017)	Systematic genocide, security quagmire, pure terrorism, new face of terrorism	Ethnic cleansing	Attackers (lethal, deadly, unprovoked and brutal), violent murderer, mindless killers, sophisticated weapon carriers	Fulani carnage	
Gever and Essien (2019)	Blood bath, drums of war		Innocent farmers, defenseless farmers	Terrorists–herdsmen, Fulani mercenaries	
Igwebuike (2020)	Invasion/attack in search of water	Fulani terrorism, herdsmen killing, ethnic cleansing (by Fulani)	Farmers: innocent victims, in-group sufferers	Armed Fulani herders splitting blood, suspected hoodlums as herdsmen, killer herdsmen,	
Kolawole (2021)		Murderous and criminals	Arms carriers, (Fulani) invaders, Fulani: killers, terrorists and kidnappers	Terrorist herdsmen, killer herdsmen, (Fulani) invaders, Fulani: killers, terrorists and kidnappers	
Nwachukwu et al. (2021)		Rampaging/suspected herdsmen: ethnic othering	Militia/killer herdsmen, armed herdsmen	Militia/killer herdsmen, armed herdsmen	
Nwankwo (2021)	Invasion		Terrorists, uncivilized, expansionists	Killer herdsmen, ethnic cleansing	Islamization agenda
Nwankwo et al. (2020)	Nomadic migration, destruction of farmlands and crops, attempt to stop the destruction of farms and crops, environmental degradation	Victims of tribal militias (Fulani), barbaric and uncivilized, herdsmen killings, 'herdsmen attacks, herdsmen destroy, herdsmen kill, herdsmen conflict, herdsmen crisis; farmers, herdsmen clashes, ethnic cleansing and terrorism	Farmland destroyers, fighters paid to attack, indiscriminate killers	Killer (Fulani) herdsmen, (Fulani) herdsmen as destroyers	
Ononye and Osoba (2020)	Attack as game hunting, community sacking	Herdsmen invasion, attack by suspected Fulani herdsmen	Slaughterers, invaders	Heavily armed suspected Fulani herdsmen	

Note. Source: Researcher's compilation and computation (2022)

constant suspicion of the ethnic group (anti-national interest), which may later degenerate into unwarranted ethnic crises.

One important question to raise at this juncture is: How do journalists arrive at the generic labels and frames they attach to the Fulani herdsmen in many instances, and farmers in very few instances? For instance, how do they know a bloodbath between herding and farming communities was instigated by only the Fulani herdsmen? How can frames such as "Fulani carnage, massacre, and bloodbath (Chiluwa & Chiluwa, 2020; Gever & Essien, 2019) be defended when all that the journalist reports come from 'eyewitnesses'? Aside that journalists rely largely on witness accounts while reporting such a story, there is a tendency that eyewitnesses can also frame their accounts (positive, negative, and neutral) (Albright & Rakoff, 2015; Mojtahedi, 2017; Wexler, 2011). For that reason, it is left to the journalist to establish the fact when he/she get eyewitness accounts of such a story instead of reporting every information scooped from the 'eyewitness' who may have overblown the story using hasty ethnoreligious frames.

Furthermore, if one argues from the episodic frames of suspected Fulani herdsmen being "heavily armed" (Ononye & Osoba (2020), one question that resonates centers on how the journalist arrived at "heavily armed" to label the suspected Fulani herdsmen. The response is that they rely on eyewitnesses whom they attribute in their stories to set a public agenda within the media agenda. Also, framing the conflict as a

Jihadist struggle or a plan to Islamize the affected communities (a form of religious-inclined identity) is questionable, and can only be argued as a form of comment being passed by the journalist. It is questionable because there are Christians among the Fulani tribe, and those ones might not even understand what Islamization really means. When a journalist is confronted with such frames from the sources, his or her expected responsibility is to avoid pejorative inference as much as possible. In fact, avoiding such negative and pejorative words will save journalists from conjecturing or editorializing on events that are expected to be accurately reported; no editorialization is allowed. That is the more reason every journalist covering conflict-related issues should go beyond the information collected from eyewitnesses to how they can identify some level of truth in the eyewitnesses' accounts; the fact that an eyewitness says a particular tribe sacks a community in a bloodbath does not really justify the inclusion of ethnicity in such news item if the journalism is truly peace-oriented. The professional approach is to simply detach ethnicity away from the perpetrators' crimes. Any journalist who chooses the route has really respected articles 11 (a journalist should strive to enhance **national unity and public good**), 12 (a journalist should promote universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, **peace**, and international understanding) of the Code.

In another instance, the media succeeded in passing comments on what had befallen farmers. Framing farmers as innocent and defenseless (Gever & Essien, 2019; Igwebuike, 2020), greedy and intolerable farmers (Abdulbaqi & Ariemu, 2017), the media had editorialized. With these conjectured descriptions of the farmers, the Fulani herdsmen were busy "destroying" farmlands (and farm produce, "sacking" communities (Ononye & Osoba, 2020). Constant repetition of narratives such as these is capable of making journalists lose the core ethics of being socially responsible to promote peace. As it stands from **Table 1**, the social responsibility of the press to promote peace through their journalism practice was jettisoned for issue-based framing. It is therefore submitted that the primary essence of social responsibility in the Code is to promote peace journalism instead of war journalism (reflected in **Table 1**).

Also, the Nigerian print media also hid under statements from government officials and security agencies to push out the generic identities they constructed around the crisis. Abdulbaqi and Ariemu (2017), Chiluwa and Chiluwa (2020), Ciboh (2017), Gever and Essien (2019), Nwankwo et al. (2020), alongside Nwankwo (2021) found this in their studies. This approach used by the media promotes war journalism at the expense of peace or solution-driven journalism (McGoldrick, 2006). According to McGoldrick (2006), war journalism has "a bias in favor of official sources, a bias in favor of event over process, and a bias in favor of 'dualism' in reporting conflicts" (p. 3). Looking carefully at the previous arguments on framing and identity labeling of farmer-herder as positioned in this paper, the three components of war journalism identified by McGoldrick (2006) are rife in the Nigerian media coverage of important socio-political issues. To avoid media-induced conflicts, Adisa (2012, p. 8) suggests:

> A conflict-sensitive journalist applies conflict analysis and searches for new voices and new ideas about the conflict. He or she reports on who is trying to resolve the conflict, looks closely at all sides, and reports on how other conflicts were resolved. A conflict-sensitive journalist takes no sides but is engaged in the search for solutions. Conflict-sensitive journalists choose their words carefully.

This paper, thus, advocates peace or solution-driven conflict-focused journalism as rightly asserted by Adisa (2012). Without a deliberate peace-driven conflict reporting and de-escalation of war-like language usage by Nigerian print media, demonizing only one actor in farmer-herder crisis reports will continue for as long as crisis remains.

Case 2: Independent People of Biafra's Call for Biafran Republic

The same inclusion criteria used to select farmer-herder crisis' empirical papers were also used to select empirical papers related to IPOB. Similar to the previous case, the focus of using IPOB as a case is to identify the media frames and identities created around IPOB as established in the findings of nine selected journal articles (**Table 2**).

From the nine studies, five different voices were heard–a voice from the government; a voice from the media; a voice from security officials; another from supporters of Biafra secession; and the last one from IPOB members. All these voices affirm that the media, while framing events and people as they report stories, build and set some public agenda within the overall media agenda setting (Blood, 1989; McCombs, 2007). The following framing and identity construction patterns were identified.

One, the first voice, which comes from the government through newspapers' reports demonizes IPOB as "armed agitators, abductors, murderers, terrorists, criminal agitators, militants, and separatists" (Akanni & Ibraheem, 2018; Chiluwa, 2018; Ezu, 2019; Folayan et al., 2021; Jimoh & Abdul-Hameed, 2017; Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2019). These negative generic labels raise the salience/prominence of IPOB in manners that portray every IPOB member as an armed and criminal agitator, murderer, terrorist and militant, even if only few of its members are criminals. Critics may argue that there is nothing wrong with journalists reporting accounts of newsmakers, for journalists are socially responsible to let the public know, as entrenched in article of 2 of the NUJ Code of Ethics–accuracy and fairness. However, Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti (2013) argue that the ideological stance of the journalists influences the direction in which journalists report stories, particularly crisis-related stories. If we contextualize Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti's (2013) assertion, we submit that the ideological positioning of the journalists who represented the government's voice about IPOB aligned with the positions of the government on IPOB. Also arguing from Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti's (2013) submission, one sees more positive media frames of IPOB. Such positive frames represented the voices of IPOB supporters and members of the movement whose own arguments were that IPOB was only interested in seceding because they are ready to free themselves from "finalization", oppression and marginalization (Amenaghawon, 2017; Nwabueze & Ezebuenyi, 2019) after experiencing years of "political irrelevance" (Ezu, 2019).

Another government voice in the selected papers framed IPOB's agitations as "genocidal" (Akanni & Ibraheem, 2018), and fruitless (Chiluwa, 2018) aimed at threatening national security and causing "nuisance" (Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020). The IPOB members were also framed as enemies of Nigeria (Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020) whose agitations are to make money (Chiluwa, 2018) and sabotage the nation's economy (Amenaghawon, 2017; Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020). The same voice described the movement as an illegal and unlawful gathering of "secessionists, separatists, terrorist, and discredited organization" (Folayan et al., 2021). If we are to also argue with Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti's (2013) submission on the place of journalists' ideology in reporting opinions of newsmakers, we will realise that majority of the newspapers that framed IPOB using the government's voices are domiciled outside the Eastern Nigerian regions where Biafra agitation is prominent. Most are not also owned by newspaper proprietors of Igbo origin. These papers include *Daily Post, Premium Times, Daily Trust, Nigerian Tribune, The Punch,* and *The Nation.* Voices from newspapers owned by Easterners/South Southerners (*The Sun, The Vanguard,* and *The Guardian*) as established in some studies tilted their frames of IPOB towards positive prominence and identity creation. As found by Jimoh and Abdul-Hameed (2017), Amenaghawon (2017), Ezu (2019), Nwabueze and Ezebuenyi (2019) as well as Osisanwo and Iyoha (2020), the papers they studied framed IPOB as "activists, (armless) freedom fighters, nationalists, neglected, disadvantaged, deprived, and oppressed."

The above insights from the studies point to two important points. The first is regional or ethnic journalism, while the second is ownership structure. What the scholars found out from the newspapers they studied points our direction to the fact that the regional location of newspapers alongside the ethnic background and leaning of newspaper proprietors in Nigeria largely influence the pattern and the direction in

Table 2. Literature-driven frames and constructed identities around IPOB

Author	Thematic	Episodic	Generic identity	Ethnic-inclined identity	Religion-inclined identity
Chime-Nganya et al. (2017)			Agitators, secessionist	Biafran separatist, Biafran agitators	
Amenaghawon (2017)	Marginalized, neglected/disadvantaged		Saboteurs, nationalists	Biafra agitators	
Jimoh and Abdul-Hameed (2017)	Criminal agitation, criminality		Powerless protesters, freedom fighters		
Akanni and Ibraheem (2018)	Genocide-like agitation		Armed agitators, abductors & murderers [public agenda in news]		
Chiluwa (2018)	Metaphor for change [public agenda in news]	Fruitless agitation, money-making industry, terrorism, trouble-making [public agenda in news]	Criminals, terrorists		
Nwabueze and Ezebuenyi (2019)	Militancy		Agitators, militants, freedom fighters	Deprived, marginalized, & oppressed Igbos	Freedom from finalization/Islamizaton,
Ezu (2019)	Biafra agitation, Biafran agitators, Biafran activism, political irrelevance		Agitators, activists, separatists	Biafra agitation, Biafran agitators, Biafran activism	
Osisanwo and Iyoha (2020)	Non-violent, freedom agitators, national threat, & insecurity, nuisance, enemies of nation		Freedom fighters not protesters, law-abiding protesters, armless freedom fighters (public agenda), economic saboteurs, violent protesters		
Folayan et al. (2021)	Illegal, unlawful		Secessionist, separatist, terrorist, & discredited organization (Government's voices)		

Note. Source: Researcher's compilation and computation (2022)

which they frame issues affecting their regions, ethnicity alongside other regions and their ethnicities.

This position aligns with Daramola's (2013) argument that ethnicity is a potent factor that influences journalism practice in Nigeria similarly to how the concept crept into journalism when political figures such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo (both late) established their newspapers and used them as "megaphones" to spread their ethnic political discourse. The position in this paper also correlates with the argument that the ownership structure of a mass medium (in Nigeria or beyond) influences how, when and what to report, and by extension, raises questions of objectivity, editorial independence, professional culture and economic reality of each medium (Namyalo, 2013; Sjøvaag & Ohlsson, 2019).

Considering the dominant voices and frames from the studies represented in **Table 2**, two implications are imminent. One, the negative episodic and thematic frames the newspapers presented, using their own voices and those of government officials, create some sort of "othering" and "bad omen" around all IPOB members, whether the criminal or the peaceful ones. The peaceful ones among IPOB members will feel oppressed and stereotyped if the media keep referring to all IPOB members as "economic saboteurs, criminals, terrorists, militants" and the country's enemies (Amenaghawon, 2017; Chiluwa, 2018; Folayan et al., 2021; Osisanwo & Iyoha, 2020). As most humans are psychologically emotional (Ovejero, 2000), it is therefore expected that the peaceful IPOB members who have been demonized, together with the violent ones, will abhor the country's political elite, the voices of whom the non-Eastern newspapers represent while reporting stories related to Biafra secession. The second implication is that all IPOB members–the peaceful ones and the violent–will continue to see themselves as "(armless) freedom fighters, activists, nationalists and

law-abiding protesters" through the voices of the pro-Biafra elite represented in the media discourse. As such, the identified media frames and constructed identities on IPOB will create media divides in IPOB-related discussions, and discursive polarity between pro-Biafra and anti-Biafra Nigerian citizens.

Therefore, using the tenets of the social responsibility theory of the media to view the two cases brought forward in this paper, one argues that the Nigerian print media is good at framing issues and taking positions on such issues, using positive, negative and neutral frames. However, the evidence provided in **Table 1** and **Table 2** indicates that the Nigerian print media is not very conscious of the social responsibility obligations the NUJ Code of Ethics demands of them. As stipulated in Article 12 of the Code–social responsibility–, media should report stories in a way that "promote principles of … peace and international understanding." Since the farmer-herder crisis and IPOB agitation are socio-political stories comprising some elements of conflict reporting, journalists can only be socially responsible/de-escalate tensions by abiding by the tips Akanni and Ibraheem (2018) suggest. According to them, journalists covering conflicts can de-escalate the occurrence of further conflicts by focusing on other news sources–"the words of ordinary people who may voice the opinions shared by many" (p. 20) –aside from the elite. Journalists should also:

> … avoid only reporting what divides the sides in conflict … avoid focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side … avoid words like devastated, tragedy and terrorized to describe what has been done to one group… avoid emotional and imprecise words … avoid making an opinion into a fact … (p. 20).

REFLECTION

The main argument this paper has brought forward is whether there is a connection or disconnection between two media theories–framing and identity construction–and the ethical practice of the Nigerian journalists as contained in their Code of Ethics. Nineteen (19) empirical studies conducted by Nigerian scholars on media framing and labeling of the farmer-herder crisis and IPOB's call for secession were used to interrogate this argument. Throughout the 19 articles, more negative episodic frames and generic labels such as "criminals/criminality, invasion/invaders/armed invaders/Fulani invaders, rapists, Fulani terrorists/terrorists, IPOB terrorists, saboteurs", among others, were more prominent than positive frames such as "Biafra activists, nationalists, freedom fighters, armless/powerless farmers, armless protesters", among others. Seeing frames and labels like these in the fourth estate of the realm is an indication that the Nigerian newspapers are more connected to the application of theories in their reportage than the application of ethics in their practice. This is so because the framing theory places salience of events or objects (escalating or de-escalating frames) in the hands of the media the same way identities are constructed whenever the media frames an event or object. However, journalism ethics provide that journalists should always desist from reporting news stories in manners that draw pejorative references to people's ethnicity and religions, which invariably can breed national disunity and threaten peace and harmonious living in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria.

This paper also argues that language use in the media, when reporting conflicts, is a potential tool that can contribute to the escalation or de-escalation of conflicts. It is time print journalism in Nigeria had a paradigm shift from war and ethnic journalism to solution/peace journalism. This latter model of journalism does not only deconstruct the principle of ethnic labeling in conflict reports, but also interprets conflicts from the point of view of proffering solutions to crises. Peace journalism, as argued in this paper, is pro-social responsibility obligations of the press and a replica of the NUJ Code of Ethics. As simple as this paradigm shift might seem, a question of headline clicks, and the economic relevance of newspapers might be raised. That is, the current journalism model (bad news sells and receives more readership or clicks than good news) would cease operation if peace journalism is deliberately infused into Nigerian journalism. But another question arises: Should we have peace journalism practice and make our nation peaceful and devoid of media-induced ethnic labeling? Or should we have economically buoyant journalism that practices war journalism, and have our nation set afire? These are two important questions that would confront journalists who adopt peace journalism and war journalism models respectively.

With the evidence provided so far in this paper, it is emphasized again that there is a wide disconnection between the Nigerian newspapers' use of theory and professional ethics. Therefore, it is recommended that Nigerian journalists "avoid only reporting what divides the sides in a conflict, avoid focusing on the suffering and fear of only one side, avoid emotional and imprecise words, avoid making an opinion into a fact" as they report conflict and ethnic-related stories (Daramola, 2019, p. 20 citing Howard, 2009).
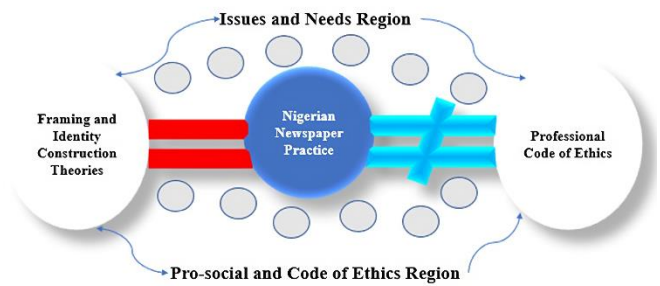

Figure 1. Emerging model for better coverage of socio-political issues (Researcher's computation, 2022)

EMERGING MODEL FOR BETTER COVERAGE OF SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

The two cases have shown that the Nigerian journalists as exhibited by newspapers' reportage of the cases cannot do without leveraging propositions and assumptions of framing and identity construction theories. This is not bad, but it should not be done at the expense of their expected social obligations to society, which social responsibility theory and professional code of ethics had been documented to achieve.

In **Figure 1**, it is noted that the newspapers deployed their resources using the theories instead of concentrating the resources on peace journalism practice with the consideration of specific ethical principles that prioritize peace journalism over war journalism. The smaller circles within the dominant environment in the model (**Figure 1**) indicate the salient part of the two cases picked by the newspapers used by authors of the 19 articles studied. The circles, at the same time, represent the salient part the newspapers left unpicked for peace journalism practice. Specifically, based on the constructs in the model, the paper proposes that significant attention be paid to the salient parts and report them using the professional ethics in the Code. Where and when it is necessary to use theories, their propositions and assumptions that promote peace journalism should be considered and prioritized.

Ethics declaration: Author declared that there were no ethical issues with the study since it does not involve human primary data. However, the empirical articles used were selected based on uniform inclusion criteria.

Declaration of interest: The author declares no competing interest.

Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the author on request.

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Humor as an ice breaker in marital tension: A family communication perspective

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ABSTRACT

Humor is a communicative tool employed by a person to amuse others. Numerous research have been conducted on how humor is used in deflating tension in romantic relationships, but little to no research has been done on the study in the Ghanaian context. Using relief theory of humor, the researcher studied 20 married couples (10 males and 10 females) within and around the Univesity of Cape Coast: 10 males and 10 females respectively were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Based on the data analyzed, the researcher identified that humor function aids in the expression of a message that will otherwise be difficult to convey. This suggestion affirms that despite the presence of tension in marriage, humor always helps in calming nerves by reducing the tension.

Keywords: humor, marriage, married people, tension

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a concept derived from a Latin word that means "being in a relation(ship) with, participating in, and bonding together" (Kucharskii & Ruthowska, 2019). Communication is the process of ensuring that meaning is shared, or information can be given out. According to Kucharski and Ruthowska (2019), "communication competence is an ability to use verbal or nonverbal behavior to accomplish the preferred goals in a manner that is appropriate to the context and effective" (p. 13). It is not only about communicating humorous messages but how the message is decoded by a partner is also important.

The word "humor" means different things to different people within a specific context. According to the Oxford dictionary, humor is the quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech. Hall (2017) defines humor as the ability an individual has to produce humorous communication or actions, to make jokes, tell funny stories and make others laugh. Also, from the perspective of Warren and McGraw (2015), humor is defined as a psychological response that is characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, to ascertain that something is funny, and has the tendency to be triggered to laughter. Thus, to Warren and McGraw (2015), humor is indicated by at least one of three responses: behavioral (laughing), cognitive (appraising something as "funny"), or emotional (experiencing positive emotion of amusement). Over years, researchers have conducted investigations on importance, functions, styles, and forms of humor and its contributions to positive relational outcomes.

According to Hall (2013), the function of humor in the context of an ongoing romantic relationship can be defined as the intended use of a humorous message or behavior to achieve a communication goal specific to the romantic relationship. Humour has become and continues to be very important to all aspects of our society today–in relationships, at workplaces, in professional groups, among others (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008; Friedman & Friedman, 2019). Humour is necessary due to the stress that comes with the daily activities of individuals and hence humor serves as a teaching tool to reduce stress and make people receptive to serious subjects (Friedman & Friedman, 2019; Guinster, 2008). Humor can be used in deflating tension between married couples. Campbell et al. (2008) argue that, besides humor enhancing positive feelings and bonding in relationships, humor can also serve to deflate tension in a relationship during times of disagreement or conflict. In as much as humor can be used to produce positive results in a relationship, it can also be used in more negative ways that may be detrimental to close relationships (Campbell et al., 2008; Winterheld et al., 2013). Although some researchers have identified a strong association between humor and relationship satisfaction (Weisfeld et al., 2011), for others, the effects of humor in relationship satisfaction is largely elusive, leading Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2010) to claim that "humor plays a limited role in intimate, long-term relationships" (p. 458).

The study intends to find out how married people communicate humorous messages to deflate tension in their marriages. This study seeks to understand if humor as a communicative tool aid married

people to reduce tension in their marriage and if it ensures marital satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

People see a sense of humor as a very desirable characteristic trait in a potential friend or romantic partner. Generally, strangers who share humorous experiences and laugh together during a first encounter tend to report a greater feeling of closeness and attraction to one another than those who share equally enjoyable but non-humorous experiences (Campbell et al., 2008). Research has often stated that the quality of humor styles and subsequently, their positive role in a couple's relationship may just be an artifact of general positivity in the way partners see themselves in the relationship. Humor styles are mostly adopted and used by married people to bring about stability and satisfaction whenever there is tension in their relationship. It is relevant to study the use of humor among married people in resolving conflict within the Ghanaian context because there is little to no local literature on the study under review. Some works have been done by various researchers on this very subject but in different countries and within a different context. For instance, Campbell et al. (2008), in their research established that, besides using humor in enhancing positive feelings and bonding in relationships, humor can also serve to stabilize a relationship during times of disagreement or conflict. In agreement with Campbell et al. (2008) also posited that humor, by its very nature, seeks to introduce something unique to human interaction that may contribute to a more stable emotional state of being. Even though, there are numerous works done on the use of humor in resolving marital conflict, notwithstanding, little to no local literature can be found on the subject matter. This study will serve as local literature, which will help understand how differently humor can be used positively in this part of the world, and its impact in deflating tension among Ghanaian married people.

Objective of the Study

1. To identify the forms of humor that married people use in deflating tension in their marriages.
2. To establish whether humor can deflate tension between married people in marriage.
3. To explore gender variations in the use of humor to deflate tension between married people.

Significance of the Study

There is a notion that the use of humor in marriage helps reduce tension and more significantly, stabilizes the marriage. The use of humor to reduce conflict among married people, will serve as an extension of knowledge in the area of marital communication in Ghana. At the end of this research, the findings may serve as a guide to stakeholders, especially married people, marriage counselors, psychologists, and/or alternative conflict resolution experts in their line of duty, and how to advise their clients. The study could provide married people with the most effective way to handle conflict using positive humor-infused messages. It could also reveal to couples the effectiveness of humor in reducing conflict, and also it may help in maximizing the use of humor among married people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forms of Humor

One of the objectives of humor study is to establish the forms of humor and to identify which form is effective in deflating tension among married people. The Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary defines marriage as a legally accepted relationship between two people who live together. Hall (2013) explored the various functions of the forms of humor and concluded that some forms of humor played an inconsistent and limited role in predicting relational satisfaction. He continued by saying that, to account for better humor value between married people, the researcher should focus on the styles of humor and its functions. Having a sense of humor alone does not influence relationship satisfaction; but rather how the sense of humor is used. Martin et al. (2003) established the existence, distinctiveness, and divergent external outcomes of four humor styles, which include affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, self-defeating humor, and aggressive humor. These humor styles differ from one another in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. Two forms or styles of humor (affiliative and self-enhancing humor) are considered to be relatively healthy and beneficial to personal well-being and in relationships. The other two forms (aggressive and self-defeating humor) are thought to be relatively unhealthy and potentially detrimental to relationships.

According to Martin et al. (2003), affiliative humor entails saying amusing things, cracking jokes, and participating in spontaneous banter to make others happy, promote relationships, and lessen interpersonal tension in a way that is beneficial to oneself and others. Interpersonal closeness and intimacy in partnerships are enhanced by this type of humor. For instance, amusing someone when he/she feels emotionally down breeds some sort of attraction. Self-enhancing humor, according to Martin et al. (2003), looks at how humor may be utilized to control one's emotions and manage stress by retaining a hilarious and optimistic viewpoint during times of crisis, and by a predisposition to be amused by life's incongruities regularly (e.g., making oneself feel better by seeing the humor in everyday events). Although the two varieties of humor are similar in many respects, Martin et al. (2003) suggest that self-enhancing humor is more intrapsychic in nature, whereas affiliative humor is more favorably utilized. Sarcasm, tease, ridicule, and other forms of aggressive humor were characterized by Martin et al. (2003) as the use of humor to denigrate or manipulate others, such as in sarcasm, tease, and ridicule (Liang, 2014). They go on to describe this form of humor as a technique for her to enhance herself at the expense of others, and it has to do with a desire to convey humor without considering how it can affect others.

Finally, self-defeating humor comprises overtly self-deprecating humor, attempts to ingratiate oneself and amuse others by doing or saying amusing things at one's own expense, and laughing along with others when criticized or disparaged. Individuals that adopt this style of behavior, on the other hand, may appear to be clever or humorous. According to Hall's (2017) meta-analysis, negative humor from a partner that embarrasses, demeans, denigrates, or deflates the self can lead to negative relationship evaluations. Aggressive humor does not contribute to relational satisfaction, it might even lead to divorce. Liang (2014) posits that humor in itself is neither positive nor negative, but it is entirely about how it is used.

Can Humor Break the Ice in Marriage?

Humor is perceived as a good character trait that makes a person more likable by others and makes them fun to be around. It has become necessary to have someone in your life who can cheer you up when you are down. Based on this, our research team wants to establish if there is a link between humor and the reduction of tension in marriages. According to Hall (2017), being perceived as a humorous person can help or hurt a romantic relationship, and the value of humor in a romantic relationship depends on how it is used (Hall, 2017; Liang, 2014). The advantages of humor production may be valuable to the person who produces it, but not so much to the joker's partner or relationship (Hall, 2013).

When humor is truly relational- that is, it is cocreated and enjoyed by both partners, its role in the relationship is greatly enhanced (Hall, 2017; Liang, 2014). The sharing of jokes and laughter between married couples is a display of mutual intimacy and romantic interest (Hall, 2017). Shared humor is a recipe for a good and healthy marriage, though not entirely but it shows that partners can understand each other's humorous messages. The feeling that someone gets your joke means they get you too, even when those jokes are in poor taste (Hall & Sereno, 2010).

Martin et al. (2003) in their development of the humor styles questionnaire hypothesized that sense of humor is a multi-faceted construct that is best viewed as a commonly related trait. Their study showed more interest in how humor use can affect the psychological well-being of people. They developed a 2×2 conceptualization of everyday functions of humor and distinguished four models of humor namely, affiliation, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Affiliative humor, according to Martin et al. (2003), is defined as the use of jokes and friendly amusing banter to strengthen interpersonal ties. The ability to find humor in life's pressures is a hallmark of self-enhancing humor. Sarcasm and put-downs are used to injure or manipulate others in aggressive humor and individuals attempt to amuse others by making excessively negative amusing remarks about themselves is known as self-defeating humor.

For the sake of this study, our focus will be on the two beneficial humor types (affiliative and self-enhancing). Extraversion, cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, relationship satisfaction, and generally positive moods and emotions are likely to be associated with affiliative humor according to Martin et al. (2003). A typically amusing outlook on life, a predisposition to be constantly amused by life's incongruities, and the ability to maintain a humorous perspective even amid stress or adversity are all characteristics of self-enhancing humor. In contrast to affiliative humor, this humor is more intrapsychic than interpersonal in nature, and so is unlikely to be highly related to extraversion. Campbell et al. (2008) claimed that affiliative humor may be particularly beneficial for relationship satisfaction and that aggressive humor in a partner appears to be particularly linked with relationship discontent, in keeping with Martin et al. (2003)'s hypothesis. They also claimed that self-defeating and self-enhancing behaviors have little to no correlation with relationship quality metrics.

In their study *'Bad humor, bad marriage: Humor styles in divorced and married couples'*, Saroglou et al. (2010) claimed that while humor makes a partner appealing, women in particular regard humorous men to be less clever and trustworthy than their non-humorous counterparts. Constructive (self-enhancing and/or affiliative) was connected to higher marital happiness and no divorce status, especially among men,

according to the researchers. Self-deprecating humor, especially among women, predicted marital pleasure but also divorce. Men's usage of antisocial humor (aggressive) has been connected to divorce and poor relationship quality. In their research, positive opinions of one's spouse's humor were found to be linked to marital problems. Also, married people seem to credit their marriages' successes to their shared sense of humor among other things. Hall (2013) with a different viewpoint on how humor can be used positively in marriage did not only focus on the forms of humor like Saroglou et al. (2010) did, he explored the functions of humor as well. Humor has five positive communicative functions. According to Hall (2013), humor can be used to communicate happiness, share affection, cope with stress, let go of tension, and apologize. According to him, one of the most well-known uses of humor in romantic relationships is to transmit positivity, enjoyment, and levity of one's partner. In romantic relationships, having fun, being witty, and being amenable to joking around were also important roles of humor. The expression of affection, which can be done through the use of pet names, affectionate dialogue, and other adorable actions, is the second function of humor. He claims that when humor is utilized to show affection, it is more likely to help a relationship flourish. The third and fourth communicative functions of humor are concerned with the role of humor in stress management and dispute resolution, respectively. According to his research, one of the oldest roles of humor is to relieve stress and tension and having a sense of humor is linked to increased immunity to infection. Also, his study drawing inspiration from Butzer and Kuiper (2008) sample report shows that one-third of romantic couples use humor to manage interpersonal conflict. When it comes to dispute resolution, couples that used more affiliative and less aggressive humor seem to be happier in their marriage. Finally, the apology function of humor is employed to convey an apology or an admitting of fault. according to Hall (2013), humor can be used to defend oneself or admit mistakes before others do. Humor's ability to express difficult-to-say messages is one of its most useful functions.

Gender Variations in the Use of Humor

The Oxford language dictionary defines gender as one of two sexes (male or female), especially when social and cultural distinctions are regarded rather than biological differences. As a relationship partner, both men and women appreciate someone with a "good sense of humor" (Bressler et al., 2005). According to Saroglou et al. (2010), humor is a significant component of a partner's beauty, and its presence boosts romantic relationship desirability. They go on to say that a partner's positive humor style indicates a trustworthy self and respect for interpersonal relationships.

According to Satici and Deniz (2020), marriage appears to be a transition state towards creating one's own family in an individual's experience and aim of meeting the emotional needs of individuals. For an important interpersonal relationship like marriage, it should be a source of happiness but for others, it is a worrying situation. Satici and Deniz (2020) attribute this disparity in marital satisfaction to the different upbringing of people with different values and expectations and hence partners must endeavor to meet each other halfway.

According to two research conducted by Bressler et al. (2005), men are not drawn to amusing women, the phrase "good sense of humor" is employed differently by men and women. Men appreciate their partners' responsiveness to their humor more than women, according to the study, whereas women valued humor production and receptivity

equally. They also proposed in another study with participants that women liked men who produced humor in all forms of interactions, whereas men chose women who were open to their humor, especially in romantic relationships. This shows that in marriage, men use humor to create shared laughter and intimacy, hence they expect their partners to understand the humorous messages and be able to decode them. Women on the other hand expect their husbands to create humorous situations as well as being able to understand their humorous messages.

This, according to Bressler et al. (2005), is a recipe for marital satisfaction. In a study of newly married couples, Campbell et al. (2008) revealed that when husbands use more humor during problem-solving, the couple is more likely to be separated or divorced later, especially when the couple is dealing with a lot of major stressful events. They hypothesized that husbands' use of humor during times of tension may be a mechanism for them to temporarily redirect challenges and escape discomfort without genuinely engaging and resolving the issues, which could contribute to increased marital instability in the long run.

Hall (2019) investigates whether sex influences the importance of humor in romantic relationships and whether sex influences relationship pleasure. According to his findings, women rate men's humor production higher than women's humor production. He contends that women should prefer humor in long-term partnerships over long-term relationships if the generation of humor during courtship is a tool for assessing the odds of long-term collaboration and compatibility.

He says that humor is a sexually chosen attribute that is a true indication of intelligence and creativity by males and evaluated by females, however, Hall (2019) found no link between humor creation and intelligence, or creativity as mentioned by others. In contrast to Hall (2019), Saroglou et al. (2010) argued that while humor is an important component of a partners' beauty, women perceive humorous men to be less intelligent than non-humorous men. Women's use of humor is strongly linked to their partner's happiness than men's use of humor (Hall, 2013).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on relief theory, this explains the process by which the use of humor affect marriage in the presence of tension and also explains how humor sustains the liveliness, cohesion, and happiness of a marriage.

According to Meyer (2000), humor arises from the relaxation felt when a person's tensions are engendered and dissipated. The release of nervous energy leads to the relief theory. In a nutshell, relief theory of humor is an umbrella term encompassing studies looking at the enjoyable effects of humor creation and appreciation as a means of reducing personal stress or social tension

The physiological or physic-physiological nature of the alleviation is idea is obvious. The theory reached its zenith when Freud (1960/1905) proposed his hypothesis on how laughter can release tension and psychic energy, the theory attained its pinnacle. This energy builds in the human body over time, but it is no longer useful, thus it must be released. This release is uninhibited and manifests as laughter. This is a prevalent belief among individuals who feel that laughing is good for one's health. Like Spencer (1860) proposed earlier, humor is vested from the idea of energy been conserved, bottled up, and

then released like so much steam venting to avoid an explosion. This theory, first developed by Spencer (1860), was made famous by Freud (1960/1905). Many people may fear or find it difficult or uncomfortable to discuss certain subjects, for example, rape, impotence, homosexuality, violence, racism, and incest. Humor gives these people a socially acceptable way to relieve their tension about these sensitive areas Mulder and Nijholt (2002).

This "psychic energy" in our bodies, according to Freud (1960/1905), is designed to help us repress feeling in these taboo areas. We chuckle when this energy is released, not only because of the energy release but also because these prohibited thoughts are being entertained. When humor replaces negative feelings like pain or despair, we experience a pleasurable sensation, according to a more traditional version of the relief theory.

To alleviate a potentially uncomfortable situation, communicators take advantage of this source of humor by telling jokes, generally at the start of their speech. People often experience dissonance after deciding or sensing the approach of conflicting and undesired things (Friedman & Friedman, 2019). Because people desire and find it pleasing to reduce dissonance, speakers who do so can create humor Meyer (2000). Simple and even awkward laughter during conversations has been found to relieve tension and facilitate further interaction between the parties. The theory does not explain why we find humor funny and can be seen as a theory of laughter.

METHODS

A research design, according to Groenewald (2004) and Holloway (2005), is a theory of knowledge, which serves to decide how a social phenomenon will be studied. This study used a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach is a research methodology that uses no statistical or quantitative methods to depict and explain a person's experiences, interactions, or social situations (Davidson et al., 2002; Seale, 1999). The researcher used the qualitative descriptive research design to seek empirical evidence to support the study through the use of an interview guide (Abdolghader et al., 2018).

Target Population and Sample Size

The target population consisted of married persons in and around University of Cape Coast (UCC) some of whom were lecturers and others were students. In all, 20 married persons were interviewed during the exercise with a gender balance of 10 males and 10 females. The purposive sampling method used restricts participation to only individuals who have in-depth knowledge of the study and therefore limits the participants who can be engaged in the work. The researchere visited the participants in person, introduce himself to them. This offers the researcher the context the privilege of observing the non-verbal cues of the participants. This will be done under strict adherence to COVID-19 protocols. Thee presented an official document that explains the intended purpose of the study to each participant after which further explanations will be offered if the need be.

Research Instrument

The data was gathered from the participants using a semi-structured interview. According to Turner (2010), one of the most popular areas of research in qualitative research design is the interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide gives n in-depth information on the experiences and perspectives of participants on a certain topic.

The data was gathered through recording. The recorded was transcribed and thematized to arrive at the research findings. The participants were informed, assured anonymity, minimal risk and many others.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Forms of Humor

This part of the work focuses on the forms of humor, one of the three objectives expounded before. In the data collected through interviews, certain forms of humor like the affiliated were more dominant than the others. The result of the findings indicates that different forms of humor help deflate tension in marriages. In an interview with one of the participants from within UCC, she agrees to using various forms of humor to reduce tension in her marriage. She says:

> I make use of pet names in addressing my husband any time he is not happy with me. I do not make it a habit by normalizing the name, so he feels the uniqueness of it anytime I use it. Aside from the pet name, I also employ the use of smiles and touch. What I do not is denigrate him, whether seriously or jovially, because words have power. This also helps in strengthening the bond between us (female participant one, 31 July 2021).

From the above interview, it is obvious that married people adopt various forms of humor in their marriage for different reasons. The participants are not oblivious of the other forms of humor like self-defeating, self-enhancing, and aggressive humor, but she chooses to use affiliative humor because of its benefits to marital satisfaction. Affiliative humor, according to Martin et al. (2003) entails saying amusing things, cracking jokes, pet names, and participating in spontaneous witty banter to amuse people, facilitate relationships, and relieve interpersonal tension in a way that affirming of both one and others. In an interview with another participant from within the university community, he affirms using affiliated humor more often because it ensures marital satisfaction. He and his wife try to shun any humor that will displease the other. In his own words he says:

> My wife loves to smile a lot, and that creates a positive atmosphere at home. What we do not is denigrate each other in the name of being humorous. We both have our limits (male participant one, 31 July 2021).

The participant is fully aware of what negative forms of humor can do in his marriage; hence he tries to avoid it. According to Hall's (2017) meta-analysis, a partner's negative humor embarrasses, demeans, denigrates, and deflates the self, which can lead to unfavorable relationships evaluations. Aggressive humor does not contribute to relational satisfaction; it might even lead to divorce. In line with this assertion, another participant we interviewed disclosed that she employs the use of humor very often because she does not live with her husband due to working conditions. Hence, any little time they get to share, she uses humor to ensure that there is little to no tension at home. She resorts to apologizing to her partner just to ensure that the happy mood goes on interrupted. She says:

> I am the type who always wants to make people laugh and happy, and I like to be at peace with the people that matter to

me. I most often apologize to my husband to ensure that there is peace. He also does the same when he realizes that he has not done well. After that, we make fun of the situation and let everything die down (female participant two, 31 July 2021).

In an interview with the different participants who also held the view of the participants above she explained that:

> My husband is the type that is always serious, and he never apologizes. But what I do is apologize in a nice and funny way to calm him down to reduce the tension at home and ensure that peace prevails I sometimes prepare his favorite food just to apologize also what he does when he knows what he has said is to take the family out so that the changing environment can help me to let go of the conflict (female participant three, 31 July 2021).

To corroborate the interviews above, Hall (2013) established that sharing enjoyment, expressing affection, coping with stress, letting go of disagreement, and apologizing are all functions of humor that have been supported by prior research and are essential in romantic relationships. Humor he believes can be used to manage interpersonal conflict. Couples who use more affiliative and less aggressive humor are happier in their relationships, according to Hall (2013), who agrees with Martin et al. (2003). Generally, the participants we interviewed mostly made use of affiliative humor, which in research is regarded as a positive function of humor. In an interview with another participant, she says that:

> I make use of humor when there is tension at home, but what I have realized is that humor does not work immediately in the heat of the moment. It takes a while for both of us to calm down and that is when the use of humor becomes effective. Because when tempers are high, the tendency to misunderstand one's humorous message is high and that takes the effectiveness out of humor (female participant four, 31 July 2021).

It is very important that married people must be able to understand and react favorably to each other's humor because it helps to strengthen their bond of intimacy. Humor can be used positively or negatively depending on the individual using it. When and how humor should be used is very important. The same participant further said:

> I feel offended anytime I have serious concerns and my husband counters with a form of humorous message. I get the feeling that he does not want to talk about the problem, or he just does not want to take me seriously, which adds up to the already existing tension (female participant four, 31 July 2021).

The responses gathered from the various interviews suggest that frequent use of affiliative humor by most married people helps to reduce tension in their marriage. Some married people make use of humor without knowing its implications because they just want to create laughter and this is why Liang (2014) posits that humor in itself is neither negative nor positive but the how it is used m this corroborates with our findings, which that positive humor forms are necessary for every marriage.

Can Humor Break the Ice in Marriage?

This section attempts to find answers to research objective two. To achieve this, the data from the interview were discussed and analyzed to establish whether humor can deflate tension between married couples in marriage. The results obtained from the study support the research objective. It was predicted that humor can deflate tension between married couples thereby fostering a positive environment for them to thrive. Results of the findings from the interviews showed that the presence of humor among couples serves as a life wire of marriage.

In an interview with a married man whose marriage is nearing a decade, he agrees that humor is an essential element in reducing tension in marriages. In his own words, the man stated that:

> Because of the presence of enormous humor in our marriage life. Anytime there is tension, no matter the magnitude of the issue, my wife or I can only prolong it when one of us fails to look at the other in the face. But once there is eye contact and I smile or she smiles depending on who has affected the other, no matter how angry we might be that will be the end of the anger (male participant two, 31 July 2021).

From the interview, one thing is certain that humor is effective in deflating tension between married couples. The respondent expressed that the presence of humor in his relationship promotes cohesion and peaceful relationship due to its ability in killing tension. The respondent also clearly articulated the various means by which one can express humor and this is through a smile, touching, name-calling, patting, dancing, etc. The above research supports Hall's (2013) claim that humor may be in five constructive ways; share enjoyment, show affection, cope with stress, let go of conflict and apologize. He went on to say that humor's role in coping with stress and managing conflict is related to its positive communicative function. That is to say that one-third of romantic couples use humor to manage interpersonal conflict.

In another interview with a married woman from UCC, she indicated that she has come to realize the important role humor had been playing in sustain her marriage in moments of tension. She notes:

> My husband and I respect each other's humor. And more often than not, I employ it when I feel that I am wrong in a situation, and he does the same too. Interestingly, there has been no time when both of us think we were right about an issue. Whenever there is an issue, one will always determine that he/she is wrong. And so would adopt humor to express an apology. Whenever this is done is truly respected and welcome (female participant five, 31 July 2021).

Similar to the earlier interview the above interview also affirms that humor can deflate tension between married couples in marriage. The respondent also reiterated how an apology can be rendered humorously. This verifies Hall's (2013) claim that the function of humor in apologizing is to communicate an apology or an acknowledgment of wrongdoing. He went further to say that this type of humor can be used to defend or to admit errors before others do. This humor function aids in the expression of a message that would otherwise be difficult to convey. These suggestions affirm that despite the presence of tension in marriage humor always helps in calming nerves by reducing the tension that occurs. According to one of the interviewees:

> My husband mostly whenever he realized that I am angry or moody. He knows what to do to bring me back to my normal self. I am a little bit temperamental and often I react to issues. When this happens, I mostly express my state of mood in silence. Once my husband realizes this, he does just one simple thing, which will cause me to be myself and this is through touching certain parts of my body (female participant six, 31 July 2021).

This, as confirmed by Hall (2017) by saying, the sharing of jokes and laughter between married couples is a display of mutual intimacy and romantic interest. Shared humor is a recipe for a good marriage, though not entirely but it shows that partners can understand each other's humorous messages.

Gender Variations in the Use of Humor

In this section, we tried to provide relevant answers to research objective three. Objective three talks about the issue of gender variation is a term as an expression to describe gender identity or behavior drawing on the outcome variable. The subject of gender in humor, like other variables, has no longer been adequately portrayed or explored with appropriate categories of humorous behavior of females in high comedy, mass media comedy, and everyday banter.

Women's isolation from the hilarious world was reinforced in reference to authors like Satici and Deniz (2020). Although humor has since been associated with muscularity rather than feminity, our study in humor used in deflating tension in marriages has provided relevant data disbanding such notion. One of our respondents at UCC:

> I could say that my husband never uses humor when there is tension. He is not the kind of person who uses humor in any circumstances (female participant seven, 31 July 2021).

Similarly, another respondent also shared a common opinion as to our first respondent. She said:

> Is amazing but my husband does not use humor in any of our marriage conflicts. She does not even say sorry when he errs, not to think of him even trying to use humor (female participant eight, 31 July 2021).

These statements reveal a different notion about humor and muscularity as Satici and Deniz (2020) claimed that the issue of disparity in culture is the main factor piloting tension in marriages. He attributes this disparity in marital satisfaction to the different upbringing of people with different values and expectations and hence partners must endeavor to meet each other halfway. This was kindly expressed in one of our respondents:

> You see, in our marriage, we are from two different cultures. I'm from the Akan side and he is from the Volta and Krobo sides. So, we are both a few worlds apart. So, when it comes to child upbringing there is always tension. My partner grew up in this place, which it's more of a rural setting. It's not so much of an urban setting. And is not a village too, but. I was brought up in the city. So, there are a lot of things he did not see growing up, but he may have seen them later when he grew up and moved out of his hometown. So, most of the time when we are talking, and there is something we have to talk about our daughter's upbringings and he goes like, no, it's not supposed to

be done that way or is not done like that. I will tease like, 'Eeii Agzikpo people di33 this is how you do things?' (female participant nine, 31 July 20211).

This is further investigated as other respondents were of the same view concerning the issues of different cultural backgrounds as beliefs. Speaking to a married man in the Cape Coast environment he said:

> My wife is a person who likes to keep track of our everyday activities. She wants us to report our daily activities to each other. On the daily basis, she tells me where she goes from time to time. She tells me when she leaves her office to another place when she moves from that place to somewhere new or even back to her office. But I do not mostly do that, and this creates tension. Not that I cannot do it but I was not brought up that way, so I'm not used to it. So, in the cause of the tension, I use humor like cracking jokes and teasing her for being angry over nothing. Eventually, we will start laughing and she teases back too (male participant three, 31 July 2021).

Another respondent believe that cultural differences lead to conflict in marriage, she whether said that every individual was raised differently, and this can create tension, but we must adjust to each other, she said:

> We do not have any issues in our marriage. What I have learned is that we came from a different home, and we have to adjust to each other. Is important that you do not have to lie as always tell the truth. Like I did this and that. Lying and trying to hide certain things is not good, just bring everything out and you must be faithful to each other. It makes everyone happy when my partner uses humor (female participant ten, 31 July 2021).

It can be seen that the use of humor is not only a tool for deflating tension, but it creates an interpersonal bond among married people. According to Saroglou et al. (2010), humor is a key aspect of a partner's attractiveness, and its preservation makes a romantic relationship more desirable. They go on to state that a partner's positive humor styles show a trustworthy personality and an appreciation of interpersonal interactions. They go on to say that a partner's positive humor styles reveal a trustworthy personality and a "care for interpersonal relationships". In a conversation with another married man, he stated:

> My wife is not a much humorous person. When there is tension in our marriage and I do not attempt to resolve it, she will prolong that tension for a longer time. So, I will wait in the night, pamper and cuddles her and tell her some jokes, which make her happy and we resolve our issues, and that chapter of tension is closed (male participant four, 31 July 2021).

Not only does this affirm the definition of humor stipulated by Saroglou et al. (2010). Also, Satici and Deniz (2020) are of the view that marriage appears to be a transition state towards creating one's own family in an individual's experience and aim of meeting the emotional needs of the individual. Another respondent also affirms this:

> I like cracking jokes, I do so when there is tension between myself and my partner. When I crack jokes it makes her happy

and I'm also happy then we can talk about our problems (male participant five, 31 July 2021).

To expatiate more on the issue of gender variation as a medium to humor initiation among married people. Hall (2019) examines whether sex influences the links between partner humor production and relationship pleasure, as well as the role of humor in a romantic relationship.

After a thorough analysis and discussion of the data, the following are key findings obtained from the study. These are, as follows: Firstly, it was revealed that humor plays a vital role in resolving conflict among married people. According to Martin et al. (2003), they revealed four forms of humor namely, Affiliative humor, self-defeating humor, self-enhancing humor, and aggressive humor. During our interview, we discovered that Affiliative humor is frequently used among married people to deflate tension in their marriage. We identified that most marriage conflicts were a result of sex tension, financial crises, and child upbringing. The above mentioned becomes friction in many marital conflicts. Individual ideologies turn to create misunderstanding among married people. Affiliative humor such as telling or cracking jokes, the use of pet names, engaging in funny things, etc in many occurrences set in to break the barrier of tension and also to normalize their marriage crises. Secondly, the findings showed that humor can deflate tension between married people. The study revealed that married people contribute effectively to resolving tension. They do so mostly through the use of Affiliative humor such as pet names, cracking of jokes, saying funny things, and engaging. Being viewed as a humorous person according to Hall (2017), may or may not enhance one's romantic relationship. This means to make a marriage or relationship work depends on the individual. In the findings, we found that to make a relationship work base on humor must be a deliberate attempt by both entities. This is because if the man is in the mood to use humor to deflate any tension and the lady is not ready, it becomes difficult to get rid of the issue. Given this, Hall (2013) underlined that the importance of humor in a romantic relationship is dependent on how it is used. The advantages of humor production may be beneficial to the one who produces it, but not so much to the joker's spouse or relationship. Focusing on the literature review, it was postulated that humor can indeed break the ice or tension in a marriage. Although some scholars disagree with this, it can be demonstrated that humor may keep things intriguing, fresh, and energetic in long-term partnerships. It can also assist couples in resolving problems, disagreements, and little irritations that can accumulate over time and sever even the strongest of relationships. According to the study, humor must be reciprocated, and sharing the pleasure of humor fosters intimacy and connection between couples. When married people laugh or make each other laugh, it strengthens their relationship. This tie functions as a powerful barrier in a relationship against stress, arguments, disappointments, and rough patches. Finally, the findings explored gender variations and how they use humor in solving conflict. Men were seen as the dominant people when it comes to the use of humor in relationships as compared to women.

As a relationship partner, both men and women appreciate someone with a "good sense of humor" (Bressler et al., 2005). Men and women both use humor and laughter to attract one another and express affection, but they do so in different ways. During the interview, we noticed the males use humor to deflate tension as compared to the females. For example, though men use humor in relationships more

compared to women, the content of this humor is negative in the form of hurting or demeaning the other. Similarly, they stated that husbands' use of humor during times of stress could be a tactic for them to momentarily redirect tension and reduce problems without completely engaging and resolving the issue, which could lead to long-term instability.

The constructive use of humor appears to be just as important as the presence of feelings such as love, trust, and affection, as well as sound communication, to properly preserve a marriage. This shows that in marriage, men use humor to create shared laughter and intimacy, hence they expect their partners to understand the humorous messages and be able to decode them.

CONCLUSION

The study based its findings on Campbell et al. (2008) who identified four types of humor: affiliative humor, self-defeating humor, self-enhancing humor, and aggressive humor. It has been established that among the types of humor, affiliative humor is the most commonly used by married people. This is because the elements such as saying funny things, telling jokes, use of pet names, etc. expressed when using affiliative humor are benefits to marital satisfaction. From the above, it can be concluded that when positive humor is adopted and use effectively in marriage during tensive situations it will help calm the tension.

Also, the study reveals that humor is an essential element in sustaining marriages. Since it can reduce tension and helps create conducive room for married people to discuss their issues regardless of their serious nature.

Recommendations

Firstly, couples must be counseled on the important functions of positive humor in resolving conflict in their marriages. It should be a prerequisite during premarital counseling that couples will be educated on the positive and negative effects of humor and how positive humor helps in creating marital satisfaction and stability. Couples must be made to understand that shared laughter is a recipe for a long-lasting relationship. One of the participants we interviewed who doubled as a counselor said that we have enlightened her on the benefits of humor and how it can be used as a positive tool to create a happy and stable home. She was grateful and promised to enlighten her clients on the important use of humor in marriages.

Secondly, individuals must endeavor to make use of positive humor in their relationships. People need to understand the benefits of positive humor; shunning negative forms of humor, which tend to create disaffection. Laughter shared even with a stranger tends to illicit good lasting memories, then imagine sharing laughter with your loved one. Humor is and will continue to be a very important communicative tool that needs to be appreciated by all.

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