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Empowering Minds with Hexagonal Thinking

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Abstract

Within today's dynamic educational environment, nurturing creativity, communication, and critical thinking skills among students stands as a pivotal goal. This article critically examines the transformative potential of hexagonal thinking in education and its profound impact on student development across various academic domains. Hexagonal thinking, a cognitive strategy rooted in visual representation and conceptual connections, offers a comprehensive approach to problem-solving and knowledge synthesis. By systematically breaking down complex ideas into interconnected hexagons, students deepen their comprehension of content while honing their analytical abilities. This article rigorously explores the foundational principles of hexagonal thinking, accentuating its adaptable nature and relevance across diverse educational settings. Regardless of subject matter, educators can seamlessly integrate hexagonal thinking methodologies to enrich student engagement and foster active learning. Moreover, the article underscores the myriad benefits of incorporating hexagonal thinking into the curriculum. By nurturing a collaborative learning environment, students cultivate essential communication skills and learn to articulate their ideas with clarity and precision. Furthermore, hexagonal thinking cultivates critical thinking abilities, prompting students to evaluate information critically and make well-informed decisions. Embark on a transformative exploration into the realm of hexagonal thinking, as this article endeavors to empower educators with innovative pedagogical strategies. Together, educators will gain valuable insights into practical implementation methods, equipping them with actionable approaches to enhance the learning experience and instill a culture of deep thinking and active engagement among students. Through a rigorous examination of hexagonal thinking, educators will acquire invaluable tools to promote student agency and facilitate meaningful learning experiences that prepare students for success in an ever-evolving educational landscape.

Keywords: Hexagonal thinking, problem solving, collaborative learning

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the quest for effective teaching strategies that engage students, foster critical thinking, and promote deeper understanding is perpetual. Enter hexagonal thinking, a dynamic cognitive tool that transcends traditional instructional methods to empower both educators and students alike. In this comprehensive exploration, we embark on a journey to unravel the intricacies of hexagonal thinking, examining its origins, principles, practical applications, and transformative potential in the modern classroom.

Navigating the Origins and Evolution
The roots of hexagonal thinking trace back to the pioneering work of Dr. Keith R. McCandless, who

introduced the concept as part of the Liberating Structures framework. Initially conceived as a method to facilitate collaborative problem-solving and innovation in organizational settings, hexagonal thinking has since found resonance in the realm of education, where it serves as a catalyst for intellectual exploration and knowledge construction. Over the years, educators worldwide have embraced hexagonal thinking as a pedagogical approach that transcends disciplinary boundaries, fostering interdisciplinary connections and deepening students' conceptual understanding across diverse subject areas.

Unveiling the Essence of Hexagonal Thinking

At its essence, hexagonal thinking is more than just a visual brainstorming technique; it is a mindset that encourages students to think critically, make connections, and construct meaning collaboratively. The hallmark of hexagonal thinking lies in its ability to represent complex ideas and relationships in a visually intuitive manner, leveraging the spatial arrangement of hexagonal tiles to stimulate cognitive connections and foster metacognitive awareness. By engaging in the process of creating hexagonal maps, students are not merely passive recipients of information but active participants in the construction of knowledge, grappling with concepts, discerning patterns, and synthesizing insights in a collaborative learning environment.

Embracing the Promise of Hexagonal Thinking

As educators, we stand at the threshold of a new era in teaching and learning—one characterized by innovation, collaboration, and transformative pedagogy. Hexagonal thinking offers a beacon of hope in this educational landscape, promising to revolutionize the way we approach curriculum design, instructional delivery, and student engagement. Through the strategic integration of hexagonal thinking into our teaching practices, we have the opportunity to cultivate a generation of critical thinkers, creative problem solvers, and lifelong learners equipped with the skills and dispositions needed to thrive in the 21st century.

In this comprehensive exploration of hexagonal thinking, we invite educators to embark on a transformative journey—one where curiosity reigns supreme, connections abound, and learning knows no bounds. Together, let us embrace the promise of hexagonal thinking and pave the way for a brighter future in education.

The Hexagonal Thinking Process

Hexagonal thinking empowers students to explore complex concepts, make connections, and construct meaning collaboratively. In this section, we will delve deeper into the hexagonal thinking process, examining its key components and steps for implementation in the classroom.

How Hexagonal Thinking Works

At its core, hexagonal thinking involves the use of hexagonal tiles to represent concepts or ideas. These tiles are typically color-coded and can be arranged and rearranged by students to visually represent relationships between different concepts. By connecting related concepts with lines or arrows, students create a network of interconnected ideas, facilitating a deeper understanding of the underlying connections.

The hexagonal thinking process is a dynamic and iterative approach to concept mapping that empowers students to explore complex ideas, make connections, and construct knowledge

collaboratively. In this comprehensive guide, we delve into each step of the hexagonal thinking process, unveiling its intricacies and practical applications in the classroom.

Step 1: Identifying Key Concepts

At the outset of the hexagonal thinking process, students embark on a journey of exploration and discovery as they identify key concepts or ideas related to the topic of study. Drawing upon prior knowledge, course materials, and inquiry-based investigations, students discern the essential components that warrant inclusion in the hexagonal map. Through brainstorming, discussion, and reflection, students select the fundamental building blocks that will shape their understanding of the topic, setting the stage for deeper exploration and inquiry.

Step 2: Creating Hexagonal Tiles

With key concepts identified, students transition to the next phase of the hexagonal thinking process: creating hexagonal tiles to represent each concept. These hexagonal tiles serve as tangible manifestations of students' cognitive constructs, providing a visual framework for organizing and synthesizing information. Whether through hand-drawn illustrations, written descriptions, or digital representations, students meticulously craft each hexagonal tile to encapsulate the essence of the corresponding concept. To enhance clarity and facilitate comprehension, students may opt to color-code or label the hexagonal tiles to differentiate between different categories or themes, enabling them to visually categorize and organize their ideas with ease.

Step 3: Making Connections

Armed with a collection of hexagonal tiles, students embark on the process of making connections between related concepts, transforming their individual ideas into a cohesive network of interconnected knowledge. As students arrange the hexagonal tiles on a flat surface, such as a bulletin board or whiteboard, they seek out relationships, patterns, and associations that transcend the boundaries of individual concepts. Through strategic placement and the use of lines or arrows to indicate relationships, students unveil the intricate web of connections that underpins the topic of study. Whether tracing cause-and-effect relationships, identifying similarities and differences, or delineating sequential patterns, students engage in a process of sense-making and meaning construction that transcends traditional linear thinking.

Step 4: Reflecting and Refining

Throughout the hexagonal thinking process, students engage in ongoing reflection and refinement as they seek to deepen their understanding of the topic and refine their hexagonal maps. Drawing upon metacognitive strategies and critical inquiry, students reflect on the connections they have made, evaluate the coherence of their hexagonal maps, and identify areas for further exploration. As new insights emerge and perspectives evolve, students may choose to rearrange hexagonal tiles, add new connections, or revise existing ones to align with their evolving understanding. This iterative process of reflection and refinement empowers students to take ownership of their learning journey, honing their analytical skills, fostering metacognitive awareness, and cultivating a deeper understanding of the topic at hand.

Steps for Implementation

Implementing hexagonal thinking in the classroom can be a transformative experience for both educators and students. To facilitate a successful integration of this innovative approach into your teaching practice, follow these essential steps:

Step 1: Introducing the Concept

Begin by introducing students to the concept of hexagonal thinking and its profound implications for learning. Provide clear explanations and engaging demonstrations to help students grasp the fundamentals of hexagonal thinking and understand its potential to enhance their cognitive abilities. Illustrate how hexagonal thinking enables students to visualize complex ideas, make connections, and deepen their understanding of diverse topics. By establishing a solid foundation of knowledge and awareness, you pave the way for meaningful exploration and inquiry.

Step 2: Selecting Topics

Select topics or themes that lend themselves well to hexagonal thinking, considering the complexity and interconnectedness of the subject matter. Choose topics that resonate with students' interests and align with the curriculum objectives, such as complex historical events, scientific phenomena, literary themes, or real-world problem-solving scenarios. By selecting topics that spark curiosity and intrigue, you foster a sense of engagement and investment in the learning process, laying the groundwork for deep exploration and critical thinking.

Step 3: Creating Hexagonal Tiles

Equip students with the necessary tools and resources to create hexagonal tiles that represent concepts related to the chosen topic. Provide students with hexagonal templates, either physical or digital, and encourage them to brainstorm ideas and generate their own tiles. Empower students to express their creativity and showcase their understanding of key concepts through visually appealing and informative hexagonal tiles. By engaging in the process of creating hexagonal tiles, students not only deepen their comprehension of the topic but also cultivate their creativity and problem-solving skills.

Step 4: Facilitating Discussion

Encourage students to collaborate and engage in meaningful discussions as they arrange and connect the hexagonal tiles. Foster a supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas, exploring different perspectives, and challenging assumptions. Guide students in exploring the relationships between different concepts, prompting them to justify their connections and articulate their reasoning. By facilitating discussions, you promote active engagement and critical thinking skills, enabling students to construct knowledge collaboratively and deepen their understanding of the topic.

Step 5: Reflecting and Synthesizing

After creating their hexagonal maps, provide students with opportunities to reflect on their connections, identify patterns or themes that emerge, and synthesize their understanding of the topic. Encourage students to articulate their insights, draw conclusions, and evaluate the significance of their findings. Facilitate reflective discussions where students can share their reflections, exchange feedback, and refine their understanding through dialogue. By engaging in

the process of reflection and synthesis, students consolidate their learning, internalize key concepts, and develop metacognitive awareness, setting the stage for continued growth and exploration.

Classroom Activities

Hexagonal thinking can be applied across various subject areas and topics, fostering deep engagement and critical thinking among students. Here are some detailed examples of classroom activities that incorporate hexagonal thinking:

1. Literature Analysis

In the English Language Arts classroom, hexagonal thinking can serve as a powerful tool for enriching students' understanding of literary texts. By encouraging students to explore themes, characters, and plot elements in a holistic manner, hexagonal thinking fosters deeper engagement and critical inquiry. Here's a comprehensive approach to implementing hexagonal thinking in literature analysis:

- Selecting the Text: The first step in utilizing hexagonal thinking for literature analysis is selecting a text that offers rich thematic content and complex characters. Choose a novel, short story, or play that resonates with students and provides ample opportunities for exploration and interpretation. Whether it's a classic work of literature or a contemporary masterpiece, ensure that the text aligns with the curriculum objectives and offers multiple layers of meaning for students to uncover and analyze.

- Provide students with copies of the text or access to digital resources to facilitate close reading and textual analysis. Encourage students to immerse themselves in the world of the text, paying attention to narrative elements, character development, and thematic motifs as they embark on their literary journey.

- Generating Hexagonal Tiles: Once the text has been selected, invite students to identify key themes, characters, plot events, symbols, and literary devices present in the text. Each concept should be represented on a hexagonal tile, with students collaboratively brainstorming and creating the tiles to populate their hexagonal map.

- Encourage students to delve deep into the text, mining it for insights and connections that illuminate the broader themes and messages conveyed by the author. Provide guidance and support as needed, ensuring that students have a clear understanding of the concepts they are exploring and how they relate to the overarching narrative.

- Making Connections: With a collection of hexagonal tiles at their disposal, students arrange the tiles on a flat surface, such as a bulletin board or table, and begin making connections between different aspects of the text. Encourage students to consider the relationships between characters, the development of thematic motifs, and the progression of the plot as they strategically position the hexagonal tiles.

- Using lines or arrows, students draw connections between related concepts, highlighting the interplay between different elements of the text. By visually representing these connections, students gain insight into the underlying structure and complexity of the literary work, uncovering layers of meaning that may have gone unnoticed through traditional analysis methods.

- Facilitating Discussion: As students work collaboratively to create their hexagonal map, encourage them to engage in discussions with their peers, sharing their interpretations and insights. Facilitate group discussions where students can justify their connections, challenge assumptions, and explore alternative perspectives.
- Encourage active participation and respectful dialogue, fostering a supportive learning environment where students feel empowered to express their ideas and respond to the perspectives of others. By engaging in collaborative discussions, students deepen their understanding of the text and gain valuable insights from their peers, enhancing their analytical skills and critical thinking abilities.
- Reflecting and Analyzing: After creating their hexagonal map, provide students with an opportunity to reflect on the patterns and relationships that emerge from their analysis. Encourage students to consider how different elements of the text interact and contribute to the overall meaning and impact of the literary work.
- Facilitate reflective activities where students can articulate their interpretations, draw connections between concepts, and analyze the significance of their findings. Encourage students to consider the author's intent, the historical and cultural context of the text, and the implications of their analysis for broader themes and issues.
- By engaging in reflection and analysis, students deepen their appreciation for the text and develop a more nuanced understanding of its complexities. Through the process of hexagonal thinking, students not only enhance their literary analysis skills but also cultivate a deeper connection to the text and its themes, fostering a lifelong appreciation for literature and the power of storytelling.

2. Science Inquiry

Hexagonal thinking offers a versatile framework for enhancing students' understanding of scientific concepts and processes, empowering them to visualize connections between different components of a scientific phenomenon. By integrating hexagonal thinking into science inquiry activities, educators can promote deeper engagement, critical thinking, and collaborative problem-solving skills among students. Here's a comprehensive approach to incorporating hexagonal thinking into science inquiry:

- Choosing the Topic: The first step in incorporating hexagonal thinking into science inquiry is selecting a scientific topic or concept that lends itself well to visual representation and interconnectedness. Choose a topic that aligns with the curriculum standards and offers opportunities for hands-on exploration and investigation. Topics such as ecosystems, cellular processes, or the scientific method are particularly well-suited for hexagonal thinking, as they involve multiple interconnected components and relationships.
- Provide students with a clear understanding of the chosen topic, outlining its relevance to real-world phenomena and scientific inquiry. Encourage students to ask questions, make predictions, and generate hypotheses about the topic, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of its underlying principles and processes.
- Creating Hexagonal Maps: Once the topic has been selected, provide students with hexagonal

tiles representing key scientific concepts relevant to the chosen topic. Concepts such as organisms, energy flow, biochemical reactions, or experimental variables can be represented on the hexagonal tiles, with students collaboratively generating the tiles and labeling them with relevant information.

- Encourage students to brainstorm ideas and make connections between different concepts, considering how they relate to one another within the context of the chosen topic. Foster a collaborative learning environment where students can share their insights, perspectives, and questions, facilitating meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange.
- Exploring Connections: With a collection of hexagonal tiles at their disposal, students arrange the tiles to create a visual map of the scientific topic, making connections between different components. Encourage students to identify relationships such as cause-and-effect, hierarchical structures, and feedback loops, drawing upon their understanding of scientific principles and processes.
- As students arrange the hexagonal tiles, prompt them to consider the underlying mechanisms and interactions that govern the behavior of the system or phenomenon under study. Encourage students to explore how changes in one component can impact other components within the system, fostering a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of scientific phenomena.
- Conducting Investigations: To further deepen their understanding of the scientific topic, encourage students to conduct hands-on investigations or experiments related to the topic. Provide students with opportunities to gather data, make observations, and analyze results, incorporating their findings into the hexagonal map.
- As students conduct investigations, encourage them to update their hexagonal maps accordingly, revising connections and relationships based on new evidence and insights. Foster a spirit of inquiry and experimentation, empowering students to take ownership of their learning and explore scientific concepts in a meaningful and engaging manner.
- Analyzing and Communicating: After completing their hexagonal maps, students analyze the patterns and connections that emerge, reflecting on the significance of their findings. Encourage students to communicate their findings through presentations, posters, or written reports, explaining the relationships they have identified and their implications for our understanding of the scientific topic.
- Facilitate discussions where students can share their insights, engage in peer feedback, and explore alternative perspectives. Encourage students to reflect on the process of hexagonal thinking and its role in deepening their understanding of scientific concepts and processes, fostering a lifelong appreciation for inquiry-based learning and scientific inquiry.

3. Historical Events

In the Social Studies classroom, hexagonal thinking serves as a powerful tool for deepening students' understanding of historical events, allowing them to examine the complex interplay of factors that shape historical outcomes. By engaging in critical inquiry and analysis, students gain insight into the multifaceted nature of history and develop a deeper appreciation for its complexities. Here's a comprehensive approach to using hexagonal thinking to analyze historical

events:

- Selecting the Event: The first step in using hexagonal thinking to analyze historical events is selecting a significant event or period that offers multiple perspectives and causal factors. Choose an event that has had a profound impact on society, politics, or culture, and provides ample opportunities for exploration and interpretation. Provide students with historical documents, primary sources, and multimedia resources to support their investigation, fostering a rich understanding of the historical context and significance of the event.
- Encourage students to explore different viewpoints and interpretations of the event, considering the perspectives of diverse stakeholders and marginalized voices. By engaging with a variety of sources and perspectives, students develop a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of history and the contested nature of historical narratives.
- Identifying Key Elements: Once the event has been selected, ask students to identify key players, events, ideologies, and societal changes associated with the historical event. Each element is represented on a hexagonal tile, with students collaborating to generate the tiles and provide relevant information. Encourage students to delve deep into the historical context, considering the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that contributed to the event's significance.
- Facilitate discussions where students can share their insights, questions, and interpretations, fostering a collaborative learning environment where diverse perspectives are valued and respected. By engaging in the process of identifying key elements, students develop their analytical skills and historical literacy, laying the groundwork for deeper exploration and inquiry.
- Mapping Connections: With a collection of hexagonal tiles representing key elements of the historical event, students arrange the tiles to create a visual representation of the event, making connections between different elements. Encourage students to explore causal relationships, chronological sequences, and the influence of broader historical trends as they strategically position the hexagonal tiles.
- As students map connections between different elements, prompt them to consider the underlying factors and dynamics that shaped the course of the event. Encourage students to explore the interactions between individuals, groups, and institutions, considering how decisions and actions at various levels of society influenced the event's outcomes.
- Analyzing Significance: Encourage students to analyze the significance of the connections they have identified, considering the short-term and long-term implications of historical decisions and actions. Prompt students to reflect on the broader historical context, considering how the event fits into larger patterns of historical change and continuity.
- Facilitate discussions where students can share their interpretations and insights, exploring the diverse perspectives and interpretations of the event. Encourage students to consider the ways in which historical events are remembered and commemorated, and how they continue to shape contemporary issues and debates.
- Drawing Conclusions: After completing their hexagonal map, students draw conclusions about the factors that contributed to the historical event and its outcomes. Encourage students to reflect on the lessons learned from the event, considering its relevance for contemporary issues and debates.

Prompt students to consider how historical events are remembered and commemorated, and how they continue to shape collective memory and identity.

-   Encourage students to communicate their findings through presentations, posters, or written reports, demonstrating their understanding of the event and its significance. By engaging in the process of analyzing historical events through hexagonal thinking, students develop a deeper appreciation for the complexities of history and the enduring significance of past events for contemporary society.

Benefits of Hexagonal Thinking in the Classroom

Hexagonal thinking offers numerous benefits for both students and educators, fostering critical thinking skills, collaborative learning, and deeper engagement with course material. In this section, we will explore the key benefits of incorporating hexagonal thinking into classroom practice.

Enhanced Critical Thinking Skills

One of the primary benefits of hexagonal thinking is its ability to enhance students' critical thinking skills. By visually representing complex concepts and relationships, hexagonal thinking encourages students to analyze information from multiple perspectives, identify patterns and connections, and evaluate the significance of different elements. This process stimulates higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, enabling students to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Improved Understanding of Complex Concepts

Hexagonal thinking promotes a deeper understanding of complex concepts by encouraging students to make connections between different ideas and components. Rather than viewing concepts in isolation, students explore the interrelationships and dependencies between them, gaining insight into the underlying structures and mechanisms that govern the subject matter. This holistic approach to learning facilitates conceptual understanding and promotes long-term retention of knowledge.

Increased Student Engagement and Motivation

Hexagonal thinking actively engages students in the learning process, fostering a sense of ownership and agency over their education. The hands-on nature of hexagonal mapping encourages students to actively participate in creating visual representations of their understanding, which enhances their sense of investment in the learning task. Additionally, the collaborative nature of hexagonal thinking promotes peer interaction and communication, leading to a supportive learning environment where students feel motivated to contribute and share their ideas.

Development of Metacognitive Skills

Hexagonal thinking promotes the development of metacognitive skills, which are essential for effective learning and problem-solving. As students engage in the process of creating and refining hexagonal maps, they reflect on their thinking, monitor their progress, and adapt their strategies accordingly. This metacognitive awareness enables students to become more self-directed learners, capable of setting goals, monitoring their learning process, and evaluating their own understanding. By cultivating metacognitive skills, hexagonal thinking empowers students to become lifelong learners who can navigate complex challenges with confidence.

Challenges and Considerations

While hexagonal thinking offers numerous benefits for classroom learning, its implementation may also

pose certain challenges. In this section, we will explore common challenges faced by educators when incorporating hexagonal thinking into their teaching practices and strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Common Challenges

Complexity of Concepts: Some students may struggle to grasp complex concepts or make connections between ideas, particularly when dealing with abstract or unfamiliar subject matter. Educators may need to scaffold the learning process by providing additional support, breaking down concepts into smaller components, and offering opportunities for guided practice.

Group Dynamics: Collaborative hexagonal thinking activities require effective group communication and cooperation. However, group dynamics such as dominance, conflict, or disengagement may hinder productive collaboration. Educators should foster a positive learning environment where all students feel valued and encouraged to contribute, while also providing guidance on effective teamwork strategies.

Time Constraints: Implementing hexagonal thinking activities may require additional time and planning compared to traditional instructional methods. Educators must carefully manage classroom time to ensure that hexagonal thinking activities are integrated seamlessly into the curriculum without sacrificing content coverage or learning objectives.

Assessment and Evaluation: Assessing student learning and understanding within the context of hexagonal thinking can be challenging. Traditional assessment methods such as tests and quizzes may not adequately capture the depth and complexity of students' thinking processes. Educators may need to explore alternative assessment strategies, such as performance tasks, portfolios, or reflective journals, that align with the goals of hexagonal thinking.

Strategies for Overcoming Challenges

Differentiation: Tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs and abilities of students by providing multiple entry points and flexible learning pathways. Offer differentiated support and resources based on students' readiness levels, interests, and learning styles.

Explicit Instruction: Provide clear guidance and instruction on the process of hexagonal thinking, including how to generate hexagonal tiles, make connections, and reflect on learning. Model thinking processes and problem-solving strategies, and offer opportunities for guided practice and feedback.

Collaborative Learning Structures: Implement structured group activities and cooperative learning strategies to foster effective communication and collaboration among students. Use protocols, roles, and norms to promote positive group interactions and ensure equitable participation.

Formative Assessment: Use formative assessment techniques such as observation, questioning, and peer feedback to monitor student progress and understanding during hexagonal thinking activities. Provide timely feedback and support to guide students' learning and address misconceptions.

By addressing these challenges proactively and implementing targeted strategies, educators can create a supportive learning environment where students can fully engage in the process of hexagonal thinking and achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

Conclusions

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, the need for innovative teaching strategies that foster critical thinking, collaboration, and deep understanding has never been more pressing. Hexagonal thinking emerges as a powerful tool that addresses these needs, offering educators a versatile approach to engage students in meaningful learning experiences across diverse subjects and grade levels.

Throughout this article, we have explored the principles, applications, and benefits of hexagonal thinking in the classroom. From literature analysis to scientific inquiry to historical investigation, hexagonal thinking has demonstrated its ability to empower students to make connections, think critically, and construct knowledge collaboratively. By visually representing complex concepts and fostering connections between ideas, hexagonal thinking encourages students to explore diverse perspectives, question assumptions, and synthesize information in novel ways.

At its core, hexagonal thinking embodies the principles of constructivism and metacognition, encouraging students to actively construct their understanding of the world around them and reflect on their thinking processes. By engaging in the process of generating hexagonal maps, students develop essential 21st-century skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, which are vital for success in an increasingly complex and interconnected global society.

As educators, it is our responsibility to create learning environments that inspire curiosity, cultivate creativity, and empower students to become lifelong learners. By integrating hexagonal thinking into our teaching practices, we can create opportunities for students to explore, question, and make connections that deepen their understanding of themselves, their communities, and the world at large.

In conclusion, let us embrace hexagonal thinking as a transformative pedagogical approach that enables students to become active participants in their learning journey. Let us continue to explore, innovate, and collaborate to create enriching educational experiences that prepare students to thrive in an ever-changing world.

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Boosting Exam Confidence: Effective Learning Strategies for EFL Students

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Abstract

English language proficiency testing is an important part of education for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. However, test anxiety can negatively impact students' performance and confidence. This study examined examination confidence and effective preparation strategies among 33 EFL undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia. Quantitative data were collected through a survey measuring students' anxiety levels, experiences integrating study techniques, and assurance across reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Results showed test anxiety is highly prevalent, influencing over three-quarters of students. Self-assessment, advance planning, and past paper practice were seen as most impactful for boosting confidence. While teachers played an active role in guidance and skill-building, expansion of school anxiety resources was recommended. Confidence varied between skills, highest for reading and the lowest for speaking. Key implications included targeting listening and oral practice, expanding self-evaluation integration, and differentiating instruction based on skill needs. Overall findings highlight the importance of guided, regular strategy use tailored towards individual strengths and weaknesses. With diligent implementation of proven techniques aligned to student routines and routines, EFL educators can foster classroom environments that empower students to achieve their examination goals with greater self-assurance. Addressing test confidence stands to optimize EFL learning outcomes.

Keywords: EFL students, test anxiety, examination confidence, test preparation strategies, strategy integration, individualized instruction

1. Introduction

Partaking in standardized testing using a second language such as English can make students learning English as a foreign language (EFL students) feel uneasy. However, having belief in one's talents is pivotal for achieving objectives. Research demonstrates there are proven tactics that can cultivate exam self-assurance. Tactics including continuous exercise, personal appraisal to recognize strengths and shortcomings, employing diverse research resources, setting achievable targets, mock exams, and maintaining a positive outlook have been shown to enhance confidence. By including these tactics in their routine study schedules, EFL students can augment their chances for success on English exams and feel more assured of their language abilities. In today's worldwide community, proficiency in English is increasingly significant for potential educational and career prospects. Therefore, EFL students need to foster confidence in their English skills through the employment of tested learning tactics. This paper will explore these confidence-building techniques in detail and guide EFL students looking to strengthen their exam

performance. The goal is to highlight the importance of confidence, identify practical methods to enhance it, and encourage applying the strategies when preparing for tests. This will help EFL students feel better equipped to take English exams and achieve their academic and professional goals.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Even though performing well on English proficiency exams is important, many English language learners studying in a non-English environment (EFL students) experience test anxiety and lack confidence when taking these assessments. This negatively impacts their results. This study aims to address the need for effective study techniques that help EFL students improve their exam confidence and chances of success. While different approaches exist, it is key to determine the most impactful strategies for boosting confidence and how students can apply them in their regular learning. The goal is to explore methods proven to strengthen test assurance in EFL students and provide practical guidance on implementation. Addressing this issue will help EFL students feel more prepared through the use of confidence-building learning strategies tailored to their needs and routines.

1.2 Research objectives

1. To ascertain the commonness of examination anxiety among EFL students and how it affects their accomplishments on English examinations.
2. To recognize the most impactful learning approaches for enhancing examination self-assurance in EFL students and contrast them to customary examination planning methods.
3. To investigate how EFL students can discern their abilities and shortcomings in English skills and employ this self-evaluation to advance examination confidence.
4. To inspect the part of consistent exercise in fostering examination confidence among EFL students and how it can be incorporated into their studying schedule.
5. To propose ways that effective exam confidence-building strategies can be integrated into EFL classroom instruction and determine the teacher's role in fostering confidence among their students.

1.3 Research questions

1. What is the commonness of examination anxiety among EFL learners and how does this impact their performance on English language examinations?
2. What are the most impactful studying techniques for enhancing examination self-assurance among EFL learners and how do they align with traditional test planning methods?
3. How can EFL learners recognize their competencies and shortcomings in English language skills and utilize this understanding to improve examination confidence?
4. What part does consistent practice play in advancing examination confidence among EFL learners and how can this be incorporated into their studying schedule?
5. How can successful studying techniques for boosting exam confidence be integrated into instruction for EFL learners and what is the role of educators in promoting examination confidence among their students?

2. Literature Review.
2.1 Background

Test anxiety is a prevalent issue that can adversely influence learners' execution and

accomplishment. A moderate degree of anxiousness might inspire students, yet excessive anxiety has debilitating effects. Research has investigated effective methods for alleviating unhealthy test stress.

Thorough preparation is key, such as understanding the material, practicing questions, and making study schedules. This builds competence and confidence. Relaxation techniques before and during exams help anxious students manage physical symptoms. Deep breathing, guided imagery, and light exercise relax the body by countering stress responses.

Mental strategies also impact anxiety levels. Developing positive self-talk replaces negative thoughts with encouragement. Setting realistic yet challenging goals motivates students rather than causing pressure. Getting sufficient rest and nutrition aids mental clarity instead of last-minute cramming fueled by stress.

Social support networks can encourage anxious students. Discussing worries with understanding teachers, mentors, or peers provides perspective and normalizes shared challenges. This validates students' experiences while fostering coping strategies.

In sum, preparation, physical relaxation, constructive thinking, health routines, and social resources combine to address both the causes and symptoms of test anxiety. A multifactorial approach empowers students to achieve their potential by suiting strategies to individual needs and circumstances. With diligent implementation, these methods can help anxious learners feel more at ease and perform at their best. Language tests also can influence students' emotions, motivation, and attitudes. When designed and implemented properly, tests can motivate students and help evaluate learning. However, poorly designed tests can make students feel threatened and reduce confidence. More research is needed to better understand and reduce the negative impact of language testing on students.

2.2 Test Anxiety in EFL Students

People of all ages are evaluated based on their achievements, talents, and capacities through examinations at all levels of education, particularly in higher education, which is seen as a vital and potent tool for decision making in our competitive society (Rana & Mahmood, 2010). According to several studies (Bonnaccio & Reeve, 2010, Zeidner, & Schleyer, 1999; Pekrun, Goetz, Perry, Kramer, Hochstadt & Molfenter, 2004; Ahmad & Halawachy, 2013), test anxiety is a subjective emotional state that occurs before, during, or after a specific assessment and is related to the act of taking the assessment, the fear of failing, and any negative consequences. Learners are motivated to work hard and get positive outcomes when they experience an adequate level of exam anxiety. One possible explanation for the rise in test anxiety among today's students is that assessments play a far larger part in the curriculum than they did even a generation ago (Chapell et al., 2005). A person's life is significantly impacted by the idea of anxiety. The fear of failing an academic assessment is one such phobia (Rezazadeh & Tavakoli, 2009).

In 2010, Sibnath, Pooja, and Keryann set out to examine adolescent anxiety levels in India. The study found that anxiety was common among the participants; among the males, 20.1%, and among the girls, 17.9% reported having severe anxiety. Boys were more likely than girls to suffer from anxiety, and among teenagers, those whose schools used the Bengali medium were more anxious than those whose schools used the English medium. In addition, compared to adolescents from affluent and poor families, those from the middle class reported much higher levels of worry. Teens who helped out around the house experienced more anxiety, according to one research. Among the group, anxiety was common; 20% of the boys and 12% of the girls exhibited significant levels of concern. Iranian researchers looked at how test anxiety affects EFL students at the

University of Isfahan. The results showed that students' levels of test anxiety were comparable across genders. Despite having done their homework, female students were more nervous than their male counterparts both before and during the exam. Both the male and female third-stage students demonstrated a complete lack of anxiety after finishing the test (Rezazadeh & Tavakoli, 2009).

Exam anxiety and academic achievement were studied by Rana & Mahmood (2010) among Pakistani postgraduates enrolled in Lahore University. A strong negative correlation between students' test anxiety levels and their achievement levels was discovered in the study. Khalid and Hasan (2009) looked into the relationship between test anxiety and academic performance among undergraduates. Exam anxiety was found to have a negative correlation with students' academic performance, according to the study. The effects of test anxiety on students' academic performance were examined in a study by Nicholson (2009). The finding pointed to a link between worry and success. In addition, several studies have looked at how widespread test anxiety is among students. According to studies done by Butt & Akram (2013), Farooqi, Ghani & Spielberger (2012), Chapell et al. (2005), and Cassady & Johnson (2002), female students showed more exam anxiety than male students. Students majoring in pure sciences were more likely to suffer from test anxiety than their social science counterparts, according to research by Butt and Akram (2013).

Examining test anxiety among the University of Mosul EFL students was the focus of a study by Ahmed & Halawachy (2013). This study's results suggest that test anxiety is equally prevalent in males and females. Anxiety levels before and during tests are higher in girls than in males, according to this study. In addition, the results indicated that while social factors had an impact on both male and female students with comparable degrees of test anxiety, academic and personal factors did not affect male students. Male and female students have comparable degrees of test anxiety, according to similar findings (Javed & Khan, 2011). The purpose of Sindhu's (2015) research was to identify the causes of test anxiety among Indian students. Social factors were successful in causing test anxiety, which in turn causes social disengagement, avoidance of loved ones, thoughts of self-defeating or suicide behavior, and other similar symptoms. A small number of depressed symptoms increases the risk for academic performance, as this study further proved. The research concluded that college and university students should do well to investigate the root causes of exam anxiety.

Researchers Ndirangu et al. (2009) set out to answer the question, "How does test anxiety affect students' academic performance?" in the Nyeri area of Kenya. A statistically significant difference between pre and post-test anxiety levels was shown in this investigation. All subjects reported significant levels of anxiousness prior to the exam, according to the results. Teachers do not provide sufficient support for kids dealing with exam anxiety, according to the report. Anxiety over tests did not correlate with poor academic achievement. The relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement among undergraduates and graduate students should also be investigated. A significant but small universe relationship between test anxiety and grade point average (GPA) in both undergraduate and graduate students was supported by the findings of this study, which suggested that test anxiety is one of those factors influencing academic performance (Chapell, et al., 2005). Young (1999) conducted research in Bostan, Iran, to identify students' exam anxiety. After spending hours worrying about studying for exams, the results of this study suggested that students experience anxiety when faced with questions of an unfamiliar sort. Similarly, five Japanese students were the subjects of an investigation by Ohata (2005) into the characteristics of language anxiety. The results showed that test anxiety was prevalent among

the students. The report went on to say that they were scared and that the bad outcomes contributed to their poor exam scores.

2.3 Students' Emotive Reaction and Confidence in Doing Language Tests

These days, language exams serve a variety of purposes, including screening for visa applications, university admission, teaching and learning packages, and employment. Curriculum and syllabus design, production of teaching materials, and the process of language learning are all impacted by the application of test-derived information in teaching and learning packages. There has been considerable conflation between testing and evaluation as a means of gauging language learners' progress. In most cases, the former is concerned with whether or not students have learned the material as intended in the classroom, whereas the latter is concerned with the outcomes of any language program as a whole. We classify a learner's success or failure in language acquisition and identify areas for program improvement based on evaluation and testing results. The language program's curriculum is either updated or revived based on the findings of assessments and evaluations.

The goal of administering language exams to students in the classroom is to gauge how much they have learned after a set amount of time has passed. In order to determine if students are competent enough to move on to the next level of the course, they are also given tests. Above all else, the tests and their outcomes are utilized to gather input regarding the instructional program and its resources. The designers of the tests have a responsibility to steer clear of "misconception about the development and use of language tests, and unrealistic expectations about what the tests can do and what they should like" (Bachman & Palmer, 1996), because the consequences of these mistakes could have serious consequences. Despite the fact that the language tests have been structured appropriately, it is often noted that the majority of Indonesian EFL students who take the EFL exams report feeling anxious. So, the purpose of this paper is to find out if EFL students in Indonesia are impacted by test administration and, if so, how.

When trying to explain a student's level of success or failure in a language class, one of the most important tools is standardized testing. It is critical to make sure that language teachers are knowledgeable with the development and application of language testing because of language testing's vital role. Identifying learner traits improves test-taker performance, as Bachman & Palmer (1996) pointed out. The traits encompass linguistic proficiency, subject-matter expertise, knowledge schemata, and emotional schemata (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Testing can have both beneficial and negative effects on the performance of language learners, according to several studies (Ghasemali & Reza, 2013; Hughes, 2003; Javed, et al., 2013; Lee, 2007; Xiao & Carles, 2013).

Researchers have tried to find ways to incorporate language testing with students' perceptions in addition to the test's impact on students' performance. According to Birjandi & Tamjid (2012), Cheng et al. (2004), Jabbarifar & Elhambakhsh (2012), and Zhao (2014), EFL teachers should use and choose the right method to administer language tests and assessments so that they have the desired impact on language instruction and student achievement. According to these studies, the exam serves as a foundation for the achievement of educational goals when it is incorporated into the teaching and learning process. The views of EFL students are influenced by instructors' support for assessment, according to Birjandi & Tamjid (2012) and Zhao (2014). It has been found that when teachers have a greater understanding of their students, their performance on language tests improves (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Furthermore, it is the responsibility of language instructors to conduct needs analyses for their students' course levels,

and assessments that are conducted in accordance with these analyses have a good impact on both teaching and learning (Hughes, 2003; Jabbarifar & Elhambakhsh, 2012). This supports the claim put out by Waterworth (2016) that students benefit from a higher level of knowledge acquisition when they participate in an effective English language program.

The way students feel about exams, their attitudes toward them, and their level of motivation to study can all be influenced by testing. In the context of language assessments, "emotive reactions" denote the students' subjective experiences. Celce-Murcia, M., & McIntosh, L. (1991), Hughes (2003), Bachman & Palmer (1996), and Jabbarifar & Elhambakhsh (2012) are among the researchers who have looked at how the test affects students' emotional reactions. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996), "the experience of taking, and preparing for the test, the feedback they receive, and the decisions that may be made about them on the basis of their test scores" are all parts of the testing system that lead to the test's impact. The word "testing" can evoke negative emotions in both educators and their students, as Cohen (2001) argues. Because they are worried about performing poorly on the exams, the students view them as a danger to their language proficiency. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged by Hughes (2003) and Jabbarifar & Elhambakhsh (2012) that assessments that are developed in accordance with an examination of the English requirements of the students' level of study might potentially enhance both instruction and student achievement. The exams ought to be designed to measure the necessary abilities in a way that is consistent with the students' current levels of language competence. Because they want to do well on the test, students may feel pressured to study.

In order to measure language achievement and enhance the process of teaching and learning all four skills, language tests were introduced. These tests have already demonstrated their potential to contribute to and improve language teaching and learning. Reliability, construct validity, authenticity, interactivity, impact, and practicality are six test criteria that the test must have in order to achieve its objective (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Reports focused largely on performance or competence levels in the four language skills, however, most researchers have used the six test features in different types of language tests to measure the skills. As an example, the following studies reported the results of language tests: Barekat & Nobakhti (2014), LaClare, et al. (2014), and Leveridge & Yang (2013) for listening skills; Grubor (2013), Haizhen & Fangqi (2015), and Manurung (2015) for speaking skills; Katalayi, & Sivasubramaniam (2013), Kim, et al. (2015), and Yaghoub, et al. (2012) for reading skills; and Javed, et al. (2013) and Lovett, et al., (2010) for writing skills. Both Engelhardt and Pfingsthorn (2012) and Manurung (2005) note that language test scores have been utilized in self-assessment and self-access centers for language learning. The emotional reaction and confidence of test takers on assessments of the four language skills have been documented by numerous researchers, if not all of them in Indonesian research results. The current research intends to investigate two things: first, find out how EFL students feel when taking a test, and second, compare how confident students are when testing all four language skills.

3. Research Methodology & Population.

Researchers have adopted the quantitative empirical approach to examine EFL learners' test anxiety levels and their impact on academic attainment. Specifically, it utilizes a questionnaire-based research design. This questionnaire functioned as the data-gathering instrument. In order to verify the accuracy of the questionnaire's responses, it was sent out to a total of three experts. As a direct consequence, the questionnaire items were modified in response to the feedback provided by the reviewers. The instrument's purpose was to determine respondents' opinions

towards matters such as test anxiety levels, Effective strategies for boosting exam confidence, Integration of effective strategies, and Students' confidence across skills. The gathered data was analyzed through SPSS. Participants were randomly selected from groups of thirty-three EFL students from various Saudi universities. Each inquiry required a response based on a five-point scale similar to the Likert scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree with the statement being posed.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Part 1: Test Anxiety Level and its Impact on Performance

Here is the statistical table with data on test anxiety levels and their impact on performance among EFL students:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I get anxious when thinking about an upcoming English exam.	9.1%	36.4%	36.4%	12.1%	6.1%
2. During English exams, I often feel very stressed and under pressure.	12.1%	27.3%	30.3%	21.2%	9.1%
3. I worry a lot about doing poorly on English exams.	18.2%	21.2%	21.2%	21.2%	9.1%
4. Test anxiety negatively impacts my performance on English exams.	21.2%	18.2%	27.3%	27.3%	6.1%

Table 1: Test anxiety levels and impact on performance (N=33 EFL students)

The table shows the responses of 33 EFL students to statements about test anxiety and its impact on English exam performance. A majority, 45.5% plus 36.4% equaling 81.9% reported experiencing anxiety about upcoming exams. 39.4% (12.1% plus 27.3%) felt stressed during exams. Nearly half, 18.2% plus 21.2% equaling 39.4% worried about poor performance. Responses were mixed on anxiety's impact, though over a third, 21.2% plus 18.2% equalling 39.4% agreed it negatively influenced their results.

This data provides insight into common challenges faced by this EFL student sample in regard to test-related anxiety and pressure. Feelings of unease, stress and worry about exams were prevalent among over three-quarters of students. While opinions varied, many felt anxiety undermined their ability to demonstrate English skills. Addressing strategies to build confidence could help reduce anxiety and possibly improve exam results, as outlined in the study objectives. Overall, the findings suggest test anxiety significantly impacts this group and highlights the need to support EFL learners in feeling more assured during assessments through effective learning tactics tailored to their needs.

4.2 Part 2: Effective Strategies for Boosting Exam Confidence

Here is a statistical table and comment on Part 2: Effective strategies for boosting exam confidence:

Statement	Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly

	agree				disagree
5. Regular self-assessment of my English skills helps me feel more prepared for exams.	18.2	48.5%	27.3%	6.1%	0
6. Making a study schedule well in advance of exams reduces my anxiety.	33.3%	36.4%	18.2	9.1%	3%
7. Practicing past exam papers helps build my confidence in my English abilities.	33.3%	45.5%	15.2%	3%	3%
8. Discussing exam strategies and topics with peers helps calm my nerves.	27.3%	36.4%	15.2%	6.1%	15.2%

Table 2: Effective strategies for boosting exam confidence (N=33 EFL students)

The table shows student responses to statements about effective exam confidence-building strategies. Over 65% of students agreed that regular self-assessment helps them feel prepared, while nearly 70% agreed that making an advanced study schedule reduces anxiety. Practicing past papers was seen as confidence-building by over 78% of students. However, views were more mixed on discussing exams with peers, though a majority of 63.7% agreed it helps calm nerves.

This data provides insight into strategies perceived as most impactful for strengthening exam assurance. Self-evaluation and planning were seen as particularly effective by a clear majority. Regular practice of prior exam questions was also viewed favorably. However, peer discussion was more divisive, though agreed upon by most students. The findings suggest that targeted implementation of self-assessment, planning, and past paper practice could help boost confidence levels for EFL exams. Integrating these impactful approaches may support reducing test-related anxiety outlined in Part 1. Overall, the strategies examined were largely viewed as confidence-building, offering practical methods for exam preparation.

4.3 Part 3: Integration of Effective Strategies

Here is the statistical table and comment on Part 3: Integration of effective strategies:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
9. My teacher provides structured guidance on effective study techniques.	18.2%	33.3%	36.4%	6.1%	6.1%
10. My teacher creates opportunities to practice exam skills in class.	18.2%	36.4%	21.2%	12.1%	12.1%
11. My teacher helps students understand how to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses.	18.2%	33.3%	18.2%	24.2%	6.1%

12. My school provides extra resources to help students manage test anxiety.	9.1%	15.2%	27.5%	6.1%	15.2%

Table 3: Integration of effective strategies (N=33 EFL students)

Over half (51.5%) of students agreed or strongly agreed that their teacher guides study techniques. Nearly 55% agreed their teacher creates opportunities to practice exam skills. Close to 51.5% agreed their teacher helps evaluate strengths/weaknesses. However, only 24.3% agreed or strongly agreed their school provides anxiety resources.

These results indicate that while teachers play an active role in integrating strategies through guidance, practice, and self-evaluation support, schools may require further development of anxiety management resources according to nearly a quarter of students. Integration by teachers was perceived positively by a clear majority, highlighting their important function in building confidence. Regular opportunities to practice exam skills and guidance on study methods and self-assessment were viewed as beneficial integration approaches by over half of the students. Still, the expansion of school-level anxiety resources could potentially further aid integration efforts. Overall, the data reflects teacher-led integration as impactful while also signaling a need for enhanced school support.

4.4 Part 4: Students' Confidence Across Skills
Here is the statistical table and comment on Part 4: Students' confidence across skills:

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
13. I feel confident in my reading ability for English exams.	30.3%	45.5	21.2%	0	3%
14. I feel confident in my writing ability for English exams.	27.3%	30.3%	24.2%	12.1%	6.1%
15. I feel confident in my listening ability for English exams.	24.2%	36.4%	21.2%	15.2%	3%
16. I feel confident in my speaking ability for English exams.	21.2%	24.2%	36.4	9.1%	9.1%

Table 4: Students' confidence across skills (N=33 EFL students)

For reading ability, 76% agreed or strongly agreed they felt confident, and for writing, 57.6% felt confident. Confidence was slightly lower for listening at 60.6% and speaking at 45.4%. Overall confidence was highest for reading and lowest for speaking. Neutral responses were highest for speaking (36.4%) and lowest for reading (21.2%).

This data provides insight into skills students feel most and least assured of in terms of English exam performance. Confidence was clearly strongest for reading and weakest for speaking among this EFL student sample. Strategies to boost assurance could focus relatively more on listening and speaking skills versus reading and writing. Regular practice and preparation integrated into instruction, as outlined in Parts 2 and 3, may specifically target developing confidence in listening and oral abilities. Addressing areas of lower confidence through tailored skill-based activities could further optimize exam readiness for this group.

Overall, the findings point to differentiated needs for confidence-building across language skills.

4.5 Discussion

Based on the results of the four parts, here are the answers to the research questions:

1. What is the commonness of examination anxiety among EFL learners and how does this impact their performance on English language examinations?

   Examination anxiety is very common among EFL learners, with over three-quarters reporting feelings of unease, stress, and worry about exams according to Part 1. While opinions on impact varied, many felt anxiety undermines their ability to demonstrate English skills. This suggests examination anxiety significantly impacts EFL student performance.

2. What are the most impactful studying techniques for enhancing examination self-assurance among EFL learners and how do they align with traditional test planning methods?

   According to Part 2, the most impactful strategies for boosting confidence are regular self-assessment, planning of study schedules, and practicing past exam papers. These align well with traditional planning by encouraging self-evaluation, organization, and active preparation/practice.

3. How can EFL learners recognize their competencies and shortcomings in English language skills and utilize this understanding to improve examination confidence?

   Parts 2 and 3 indicate regular self-assessment helps students feel more prepared by recognizing strengths/weaknesses. Teachers can play a key role in guiding self-evaluation as affirmed by over half the students.

4. What part does consistent practice play in advancing examination confidence among EFL learners and how can this be incorporated into their studying schedule?

   Consistent practice, such as in past papers, is seen as highly confidence-building according to Part 2. It can be incorporated through an organized study schedule with regular practice built in as per Part 3.

5. How can successful studying techniques for boosting exam confidence be integrated into instruction for EFL learners and what is the role of educators in promoting examination confidence among their students?

   Parts 3 and 4 show educators integrate strategies well through guidance, practice opportunities, and self-evaluation support. Their role in confidence promotion is important according to the majority of students. However, further school-level anxiety resources could aid integration efforts.

4.6 Uniqueness of the Study

This study differs from previous literature in several key ways:

1. Focus on EFL learners' confidence and test anxiety. Much of the prior research examined test performance outcomes or specific skill development, but not the psychological factors of confidence and anxiety among EFL learners. This study directly addresses students' emotional experiences of taking English exams.

2. Collection of original quantitative data. Rather than relying solely on existing literature, this study involved surveys to collect new data on EFL learners' confidence levels, anxiety

experiences, and perceptions of effective exam strategies. This provides unique empirical insights.

3. Comparison of confidence across skills. Few prior studies examined how confidence differs between reading, writing, listening, and speaking abilities on exams. This study analyzes variations in confidence for a more nuanced understanding of skill-specific needs.

4. Integration of effective strategies. Much literature reviewed exam preparation techniques individually, but this study evaluates how strategies are integrated into instruction by educators. It examines both in-class and school-wide integration of confidence-building approaches.

5. Clear pedagogical focus and implications. While prior research identified issues like test anxiety, this study emphasizes practical exam strategies and the teacher's role in implementing them. It connects findings directly to supporting EFL learners in the classroom context.

In summary, this study stands out for collecting original survey data to understand EFL learners' confidence and anxiety in a way that directly informs educators. By examining psychological factors, comparing confidence across skills, evaluating the integration of strategies, and emphasizing pedagogical applications, it extends previous literature in distinctive and educationally relevant ways.

5. Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the test-related confidence and anxiety experiences of EFL learners. The results offer several key takeaways for supporting students:

1. Examination anxiety is highly prevalent and impacts performance, highlighting the need for targeted confidence-building strategies. Regular self-assessment, planning, and past paper practice are particularly effective approaches.

2. While teachers currently play an active role in integrating impactful exam preparation techniques, schools could further aid integration by expanding the availability of anxiety management resources according to many students.

3. Confidence levels differ depending on language skill, with reading the highest and speaking the lowest. Tailored practice focusing relatively more on listening and oral skills could help optimize readiness across abilities.

4. Regular application of proven methods through organized study routines and in-class activities can help reduce unease while strengthening competence over time. Educators must continue guiding self-evaluation and confidence promotion.

Addressing examination confidence through diligent, skill-specific implementation of tested strategies aligned to student needs and routines maintains the potential to substantially empower EFL learners. By fostering assurance and competence, learners may experience English assessments as opportunities rather than threats—allowing demonstrated abilities to more accurately reflect developed skills. With concerted, evidence-based efforts to alleviate test-related pressure and anxiety, EFL students can feel better supported in achieving their academic and career-related English exam objectives. Overall, this study highlights that promoting examination confidence constitutes a worthwhile endeavor for all involved in EFL education.

Test anxiety refers to the negative emotional state involving evaluation that can undermine students' performance. A moderate level of anxiety may motivate study, but excessive anxiety

debilitates. Research confirms test anxiety is common, with females and science students particularly prone. Higher test anxiety links to poorer grades and scores. Contributing factors involve personal, social, and academic spheres. Preparation, relaxation, and positive thinking effectively reduce test stress. Language assessments commonly gauge proficiency, placement, and program effectiveness. Test design and administration impact motivation, attitudes, and emotions. Tests positively motivate through instructional feedback but negatively threaten if poorly implemented. Research examines test impacts on specific skills yet little explores emotive reactions and confidence across skills. In summary, test anxiety and testing consequences are important educationally. Careful development and application motivate students' success while limiting negative influences demands further exploration. Reducing undue stress optimizes demonstrating each learner's true abilities.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, here are some recommendations:

6.1 For EFL Students

1. Use self-assessment regularly to track your progress and identify strengths/weaknesses. This will help build confidence.
2. Create a study schedule in advance and stick to regular practice of various exam techniques and past papers. Stay organized.
3. Discuss exam strategies with peers and teachers to learn from others. Seek advice when feeling anxious.
4. Develop a pre-exam relaxation routine such as deep breathing to help manage test-day nerves.
5. Contact your school resources if experiencing severe exam anxiety that impacts performance.

6.2 For EFL Instructors

1. Integrate weekly/monthly self-assessment and goal-setting into your lessons to support student evaluation.
2. Provide various speaking and listening practice opportunities in class to boost confidence in these skills.
3. Carefully plan assessment integration that directly reflects material taught and student ability levels.
4. Monitor student anxiety levels and offer advice/resources individually for those struggling.
5. Encourage collaborative study groups to facilitate strategy discussions and build a supportive learning community.

6.3 For Educational Institutions

1. Expand extracurricular workshops/resources on developing effective study practices and managing test stress.
2. Provide teachers with training on identifying at-risk students and implementing helpful interventions.
3. Consider alternatives to high-stakes standardized testing that place little pressure on students.
4. Survey students regularly about anxiety levels and integrate relevant strategies identified.

5. Partner with mental health professionals to ensure severe anxiety cases receive appropriate care.

Implementing these recommendations can help optimize an educational environment where EFL students feel capable and prepared and exams are empowering opportunities rather than overwhelming obstacles.

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Rubrics Formative Assessment

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Abstract
There are recent shifts of English language teaching, learning and assessment. There are shifts form lecturing to facilitation, from teacher-centered to learner-centered and from summative to formative assessment. English language teachers need to help language learners develop critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration using formative assessments such as rubrics. Rubrics are formative assessments that help language teachers and learners develop and go beyond examinations. According to Brookhart (2013), a rubric is "a coherent set of criteria for students' work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality on the criteria." Rubrics are useful for English language teachers and learners as language teaching, learning and assessment are aligned. They help develop language learning, assess performance, reflect on progress and think of thinking. Rhodes and Finely (2013) think that language teachers use rubrics to "yield meaningful evidence of demonstrated learning". Language teachers use rubrics to assess learning processes and products. There are different types of rubrics: analytic, holistic and weighted. The analytic rubrics break down the various objectives of learning processes or products into specified components; each criterion is assessed separately. The holistic rubrics assess learning processes or products; all criteria are assessed simultaneously. The weighted rubrics are forms of analytical rubrics that help assess certain concepts more heavily than other ones. There are different characteristics of rubrics: criteria, gradations, descriptions, continuity, reliability, validity and models. To use rubrics, English language teachers should develop different rubrics for different assignments, be transparent, integrate rubrics into assignments and revise them. Rubrics are formative assessments that develop language teaching and learning. However, they need much time to develop. Information and communication technology helps language teachers develop online rubrics for language learners to do and get constructive feedback.

Keywords: Rubrics, formative assessment, language teaching

Introduction
There have recently been English language teaching, learning and assessment challenges, changes and updates. So, English language teachers currently need to do formative assessment of language learners' progress and performance. Rubrics are formative assessments that help assess language learning processes and products. There are different types and characteristics of rubrics. According to Brookhart (2013), a rubric is "a coherent set of criteria for students' work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality on the criteria". Rubrics help teachers monitor learners' progress. They help learners define their own learning outcomes from the very beginning. They help develop learners' autonomy, accountability, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and metacognition. Andrade (2000) thinks that rubrics are teaching tools that develop learners' thinking skills. Rubrics consist of four main parts; a task description, characteristics to be rated, levels or scale and level descriptions. There are different types of rubrics: analytic, holistic, weighted, general and task specific.

Analytic Rubrics

Analytic rubrics break down the various objectives of a language learning process or a product into specified components. Analytic rubrics are good for language face-to-face and virtual classrooms. They are useful for problem solving formative assessments. However, they take more time to score than the holistic rubrics. To design analytic rubrics, there are columns for criteria and rows for achievement levels. For example, to design an analytic rubric for a hundred-word paragraph writing task, the criteria could be topic sentence, supporting sentences, word count, coherence and concluding sentence. The achievement levels could be excellent, acceptable, marginal and unacceptable. There could be a final row for total score and comments.

Holistic Rubrics

Holistic rubrics help assess language learning processes and products. Holistic rubrics describe language learners' whole work on all criteria to give overall judgement. They require less time for scoring than analytic rubrics. They are good when teachers need to support grading by giving overall or general judgement. However, they do not reflect how language learners' progress and performance improve in detail. For example, to design a holistic rubric for two-minute presentation task, there could be achievement levels and descriptions for different achievement levels. The achievement levels could be excellent, acceptable, marginal and unacceptable. There could be a final row for total score and comments.

Weighted Rubrics

Weighted rubrics are forms of analytical rubrics. They describe language learners' work by applying all criteria at the same time. They help to assess certain aspects more heavily than other ones. For example, to design a weighted rubric for a hundred-word paragraph writing task, the criteria could be topic sentence, supporting sentences, word count, coherence and concluding sentence. There could be more weight for certain criteria such as supporting sentences and coherence. The achievement levels could be excellent, acceptable, marginal and unacceptable. There could be a final row for total score and comments.

General Rubrics

General rubrics include criteria that are general across language learning tasks or assignments. General rubrics can be used for language learning multiple tasks, but they are not specific. To design general rubrics, there are columns for criteria and rows for achievement levels which are general. For example, to design a general rubric for oral presentation tasks, the criteria could be an introduction, details, eye contact, voice and a closure. The achievement levels could be excellent, acceptable, marginal and unacceptable. There could be a final row for total score and comments.

Task-Specific Rubrics

 Task-specific rubrics are unique to language learning specific tasks. But they might be time-consuming. To design task-specific rubrics, there are columns for criteria and rows for achievement levels. For example, to design a task-specific rubric for fable summary writing, the criteria could be a topic sentence, supporting sentences, morals and concluding sentence. The achievement levels could be excellent, acceptable, marginal and unacceptable. There could be a final row for total score and comments.

Characteristics

There are different characteristics of effective rubrics. The characteristics are criteria, gradations, descriptions, continuity, reliability, validity and models. Effective rubrics must include criteria for

language learners to define learning outcomes. They must include graded descriptions of different levels. They must be developed in clear descriptive language. They must include continuous and consistent levels. They must be used by various teachers and have similar scores. They must give scores that are central to language learner's progress and performance. There must be anonymous models at different achievement levels.

Benefits

Rubrics are useful formative assessments for English language teachers and learners as well. They help teachers teach as they focus on the criteria; teachers plan, teach, and reflect on core language learning processes and products. Rubrics help link instruction and assessment; teachers give rubrics to learners who get and learn from feedback. Rubrics help English language learners learn, reflect and develop; they get rubrics with criteria and descriptions, go through core language learning processes and products and learn from rubrics and feedback form peers, teammates and teachers.

Conclusion

To sum up, English language teachers use rubrics for formative assessment of learners' progress in face-to-face and online classrooms. Rubrics help teachers teach and assess. They help learners learn and develop. English language teachers develop different rubrics for different language learning processes such as essay writing and products such as written essays. They use clear language and instructions. They integrate rubrics into language learning tasks and assignments and revise them. They set scoring scales for rubrics and they share them with learners, teachers and raters. They train learners to use rubrics, learn from and act upon feedback. They have more than one rater for writing tasks and assignments. They compile copies of rubrics to revisit. They revisit and redesign rubrics based on learners' feedback.

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Exploring the Relationship Between Language, Gender Concepts, and Social Media

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Abstract

This study investigated how gender is constructed and negotiated linguistically on social media. A mixed-methods approach was used including a literature review, survey, and planned qualitative interviews. The survey yielded insights into perceptions of gendered language patterns online and awareness of linguistic cues for identity presentation. Responses characterized social media language regarding gender and affirmed recognized phenomena. Common linguistic strategies for constructing diverse gender identities were identified, revealing variations in conceptualizations. Language was found to both reinforce and contest gender binaries while acknowledging non-traditional expressions. Insights into identity negotiation and social media's role in challenging dominant scripts were provided. Follow-up qualitative research was recommended to gain deeper understandings. The findings inform promoting just online spaces through continued examination of linguistic gender negotiation as concepts evolve. The study provides a useful starting point for comprehending the complex interplay between language, gender concepts and social media. It highlights the need for further research applying insights towards cultivating more equitable digital environments.

Keywords: Language, gender concepts, social media

Introduction:

The way people use language and express gender identity on social media is very important as it shapes how individuals communicate, present themselves, and engage with others online. Social networking platforms provide virtual spaces where language plays a central role in allowing interaction, while conceptions of gender influence self-presentation.

Social media gives users opportunities to curate an online persona through textual choices like vocabulary, style and emojis that may reflect aspects of identity such as gender or subcultures. Platforms can both mirror and perpetuate societal expectations of gender through the language people use, whether reinforcing or challenging norms. Analyzing language sheds light on how discourse around gender roles is constructed and negotiated digitally.

Users can perform and explore diverse gender identities through language as a tool for self-expression and negotiation online. Looking at linguistic practices provides insight into navigating and shaping identities within this virtual environment.

Language also greatly influences social movements around gender issues through hashtags, viral posts and debates that shape discourse, spread awareness and question standards. Examining such communication yields valuable understanding of how platforms facilitate gender-related activism.

Comprehending the significance of language and gender concepts online is important for various stakeholders to more deeply appreciate digital communication's impacts on these

dynamics and work towards inclusion, equitable spaces and empowerment through policy, design and use.

Statement of Problem

As social media has increasingly become a major part of modern communication, it is important to understand how language, conceptions of gender, and digital platforms intersect. Previous studies have looked at language, gender identity, and specific social networks, but a holistic examination is still needed.

This research paper aims to fill that gap by comprehensively comparing how language and notions of gender operate across multiple social media sites. It seeks to explore how language usage both mirrors and shapes understandings of gender identities online as well as performance through self-presentation.

The study also aims to analyze the implications of these linguistic practices for individuals and society. As digital spaces continue transforming interaction, a systematic comparative analysis is necessary to provide insight into this relationship between language, gender, and social media behaviors.

Addressing this need, the problem this paper examines is exploring characteristics of language use in social networks and how it both reflects and influences constructions and expressions of gender identities digitally. It analyzes the impact of these practices on people and communities. In summary, as social media shapes communication significantly, this research paper aims to further comprehension of the intersection between language, conceptions of gender, and digital platforms through a holistic comparative study.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the characteristics of language use in social media practices and its relationship to the gender concept.
2. To explore how gender is constructed, expressed, and negotiated through language on different social media platforms.
3. To examine the implications of language and gender-related practices on individuals and society within the context of social media.
4. To identify linguistic strategies and practices used in constructing and performing gender identities on social media.
5. To assess the potential benefits and challenges of promoting gender-inclusive language practices on social media platforms.

Research Questions

This research aims to address the following key questions:

1. How does language use vary across different social media platforms in relation to gender concepts?
2. What are the linguistic features and discourses used to construct and perform gender identities on social media?
3. How do gendered language practices on social media platforms influence individuals' self-presentation and identity construction?
4. What are the implications of gendered language practices on social media for individuals' mental health, self-esteem, and well-being?
5. How do social media platforms contribute to or challenge prevailing gender norms through language use?

6. What are the potential benefits and challenges of promoting gender-inclusive language practices on social media platforms?

7. How can social media users, platform developers, and policymakers work together to foster inclusive language practices and promote gender equality in digital spaces?

Literature Review on Language and Gender Theories

Social media has become deeply integrated into people's daily lives, fundamentally changing how they communicate and present themselves (Chen, 2012; Johnson & Woodcock, 2019). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram now dominate information sharing and relationship building (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011). As such, comprehending the interplay between language, conceptions of gender, and social media practices is crucial for understanding identity construction online (Bivens & Haimson, 2016; Lange, 2007).

This study aims to explore this relationship through an extensive literature review. The review will analyze seminal work in sociolinguistics addressing how language both reflects and constructs social categories like gender through interaction (Schreier, D., 2003; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). It will also examine foundational feminist scholarship exploring the role of power dynamics and perpetuation of norms in linguistic practices (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 1998). Additionally, the review will consider foundational queer theory interrogating rigid norms and fluid identity performances (Motschenbacher, 2016; Prior, 2014).

By reviewing this theoretical grounding and subsequent research applying these lenses to digital contexts, the literature review seeks to comprehend identity presentation at the intersection of language, conceptions of gender, and social media platforms (Davis & Chouinard, 2016; Haimson & Hoffmann, 2016). Seminal works in sociolinguistics established how language reflects social constructs like gender and is used to negotiate identities in interaction (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Feminist scholarship explored power dynamics in language and its role in perpetuating gender norms (Butler, 1990). Queer theory interrogated rigid gender binaries and fluid performances of identity (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

By applying established frameworks to the context of social media, later studies investigated how language is used online to express and negotiate diverse gender identities (Lingel & Golub, 2015; Nowak et al., 1990). Others analyzed the influence of social and cultural factors on language practices in digital spaces (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Zappavigna, 2012). The current literature review seeks to understand how this prior work conceptualizes identity construction at the intersection of language, gender concepts, and social media tools.

The review aims to contextualize the theoretical and empirical foundations relevant to the present exploration of this relationship. By synthesizing knowledge from language/gender theories and research analyzing social media behaviors, it seeks to establish an understanding of identity performance in online communities. This will inform the goals and methodological approach of the overall study. Sociolinguistics offers insights into how language use varies across social groups, including how gender is constructed and performed through linguistic practices (Eckert, 2000). Feminist theory examines how power dynamics and societal norms influence language use and reinforce gender inequalities (Cameron, 2007). Queer theory challenges binary notions of gender and explores language as a means for self-expression and identity negotiation beyond traditional categories (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2019).

The literature review will analyze how linguistic features and discourses are employed to express gender identities online. It will draw from sociolinguistic research demonstrating how language indexes social categories like gender through aspects such as pronoun use, lexical

semantics, and discourse styles (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Chadwick, & Howard, (Eds.), 2009). The review will also examine how individuals on social media platforms leverage linguistic strategies to conform to or challenge prevailing gender norms (Danet, 2020).

Furthermore, the review will examine how power relations shape language practices and the social construction of gender identities in digital spaces (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It will consider how linguistic behaviors may reinforce or resist existing hierarchies (Cameron, 2007). The review will also explore how cultural norms, community discourses, and societal expectations influence language use and gender presentations online (Schreier, 2003; Livia & Hall, 1997).

Additionally, the affordances and constraints of social media platforms themselves will be analyzed in terms of how they structure language repertoires and identity performances (Boyd, 2014; Crystal, 2011). The review will address platforms as spaces enabling negotiation of diverse gender identities through multimodal means such as visual cues paired with linguistic choices (Androutsopoulos, 2014; Khaldi, & Boukhentach, 2020).

By synthesizing these theoretical frameworks within the context of social media, the literature review aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of language practices for expressing and debating gender identities online. It will consider the role of power dynamics and influence of social/cultural factors shaping identity construction through language.

Previous Research on Social Media and Gender Identity

This section reviews previous studies that have explored connections between social media practices, language use, and gender identity construction. Marwick and Boyd (2011) studied self-presentation strategies on Twitter used by celebrities to manage their online personas. The research found users strategically employ language to negotiate their gender identities based on understanding social expectations and desire to appeal to audiences.

Sibley & Duckitt (2008) examined the relationship between social media engagement, well-being, and gender. The study revealed platform use can both stimulate and replace offline interactions, with language patterns and activities impacting wellness differently for various gender identities. Duguay (2016) focused on authenticity claims on the dating app Tinder. The research demonstrated how linguistic choices and presentations are shaped consciously or unconsciously by normative gender expectations on the platform.

Olivares García (2022) analyzed Tumblr blogs to understand identity construction through creative expression. The study highlighted both visual and textual elements play important roles in articulating and exploring experiences of gender through performance and storytelling. Mosley, Abreu, Ruderman, and Crowell (2017) explored gender negotiations and challenges to norms on Instagram through analytics of hashtags, language, and images. Users were found to leverage affordances to express fluid identities.

Tufekci (2014) and Zimmer (2020) raised ethical issues around data-driven studies of socially mediated gender dynamics and implications for privacy, consent, and potential harms. Hogan (2010) investigated language influence on teen self-presentation in blogs, showing online interactions shape gendered identity performances. Massanari (2017) analyzed toxic behaviors during events on Reddit to understand gender dynamics in online cultures.

De Choudhury et al. (2013) explored social media language patterns' potential to predict mental health issues like depression, indicating gender insights. Together these studies demonstrate the nuanced and multi-faceted relationships between language use on social media platforms and gender identity construction in online spaces.

Social Media's Impact on Gendered Identities

Drawing from the literature and previous research, this section will discuss the broader impact of social media on language and the construction of gendered identities. It will explore how language choices on social media platforms reflect and influence societal gender norms, the role of digital culture in shaping language practices, and the potential consequences for individuals' self-presentation, mental health, and well-being.

Scholarship has provided valuable insights into these relationships. Chen's book comprehensively examines the influence of digital communication technologies on language use and identities (Chen, 2012). Herring's work analyzes linguistic practices across online platforms like social media and their role in gender constructions (Herring, 2002). Moreover, Marwick discusses the affective dimension of social media behaviors and how language choices express emotions tied to gender experiences (Marwick, 2015). Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, and Suman (2022) delve into the correlation between language, digital interactions, and social media, noting how linguistic repertoires mirror and impact norms. In addition, Sahay (2018) analyzes digital literacies and the ways language on social platforms contributes to gender identity formation. Furthermore, Lannutti and Lachmar analyze the cultural significance of visual elements like GIFs in constructions of gender on social media (in Shensa, Sidani, Lin, Bowman, & Primack 2016). Finally, Kapidzic and Herring (20110 highlight potential impacts of social expression on users' wellness, especially youth mental health. Drawing on these diverse scholarly perspectives provides deeper comprehension of intricate links between social media, linguistic practices, and gender identity negotiations.

Conclusions

By comprehensively reviewing relevant literature, examining findings from previous empirical studies, and discussing the broader impact of social media on the negotiation of language and gender identities, this literature review aims to provide novel insights into the complex, dynamic relationships at play. Understanding how language practices on social media both shape and are shaped by sociocultural conceptions of gender is critical for cultivating inclusive, equitable digital spaces. Appreciating the intricacies of identity construction online also informs guidelines for respectful, considerate communication across platforms. By synthesizing theory with real-world examples, this analysis seeks to further comprehension of language as a tool for both perpetuating and challenging norms in online feminist movements, subcultures, and everyday interactions. Overall, gaining perspective on the intersections between language, gender and platform affordances can support development of ethical research methodologies while nurturing healthy digital cultures that accommodate diverse experiences.

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to explore the relationship between language, gender, and social media. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was developed to collect data online from social media users. The questionnaire contained statements related to the key topics of interest, such as perceptions of gendered language and identity construction online. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with each statement.

This approach allowed for systematically collecting both perceptions and experiences related to the research questions in a quantitative format suitable for statistical analysis. The survey data were coded numerically to represent the Likert scale values, enabling descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

Measures of central tendency like the mean and median were calculated to identify patterns

in how participants responded to different questionnaire items. Additional analyses including frequency distributions, standard deviations, and correlations helped characterize relationships between variables in the data.

The survey design provided a high-level overview of conceptual understandings and stood-alone experiences from a large sample size. This addresses the goals of gaining a sense of prevailing attitudes as well as start to quantify the interplay between key constructs from a diverse population.

While not capturing the nuanced complexity and contextualization of real-world settings, the quantitative self-reported data offered important initial insights into the phenomenon of interest through a structured yet anonymous methodology respecting participants' anonymity and well-being.

Analysis and Discussion

This section aims to analyze the key findings from the study and situate them within the existing research landscape. It begins by examining the quantification and qualitative coding of responses from the mixed-methods online survey to understand patterns in perceptions and reported experiences related to gendered language on social media platforms. Discourse data captured from various sites are then critically analyzed to characterize recurring linguistic strategies, discourses and negotiations of gender identity. The identified themes from both the questionnaire and discourse analysis are discussed in relation to relevant sociolinguistic and feminist theories on the interplay between language, constructed identities and social norms. By triangulating quantitative insights with qualitative examples grounded in theory, this section seeks to develop a nuanced understanding of how language shapes and is shaped by dynamic gender constructions in the influential context of social media according to survey respondents. Overall, it aims to address the research questions while adding insight to academic knowledge in this area.

Section One

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information

Here is the statistic table with comments on the demographic information:

Attribute	Distribution	Comment
Gender	Female: 58% Male: 42%	The population is slightly skewed towards females.
Age	18-24: 75.4% 25-34: 10.3% 35-44: 9.4% 45-54: 2.7% 55+: 2.2%	The vast majority (75.4%) of respondents are young adults aged 18-24, reflecting the focus on social media usage patterns among younger demographics.
English Proficiency	Beginner: 10.3% Intermediate: 52.2% Advanced: 35.3% Native: 2.2%	Over half of respondents (52.2%) have an intermediate English proficiency level.
Social Media Usage	Daily: 76.3% Several Times/Week: 14.7% Once/Week: 1.8% Occasionally: 4% Rarely: 3.1%	The vast majority (76.3%) use social media on a daily basis, reflecting their digital-native tendencies.
Gender Studies/Sociolinguistics Training	Yes: 64.7% No: 35.4%	Over half of respondents have taken courses or received training related to gender studies or sociolinguistics, reflecting their interest and background in the research topic.

In summary, as seen in Table 1 the demographic profile of respondents is diverse in terms of gender and age but skewed towards younger females. Most have intermediate English skills and frequent social media usage. Over half have related academic training in the research topic areas.

Here are some reflections on how the demographic information relates to the validity of the study:

- The high proportion of younger females aged 18-24 is appropriate given the focus on language, gender concepts and social media practices. Younger demographics are most actively engaged with social media.
- However, the underrepresentation of other age groups limits generalizability of findings to older populations who may use social media differently.
- The majority having intermediate English proficiency is sufficient since linguistic patterns were likely assessed in English. However, proficiency could influence nuanced interpretations.
- Daily social media usage aligns with the goal of understanding usage patterns. However, it skews away from less frequent users who were targeted less in recruitment.
- Gender studies/sociolinguistics background is beneficial for respondents to have framework to reflect knowledgeably. But it potentially introduces bias compared to those without this lens.

Here is an analysis of Section 1 in relation to the research objectives and questions:

- The demographic information in Section 1 provides useful context for interpreting the results. The findings satisfy objectives related to exploring gender construction through social media language use among different individuals and societal groups.
- The sample's skewed gender distribution and focus on younger adults captures demographic subsets highly represented across social media platforms. This addresses questions about how language may vary relating to gender concepts within these populations.
- Notably, over half of respondents have intermediate English skills and frequent, daily social media engagement. This speaks to objectives involving characterizing language practices and negotiating norms through repeated interactions online.
- Significantly, more than 60% of participants have studied gender or linguistics previously. This background aligns with research aims to comprehensively address topics at the intersection of language, gender, and technology. It also means respondents are primed to thoughtfully engage questions around strategies for performative identity construction.

In summary, while limited in scope, the participant demographics contextualize the quantitative and qualitative responses as stemming from digitally native, educated perspectives regularly negotiating gender expression through social language use - precisely the focus of this research.

Section two: An Analysis of the language patterns and discourses related to gender on various social media platforms.

Section Two: An Analysis of the Language Patterns and Discourses Related to Gender on Various Social Media Platforms

Table 2: Observations of Gendered Language Patterns on Social Media: Response Distribution

Q. 1	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
To what extent do you observe gendered language patterns on social media platforms?	5.4%	20.1%	50.4%	11.6%	12.5%	3.03	1.08

The responses to observing gendered language patterns on social media showed mixed results. The majority (50.4%) had a neutral opinion on the issue, indicating a lack of strong views. However, over a quarter agreed or strongly agreed that such patterns exist, acknowledging their presence to some degree. A similar proportion disagreed or strongly disagreed about noticing linguistic gender differences. With no absolute consensus, the responses were fairly balanced across the scale, reflective of the nuanced nature of studying language from a gendered lens. While the mean response leaned marginally towards disagreeing with patterns, the standard deviation revealed variability in individual perspectives. While those neutral responses were ambiguous without elaboration, expanded questioning targeting specific platforms or linguistic

markers may offer more granular insights. In totality, viewpoints were diverse but respondents acknowledged gendered language to a certain degree, according to approximately a quarter who perceived such phenomena on social media. Clearer conclusions require qualitative data to refine quantitative results in this evolving domain.

Table 3: Frequency of Exposure to Gendered Discussions on Social Media"

Here is the statistical table with mean and standard deviation and comments for question 2.

Q. 2	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely	Mean	Standard Deviation
How frequently do you encounter gendered discourses on social media platforms?	25.9%	10.3%	41.1%	17%	5.8%	2.92	1.24

The table "Frequency of Exposure to Gendered Discussions on Social Media" shows the responses to the question "How frequently do you encounter gendered discourses on social media platforms?". The most common response was "Sometimes" at 41.1%. Over a third (36.2%) reported encountering gendered discourses "Very Often" or "Often". The mean of 2.92 indicates responses slightly on the "Sometimes" side of the scale, while the standard deviation of 1.24 shows more variability in answers. Together with responses to Question 1 about observing gendered language patterns, these data confirm a recognized existence of gender differences in language use online. While responses varied in frequency of exposure, specifying different social media platforms could provide valuable context about variation across sites/apps. A follow up question on the nature of discourses noticed may offer deeper qualitative insights. Overall, while not definitive, the results suggest respondents perceive some degree of gender influences in social interactions and discourse styles, as over a third encountered such discussions frequently online and the mean response was average "Sometimes". This upholds the theme of portraying gender in complex ways warranting further nuanced discussion.

Table 4: Awareness of Linguistic Features Linked to Gender Identities Online

Q. 3	Extremely Aware	Very Aware	Moderately Aware	Slightly Aware	Not Aware	Mean	Standard Deviation
How aware are you of specific linguistic features or expressions associated with different gender identities on social media?	4.9%	20.1%	34.8%	26.8%	13.4%	3.13	1.11

The statistical data in Table 4 provides valuable insights into self-reported awareness of linguistic features associated with different gender identities online among respondents. The most prevalent response of "Moderately Aware" at 34.8% indicates participants feel a moderate

understanding of gendered language cues used in social media contexts. However, over a quarter reported higher levels of awareness classified as "Extremely" or "Very", suggesting awareness varies considerably. This is supported by the mean awareness level being just above "Moderate" and a standard deviation signaling some response variability. While centralized around moderate, answers were not uniform. Greater qualitative questioning could offer deeper perception-based findings on linguistic markers recognized as gendered. Notably, 13.4% lack awareness, an important finding that highlights room for more education. Overall, results demonstrate respondents possess some consciousness but varying degrees of familiarity with gender identities' social media language use. This table therefore establishes a moderate baseline of self-reported familiarity with nuanced sociolinguistic gender cues warranting further exploratory research.

Table 5: Perceptions of Linguistic Differences by Gender on Social Media

Q. 4	Extreme Differences	Significant Differences	Moderate Differences	Minor Differences	No Differences	Mean	Standard Deviation
To what extent do linguistic features differ according to gender on social media?	4.5%	18.3%	35.7%	29%	12.5%	3.10	1.04

A deeper analysis of the data in Table 5 provides insights into respondents' perspectives on linguistic variations associated with gender online. The most prevalent response of "Moderate Differences" at 35.7% signals that gendered language divergences are acknowledged but perceived as moderately distinct rather than extremely polarized. Notably, over one fifth saw "Extreme" or "Significant" variances, implying acknowledgement by some of pronounced divergences. However, the mean response closer to "Moderate" alongside a relatively low standard deviation indicates responses were predominantly centralized around perceptions of intermediate differences. Still, 12.5% perceived "No Differences", highlighting lack of consensus.

Overall, while still endorsing divergence, responses leaned towards a more nuanced view that gendered language is discernibly yet moderately rather than overwhelmingly variant on social media. This suggests an aspiration for balanced consideration of the issue over generalization. Qualitative follow-ups could unpick perceptions of particular linguistic cues to expand understanding. In conclusion, data provides a more integrated perspective of acknowledged yet complex gendered language dynamics warranting sophisticated discussion.

Table 6: Likelihood of Noticing Changes in Gendered Language Online Over Time

Q.5	Very Likely	Likely	Neutral	Unlikely	Very Unlikely	Mean	Standard Deviation
How likely are you to notice any changes or shifts in gendered language use on social media over time?	8.9%	30.4%	41.1%	12.9%	6.7%	3.21	0.95

A deeper analysis of the data in Table 6 provides insight into respondents' self-assessed ability to detect fluctuations in gendered linguistic practices through social media usage over time. The plural response of "Neutral" at 41.1% signals some uncertainty, though over a third viewed themselves as "Very Likely" or "Likely" to notice, pointing to confidence in perceptual abilities. The mean response leaning slightly towards "Likely" alongside a relatively low standard deviation indicates assessments were predominantly centralized around feeling reasonably able to track changes.

Still, qualitative questioning could explore factors affecting neutral or uncertain views. Overall, while not definitive, findings endorse an acknowledged potential for fluidity in online gender discourses warranting ongoing consideration. Longitudinal studies tracking actual identification of shifts could evaluate self-perceptions against observable realities. Additional context like platform differences may also influence outcomes. In conclusion, data presents perceptions of capacity for noticing evolutions in this multifaceted area as predominantly balanced yet with room for enhanced skills and deeper insights over time.

Here is an analytical reflection on the results of Section 2 in relation to the research objectives and questions:

The results from Section 2 provide useful insights into addressing several research objectives and questions. Regarding the objective to explore how gender is constructed, expressed and negotiated through language on social media, the findings reveal diverse yet nuanced perceptions of gendered language patterns and discourses online. Significantly, over a quarter perceive such phenomena to varying degrees. Exposure to gendered discussions was also common, with responses centered on "Sometimes", indicating language plays some role in how respondents engage with gender concepts digitally.

Relatedly, objectives involving examining implications for individuals and society, and identifying strategies for constructing gender identities, are partially addressed. Variations in awareness levels of linguistic gender cues point to their potential influence on online presentation and interactions. The mean "Moderate" difference in language by gender also suggests language norms warrant consideration in digital contexts impacting users.

Responses affirm the objective to characterize social media language use in relation to gender, by confirming a recognized existence, though findings. Questions 1 and 2 are partially answered through observations of phenomena across platforms and linguistic features triggering gender associations. Self-assessed fluidity in discourses over time also aligns with Question 5 on challenging norms.

Overall, while not conclusively addressing all objectives and questions, the largely mixed but acknowledgement-leaning responses lay groundwork for continued inquiry. Qualitative aspects

like specific examples could strengthen understanding to ultimately inform promoting inclusive practices per the final objective. The nuanced picture emerging aligns with complexity in studying online gender and language dynamics.

Section Three: Identify Linguistic Strategies and Practices Used to Construct and Perform Gender Identities

1. How familiar are you with the linguistic strategies used to express gender identities on social media?

Here is the statistical table with mean and standard deviation included: Table 7

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely Familiar	4	1.8%
Very Familiar	44	19.6%
Moderately Familiar	84	37.3%
Slightly Familiar	45	20.0%
Not Familiar	48	21.3%
Total	224	100%
Mean	2.735	
Standard Deviation	1.080	

Analysis

The data collected in Table 7 provides insight into respondents' familiarity with linguistic strategies used to express gender identities on social media. The mean of 2.735 suggests an overall moderate level of familiarity among the 224 respondents. The standard deviation of 1.080 indicates there was some variability in the responses. The highest frequency was for "Moderately Familiar" with 37.3% of respondents selecting this option. Less than 2% reported being "Extremely Familiar". Overall, while familiarity levels differed, the majority appeared to have at least a fair understanding of how language constructs gender in social media contexts. A possible limitation is the self-reported nature of the data. Nevertheless, the statistics help characterize respondents' familiarity with this emerging topic relating to language, gender and digital platforms. More research could explore factors influencing individuals' familiarity and differences across demographics.

Q.2 To what extent do you believe individuals use specific words, phrases, or hashtags to construct their gender identities on social media?

Here is the statistical table with analysis for the second question: Table 8

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very often	19	8.4%

Often	58	25.8%
Sometimes	97	43.1%
Rarely	34	15.1%
Not at all	17	7.6%
Total	224	100%
Mean	2.846	
Standard Deviation	1.022	

Analysis

In Table 8, for this question, the mean response of 2.846 indicates that on average, respondents believed individuals 'Sometimes' use language to construct gender identities online. The standard deviation of 1.022 signifies moderate variability in responses. Over half (51.8%) selected 'Sometimes' or 'Often'. This suggests most respondents thought linguistic strategies are at least occasionally employed for gender expression on social media. The 43.1% selecting 'Sometimes' was the most frequent response. Overall, the data implies that while opinions varied, the majority perceived specific words, hashtags, etc. to be at least a moderate method for conveying gender socially and digitally. Further analysis could explore if exposure influences perceptions on this topic.

Q.3. How much do you notice differences in linguistic strategies used by individuals to perform traditional gender identities versus non-binary or gender non-conforming identities on social media?

Here is the statistical table with a more in-depth analysis: Table 9

Response	Frequency	Percentage
No Differences	21	9.3%
Minor Differences	66	29.3%
Moderate Differences	83	37%
Significant Differences	45	20%
Extreme Differences	14	6.3%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.149	
Standard Deviation	1.077	

Analysis

The mean of 3.149 in Table 9 indicates that on average, respondents noticed differences at a level between 'Moderate Differences' and 'Significant Differences'. The standard deviation of 1.077 represents moderate response variability. Over half (56%) selected 'Moderate Differences' or higher, revealing most people perceived at least some contrast in linguistic strategies between traditional and non-binary gender presentations online. The highest response rate of 37% was for 'Moderate Differences'. This suggests differences are acknowledged but not to an extreme extent. Factors like one's gender identity, social media exposure and awareness of non-binary issues could influence perceptions. Overall, the data reflects an inclination among respondents to observe nuanced variation in language used for diverse expressions of gender, rather than homogeneous strategies. Further research may shed light on specific linguistic variables involved.

Q.4. How often do you come across instances where individuals challenge or subvert traditional gender norms through their language use on social media?

Here is the statistical table with a more in-depth analysis: Table 10

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	38	16.9%
Occasionally	50	22.2%
Sometimes	81	36.1%
Frequently	44	19.6%
Very Frequently	12	5.3%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.041	
Standard Deviation	1.050	

Analysis

The mean of 3.041 in Table 10 suggests that on average, respondents came across instances of challenging gender norms 'Sometimes' through social media language use. The standard deviation of 1.050 represents moderate response variability. Over half (55.7%) reported encountering such instances 'Sometimes' or more regularly. This implies that for many respondents, linguistic acts dissenting from traditional expectations of gender are observed with some frequency online. The highest response of 36.1% was for 'Sometimes', indicating such encounters are regular but not a daily occurrence. Factors like one's own gender identity/expression or social circle may affect perception. Overall, the data reflects a trend among this sample to bear witness with prudent consistency to discursive resistance of standard gender scripts digitally.

Q.5 How likely are you to engage in discussions or interactions related to gender identity on social media?

Here is the statistical table with a more in-depth analysis: Table 11

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Likely	13	5.8%
Likely	36	16.0%
Neutral	68	30.2%
Unlikely	60	26.9%
Very Unlikely	49	21.8%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.093	
Standard Deviation	1.133	

Analysis

In Table 11, the mean likelihood of 3.093 suggests respondents on average fell between 'Neutral' and 'Unlikely' for engaging in gender identity discussions online. The standard deviation of 1.133 represents moderate response variability. Over half (56%) selected 'Neutral' or lower likelihood options. This implies that for many respondents, consciously interacting around issues of gender expression through social media is not a strong probability. However, 30.2% selected 'Neutral' as their most frequent response, reflecting ambivalence rather than aversion. Factors like one's own gender experience or comfort with online discourse may impact engagement levels. Overall, while viewpoints differed, data indicates a tendency among respondents to be neutral at best regarding active participation in gender-focused digital conversations.

Here is an analytical reflection on the results from Section Three in relation to the research objectives and questions:

The aim of Section Three was to identify linguistic strategies and practices used to construct and perform gender identities on social media (Research Objective 4). The questions addressed how familiar respondents were with gendered language practices online, their perceptions of how language is used to convey gender, and observations of differences in strategies.

The results provided insights into commonly used linguistic features to express diverse genders (Research Question 2). Most respondents had at least a moderate familiarity, and believed language is sometimes or often employed for gender construction online. Over half noticed differences between traditional and non-binary identities. This helps characterize language variations across gender concepts in social media (Research Question 1).

The findings also shed light on how gendered discourses influence identity presentation. Respondents somewhat regularly witnessed challenges to norms, implying language enables non-conforming expressions (Research Question 3). However, fewer were inclined to actively engage in related discussions themselves. This nuanced perspective on personal involvement versus observation warrants further investigation into impacts on well-being (Research Question 4).

The data reflected acknowledgment that language both reinforces and contests prevailing binaries. While strategies varied, non-traditional expressions were perceived. This suggests social media both perpetuate and trouble norms (Research Question 5). Greater inclusion of diverse voices may optimize platforms' contribution to equality (Research Objectives 3 & 5). Overall, Section Three provided valuable baseline understandings to inform later analysis and address the overarching goal of promoting just online spaces. Continued research encompassing broader demographics could build on these exploratory insights.

Section Four: Examine the relationship between Language, Gender Concepts, and Social Media Practices

Q1. To what extent do you believe social media practices influence the formation and perception of gender concepts through language?

Here is the statistical table with an in-depth analysis for question 1 in Section Four: Table 12

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	21	9.3%
Slightly	37	16.4%
Moderately	61	27.1%
Very	71	31.6%
Extremely	37	16.5%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.389	
Standard Deviation	1.150	

Analysis

In Table 12, the mean of 3.389 suggests respondents on average believed social media influences gender concepts at a level between 'Moderately' and 'Very'. The standard deviation of 1.150 represents moderate response variability. Over half (53.1%) selected 'Moderately', 'Very' or 'Extremely', indicating most acknowledged at least some impact. The highest response of 31.6% for 'Very' reflects strong perceptions of influence through language online. Considering the pervasiveness of social media usage in everyday life, particularly among younger demographics, the results imply awareness that digital discourses shape understandings of gender identity. However, intrinsic and external sociocultural factors also contribute. Overall, the data captures acknowledgment among respondents that social media both reflects and helps construct prevailing conceptions of gender.

Q2. How much do you think individuals' language choices on social media reflect or reinforce societal gender norms and expectations?

Here is the statistical table with analysis for question 2: Table 13

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	19	8.4%
Slightly	46	20.4%
Moderately	85	37.8%
Very	56	24.9%
Extremely	19	8.4%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.027	
Standard Deviation	1.040	

Analysis

In Table 13, the mean of 3.027 suggests respondents believed on average that language choices 'Moderately' reflect or reinforce gender norms on social media. The standard deviation of 1.040 represents moderate variability. Over half (62.7%) selected 'Moderately' or higher, indicating most acknowledged reinforcement to some degree. The highest response of 37.8% for 'Moderately' reflects perceptions of language both complying with and challenging established societal scripts related to gender. The dominant yet evolving nature of social media's influence likely contributes to this balanced viewpoint. Overall, the data captures acknowledgment that while individual agency exists, digital discourses generally perpetuate conventional cultural standards around gendered behavior and appearance.

Q3. How often do you come across instances where social media practices lead to the transformation or redefinition of gender concepts and language use?
Here is the statistical table with analysis for question 3: Table 14

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Rarely	45	20%
Occasionally	46	20.4%
Sometimes	92	40.9%
Often	39	17.3%
Very Often	3	1.3%
Total	224	100%
Mean	2.924	

Standard Deviation	1.025

Analysis

Table 14, the mean of 2.924 suggests respondents on average came across transformative instances 'Sometimes' through social media. The standard deviation of 1.025 represents moderate variability. Over half (58.2%) reported encountering such instances 'Sometimes' or more often. This implies that for many respondents, social media leads to observable evolution in understandings of gender concepts and language at least occasionally. The highest response of 40.9% for 'Sometimes' mirrors this moderate level of exposure. Considering social media's growing influence, the results indicate it enables exploration and changes and gender norms over time through discursive experimentation. Further research could aim to characterize specific transformations witnessed.

Q4. How influential do you perceive social media platforms to be in shaping the adoption and dissemination of gendered language practices?

Here is the statistical table with analysis for question 4: Table 15

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not Influential	31	13.8%
Slightly Influential	41	18.2%
Moderately Influential	63	28.0%
Very Influential	62	27.6%
Extremely Influential	29	12.8%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.325	
Standard Deviation	1.212	

Analysis

Table 15, the mean of 3.325 suggests respondents on average perceived social media platforms as being between 'Moderately Influential' and 'Very Influential' in shaping gendered language. The standard deviation of 1.212 represents moderate variability. Over half (68.4%) saw platforms as at least 'Moderately Influential', showing most acknowledged a significant level of impact. The highest single response of 28% selected 'Moderately Influential', signaling a balanced perspective. This implies awareness that while language development involves agency, social media noticeably propagates certain gender discourses. Considering platforms' growing role in communication, the results provide useful insights into their role in both perpetuating and challenging dominant linguistic constructions of identity.

Q5. How aware are you of the potential consequences or effects of gendered language use on social media, such as self-presentation, identity formation, or social interactions?

Here is the statistical table with analysis for question 5: Table 16

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not aware	29	12.9%
Slightly Aware	48	21.3%
Moderately aware	70	31.1%
Very Aware	50	22.2%
Extremely aware	28	12.4%
Total	224	100%
Mean	3.071	
Standard Deviation	1.141	

Analysis

Table 16, the mean of 3.071 suggests respondents were on average 'Moderately aware' of potential consequences of gendered language on social media. The standard deviation of 1.141 represents moderate variability. Over half (53.3%) reported being at least 'Moderately aware', indicating recognition that linguistic choices online can impact aspects like identity and relationships. The high response of 31.1% for 'Moderately aware' demonstrates a balanced perspective. Considering language's role in social processes, the results highlight developing cognizance of dynamic interplay between discourse and sociocultural factors like self-presentation online.

Based on the research objectives and questions outlined, here is an analytical reflection on the results from Section Four:

- The results provide useful insights that help address several of the research objectives and questions:
- The studies investigate how language shapes and is shaped by gender concepts in the context of social media use (Objective 1). Responses to Q1 and Q2 shed light on this relationship and reciprocal influence.
- Q3 and Q4 examine how gender is negotiated and expressed linguistically on platforms, helping to fulfill Objective 2. Respondents acknowledge transformation of norms and platforms' role in shaping practices.
- Objectives 3 and 4 aimed to understand implications for individuals and identify strategies used to perform identity. Q5 responses indicate growing awareness of linguistic influence on self-presentation and relationships online.
- Q1-Q4 offer a picture of prevailing understanding around social media's contribution to both reflecting and challenging dominant gender scripts through language (Question 5).
- Perceptions of agency versus reinforcement in Q2 provide initial insight into how inclusive practices could be promoted (Objective 5, Question 6).

However, the study could be expanded to gain deeper qualitative insights into specific practices, discourses, and identities shaped online to fully address Objectives 2 and 4. More research is also needed on implications like mental health to answer Question 4. Overall, the results represent an informative analysis of language, gender, and social media's dynamic interrelationship to begin addressing the key questions. Further phases of the study could help broaden and contextualize the understandings.

Findings and Recommendations

Section One analyzed respondents' demographic data to provide context for interpreting the study's results. The population was slightly skewed towards younger females aged 18-24, reflecting the focus on social gender concepts and social media among this demographic group. Over half of respondents had intermediate English proficiency and daily social media usage, aligning with the research focus. Significantly, more than 60% had taken courses in gender studies or sociolinguistics, indicating familiarity with the research topics.

The demographic profile was assessed in relation to validity. While the high proportion of younger females was appropriate, the underrepresentation of other ages limited generalizability. Similarly, frequent social media use aligned with study goals but skewed away from less engaged users. Those with gender/language training may have introduced bias versus those without.

Overall, the demographic information situated the sample as digitally native and educated perspectives regularly negotiating gender expression through social language online. This directly addressed research questions about language variation across gender and social groups highly active on platforms. The results provided useful context for interpreting subsequent survey responses.

Here is a summary of the key conclusions from the analytical reflections. The results from Section 2 provided useful insights towards addressing several research objectives and questions. In relation to exploring how gender is constructed and negotiated through language on social media, the findings revealed diverse yet nuanced perceptions of gendered language patterns and discourses online. Over a quarter of respondents perceived such phenomena to some degree, indicating language plays a role in engaging with gender concepts digitally. Variations in awareness levels of linguistic gender cues pointed to their potential influence on online presentation and interactions. Responses also affirmed characterizing social media language use regarding gender by confirming recognized phenomena and triggering features across platforms. While not conclusively addressing all objectives and questions, the mixed but acknowledgement-leaning responses laid groundwork for continued inquiry. Qualitative insights could strengthen understandings of this complex issue.

The aim of Section 3 was to identify linguistic strategies and practices for gender identity construction and performance online. The results provided insights into commonly used linguistic features to express diverse genders and helped characterize variations across concepts. Most respondents exhibited at least moderate familiarity with gendered language practices online and believed language is sometimes employed for gender construction. Over half noticed differences between traditional and non-binary identities. The findings also shed light on gendered discourses' influence on identity presentation and warranted further investigation into well-being impacts. The data reflected acknowledgment that language both reinforces and contests prevailing binaries, while non-traditional expressions were perceived. This provided baseline understandings to inform promoting just online spaces through continued, broader research.

Section 4 results helped address several research objectives and questions. Responses

contributed to exploring how language shapes and is shaped by gender concepts on social media through perceptions of their reciprocal influence. Examination of transformations and platforms' shaping role fulfilled the objective of analyzing linguistic gender negotiation. Indications of growing awareness of linguistic self-presentation and relationship implications emerged. An understanding began to form around social media's role in reflecting and challenging dominant scripts and initial insights into inclusive practice promotion. The analysis represented an informative starting point to contextualize understandings through future research broadening the study's scope.

Here are some key ways this study is distinctive based on the literature review and previous studies:

1. Comprehensive theoretical framework - It applies theories from sociolinguistics, feminist linguistics, and queer theory to analyze language and gender, giving a robust theoretical lens. Many prior studies focus on individual theories.

2. Interdisciplinary scope - It examines language use through both linguistic and social media/digital literature, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the topic. Previous work often emphasize one field over the other.

3. Exploration of diverse platforms - Rather than focusing on a single site like Twitter or Instagram, it considers various platforms to understand cross-platform similarities and differences.

4. Attention to identity negotiation - It analyzes not just norms/stereotypes but also strategies of challenging them, capturing the fluid, negotiated nature of online gender performance.

5. Sociocultural contextualization - It places language practices within the broader context of social/cultural influences on gender. Many studies analyze language features in isolation.

6. Comprehensive research design - Its mixed-methods inquiry through literature, previous studies, quantitative survey, and planned qualitative interviews provides fuller, triangulated insights.

7. Focus on implications - It examines implications for well-being, mental health in addition to representation, giving a more holistic understanding of social media's role.

8. Guidance for future work - The analysis identifies gaps for future research to address, moving the field forward systematically through an iterative process.

So, in drawing on diverse theoretical/empirical resources and addressing limitations of prior work through its comprehensive, contextualized mixed-methods design, the study makes a distinctive contribution to knowledge in this area.

Recommendations

Based on the results, findings, and analytical reflections from the study, here are some recommendations:

1. Conduct follow-up qualitative interviews and focus groups to gain deeper insights into individuals' lived experiences with gendered language practices on social media. This will help address some research objectives more fully.

2. Expand the demographics of participants to include more diverse ages, genders, cultural/linguistic backgrounds. This will make the understandings more generalizable and inclusive.

3. Investigate specific examples of language used to negotiate and challenge gender norms to better characterize transformation processes. Qualitative data can elucidate nuanced strategies.

4. Examine mental health and well-being impacts more closely through validated assessment tools, as some responses flagged this as under-researched area.

5. Partner with social media companies to analyze large natural language datasets to triangulate self-report findings and detect trends over time/across contexts.

6. Engage policymakers and platforms to discuss promoting gender-inclusive guidelines and features based on evidence from the study (e.g. customizable pronouns, content moderation training).

7. Develop educational materials and training for users on respectful communication, critical digital literacy and the social impacts of language based on frameworks from the study.

8. Disseminate findings through academic publications, presentations, summary reports to inform research, policy, product design and raise awareness on issues identified.

9. Continue the iterative research process through follow-up studies to monitor developments, address gaps identified and keep insights up-to-date in this rapidly changing field.

The overarching aim would be to apply the research towards positive social change and more equitable online environments.

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The Level of Activating Teacher Agency in English Language Classes

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Abstract

This study explored the activation of teacher agency in the English language classroom. It examined to what extent English language teachers could utilize their agency and expertise in their professional performance. The study, a mixed-methods research, employed a survey questionnaire to collect data from one hundred eleven (111) Lebanese English language teachers for cycle one to cycle four (grade 1 to grade 12). Both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis were carried out to examine the teachers' responses to the semi-structured questionnaire. The study findings showed that most of the surveyed teachers' agency was restricted to a great extent in the classroom. It also revealed that teachers were aware of the problem, yet most of them abided by school guidelines. The study conveyed teachers' dissatisfaction with a number of teaching methods and strategies they used in the classroom, but they were unable to change due to the education system restrictions despite the teachers' knowledge of better alternatives. The study also revealed that the findings resonated with Zeichner's view of teacher agency. Furthermore, the study answered the research questions that guided the analysis. In the concluding part, the study highlighted the findings' implications, and it suggested recommendations.

Keywords: Teacher agency, professional identity, professional development, English language teachers, education system reform

Introduction

There is a growing awareness of the significance of agency which led to the publication of research articles revolving around this concept specifically in the last decade (Imants & van der Wal, 2020). The aim in focusing on teacher agency is directly related to the development of education systems and policies (Zeichner, 2019). The shift in curriculum planning away from traditional curriculum regulations to embrace a new system in which teachers can enact their agency in the teaching practices has not achieved its purpose, hence, teacher agency is still highly deactivated (Priestley & Drew, 2019).

The interest in supporting the agentic role of teachers is due to viewing them as agents of change in curriculum reform and teacher professional development (Imants & van der Wal, 2020). Professional development, one of the aspects of teacher agency, is also reflected in teacher's professional identity that grabbed the attention of researchers in the period 1988-2000 (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2003). In fact, there is an increase of interest in comprehending the identity of language teachers, how they view themselves in relation with the surrounding environment, inside and outside the classroom, the factors that affect their teaching profession and life (Hempkin, 2023), and how their agency is reflected in their teaching performance.

Accordingly, this study is an attempt to throw light on the level of putting teacher agency into practice. The study will examine the activation of agency of Lebanese English language teachers in the classroom. The findings will be analyzed in reference to Kenneth M. Zeichner's argument on underutilizing teacher expertise and teacher agency in education policies (Zeichner, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Although teachers should be situated in the center of the education systems (Cambridge, 2019), the problem is that teacher agency is still restricted in the classroom. In Lebanon as in many countries around the world, teachers are not always given the freedom to make decisions pertaining to their teaching performance, teaching strategies, and materials used in the classroom. Instead of "being creative and using [their] professional judgment to make decisions" (Christopher, 2022), teachers abide by school and education system guidelines while taking decisions, even if the established criteria do not meet student needs and underutilize teacher's expertise.

Rationale of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine to what extent teacher agency is disabled in the teaching process. The study observes the degree of limitations imposed by school systems on teachers' professional performance, and whether teachers abide by school guidelines. It explores whether teacher professional identity, which needs to be considered and linked to the studies in various education domains (Rushton et al., 2023), influences the activation of agency in the classroom. Additionally, the study is an attempt to delve into teachers' perspectives to know what methods, strategies, and activities they need to eliminate altogether or substitute with better alternatives as "[t]hey notice what works and what doesn't" (Knight, 2023) in the classroom.

Questions of the Study

The study is guided by the following three questions:
1. To what extent is teacher agency activation absent in the English language classroom?
2. How is teacher professional development effective in activating teacher agency in the English language classroom?
3. What are the practices teachers need to eliminate as they obstruct the function of teacher agency, and what are the alternatives they need to implement in the English language classroom?

Significance of the Study

Because there has been no sufficient body of research exploring teacher agency (Guoyuan, 2020), the value of this study lies in the problem it highlights. Because teachers are the focal element in the teaching and learning process, examining a topic which is at the core of education can be considered of paramount importance especially that little attention has been paid to teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2015). Teacher agency is fundamental in teacher's professional development (Guoyuan, 2020). As education is an indispensable condition for world development, so is teacher's professional state that is the major factor influencing teacher agency. Teacher agency is directly connected to the way information is delivered, hence, knowledge acquisition. Exploring the issue of obstructing the efficiency of teacher agency and suggesting solutions to activate it entail improvement in the teaching and learning outcome and contribute to the research field in general and to enhancing the Lebanese education system in particular.

Review of Literature
Teacher Agency

Being agents who produce knowledge has been the notion attributed to teachers nowadays and for the past years as teacher agency remains an interest for researchers (Smith et al., 2022). Agency is defined by scholars and educators in many ways and from different perspectives. One of its definition is that it is "the by-product of activating accumulated past teaching experiences,

patterns of thoughts and actions, and professional qualifications. These patterns permeate into teachers' classroom practices and make their identities stable" (Li, 2023, p.4). Another definition is that

> [t]eacher agency is about how teachers see themselves, their role and their active contribution in shaping their work and how it is valued in their professional context. It is about how they bring an eternal critical thinking quality to everything they do. (Knight, 2023, para. 5)

Agency is also viewed as "the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of education quality" (Guoyuan, 2020, p. 2). According to Priestly et al. (2015), agency "denotes a 'quality' of the engagement of actors with temporal-relational contexts-for-action" (p. 3).

Agency Roots
The concept of agency, as an essential aspect in theoretical as well as practical education, has its origin in Kant's Enlightenment that views the individual as a human being only through education by which rational faculties grow and produce independent judgment, hence leading to autonomous action (Biesta & Tedder, 2006). The concept of agency can be found in the works of Piaget and Kohlberg who believe that autonomy refers to the highest levels of moral and cognitive developments, in addition to being the basis of critical thinking in liberal education, and emancipatory concepts in education due to the impact of Marxism (Biesta & Tedder, 2006).

Agency Models
Sociological Model of Agency
Emirbayer and Mische (1998) have proposed their sociological model of agency established on reconceptualizing

> human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment). (p. 963)

In other words, the human agency cannot be construed unless it is viewed as constituting different orientations that change in relation to time (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

Ecological Model of Agency
Understanding agency from an ecological perspective (Priestley & Drew, 2016) is influenced by agency viewed from a sociological perspective (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Mark Priestly, Gert Biesta, and Sarah Robinson (2015) have developed a model for teacher agency based on ecological perspective that focuses on actualizing temporal and relational dimensions of agency. In their model, agency is viewed in relation with and through the influence of agentic capacity and agentic spaces. Priestley et al. (2015) study teacher agency not as a personal capacity an individual owns, but rather as a result of temporal and relational aspects, hence 'ecological conditions' through which it emerges and becomes actualized. Thus, agency is about what an individual can do or achieve not a quality they have (Biesta & Tedder, 2006).

Zeichner's Argument
Kenneth M. Zeichner, a prominent researcher, is famous for his interest in the different approaches that focus on enhancing teacher education and supporting reforms in the teaching domain (College of Education, 2024). One of his major interests is teacher agency. Zeichner

(2019) argues that, from his experience as a researcher conducting studies in teacher education and practice, he has found out that teacher agency and expertise are not usually taken advantage of in establishing education systems. He maintains that officials who are responsible for setting education policies should foster the activation of teacher agency through enhancing it in relation with teachers' expertise.

Furthermore, Zeichner (2019) emphasizes that it is essential to support teachers and benefit from their experience for a better education system. To him, this can be realized through giving them the opportunity of having a clear and efficient voice in structuring education policies "to provide everyone's children with access to well-prepared teachers and a high quality and enriching education" (p.12). Another idea in Zeichner's argument is that teacher performance in learning activities and research rarely focuses on teacher agency. If cultural and social aspects of the teaching and learning environment are paid more attention to, this will build a better education system in which teacher agency and expertise are adequately utilized (Zeichner, 2019).

Teacher's Professional Identity

Teacher's professional identity is a major factor influencing teacher's performance and a significant subject in terms of its impact on education systems (Mulu, Tadesse, Wolyie, & Amasu, 2022). In the past, language teachers were viewed as individuals who applied the correct strategy and methodology so that student could acquire the target language (Varghese & Morgan, 2005). Nowadays, the view has changed. The literature reveals the interest in the concept of teacher identity and its importance particularly that of language teachers (Hempkin, 2023).

> [D]eveloping an identity as a teacher is not a singular event in a person's career. Teachers are constantly renegotiating their notions of education and their role within it as they work with different populations of students or are influenced by continued education or work with mentors (Robinson, 2020, p. 84).

Teacher identity can be defined through considering its two dimensions: the personal and the social (Li, 2023). The personal dimension is the teacher's image formed by past experiences. Teacher's roles at work define the social dimension of his/her identity. The social dimension can be an ongoing process of being shaped through interaction in professional and work contexts affecting teacher agency, hence teacher agentive performance in class. The influence of both teacher identity and teacher agency is reciprocal in which language and discourse play a major role in the impact of each one of them on the other, as language and discourse influence teacher professional identity and agency construction in professional contexts (Li, 2023).

Teacher professional development hugely affects the formation of teacher professional identity and agency. Teachers gain high quality experience in education domain, teaching performance, classroom management, and in leading students to better academic outcome when they engage in professional development (OECD, 2020). The Lebanese teachers of English language, the focus of this study, involve in professional development workshops to improve their teaching skills and performance, yet, the education system does not aid them as it has not been updated since 1997 (CERD, n.d.) although in the Lebanese law it should be updated every four years (El-Hakim, 2021). Because teachers are at the heart of the teaching and learning process, and they are responsible for implementing the curriculum in the classroom, it is necessary that they take part in updating and developing it (Alsubaie, 2022). Teacher expertise is their professional identity which is an aspect of teacher agency that is essential to function in

establishing school curriculum and education policy.

Methodology
Research Design
This study is a descriptive mixed methods research (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In order to answer the research questions, qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed.

Data Collection
The collected data consist of teachers' answers to a semi-structured Google Form survey (Pew Research Center, 2023; William, 2023). The survey questionnaire asks teachers questions about their freedom to take decisions pertaining to the use of alternative materials without referring to the school, abiding by school guidelines, restricting the freedom of their professional development, the effectiveness of their professional development, and the teaching strategies or methods they prefer to replace.

Participants
Lebanese English language teachers are the participants in this study. They are a mixture of teachers who teach different levels from grade one to grade twelve. They are 111 teachers from different schools and regions.

Instruments
Teachers' Survey
There are seven (7) essential questions of three kinds in the teachers' survey questionnaire: multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Zeichner's Argument
The findings of the study are analyzed in reference to Zeichner's view on the role of teacher agency and expertise in structuring education systems. Thus, the findings either refute or support Zeichner's argument (2019).

Analysis and Findings
The target of the study leads the analytical process of the collected data. It is the examination of confining teacher agency, the restrictions on teacher's professional performance, the impact of teacher professional identity on mobilizing agency, and how teachers view the relation between professional development and agency.

Teachers' Survey Analysis
One hundred eleven (111) teachers for various cycles and levels (grade one to twelve) answered the questionnaire. The response to each question is displayed and analyzed in the following section.

Question 1
Responding to the first question "Do you have the freedom to replace any teaching method or strategy established in the school syllabus with another one that you believe is better, without referring to the school administration or to the coordinator?", forty-four point one percent (44.1%) of the teachers revealed that they had the freedom to do that, a percentage which was higher than that of the teachers (37.8 %) who chose "to a certain extent". The lowest percentage (18 %) went for the teachers who had no freedom in changing the teaching methods or strategies.

Figure 1

Teachers' Freedom to Change Teaching Methods Established in the School Syllabus
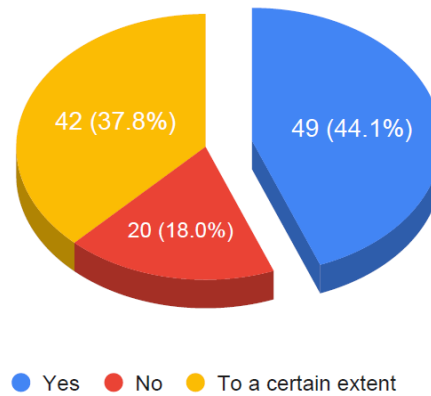
Question 2

Teachers had different responses to the question "Do you have the freedom to replace a text included in the school syllabus with a better one from your own without referring to the school administration or to the coordinator?". The highest percentage (43.2%) went for the teachers who chose "Yes", while twenty-eight point eight per cent (28.8 %) of them had freedom 'To a certain extent' which was a little more than twenty-seven point nine per cent (27.9 %) of the teachers who had no freedom without referring to the administration or coordinators.

Figure 2

Teachers' Freedom to Replace a Text Included in the School Syllabus
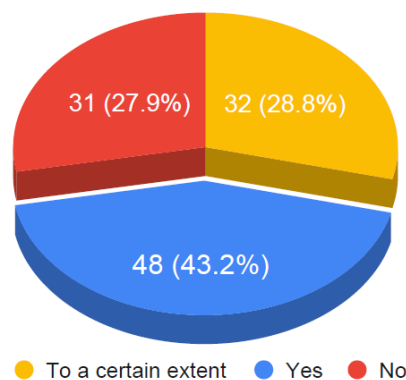
Question 3

In responding to the question "Do you abide by the school problem-solving guidelines when issues emerge in the classroom even if you believe you have better ways to deal with the situation?", the lowest percentage (22.5 %) of teachers answered 'No' whereas the percentage was higher (35.1 %) for teachers who abided by school criteria. The teachers who selected 'To a certain extent' got the highest percentage (42.3 %).

Figure 3

Abiding by School Problem-Solving Guidelines in Classroom

- No   - Yes   - To a certain extent
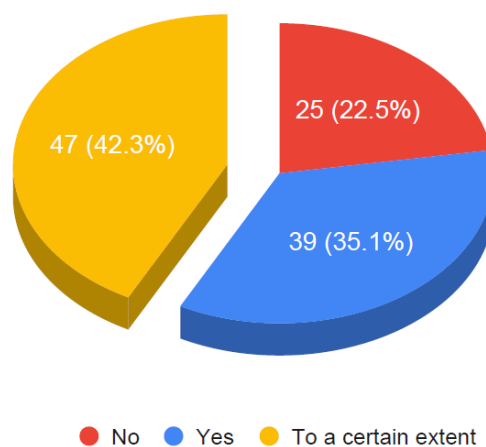
Question 4

The teachers' responses to the question "In order to raise your students' awareness, do you discuss important topics the school does not agree on? (topics related to politics, religion, gender issues, etc.)?" revealed that the lowest percentage (18.9 %) did not abide by school restrictions and discussed topics they considered significant to students. On the other hand, slightly less than half of the teachers (48.6 %) did not explore prohibited subjects, while thirty-two point four per cent (32.4 %) did that 'To a certain extent'.

Figure 4

Discussing Important Topics the School Does Not Agree on

- Yes   - No   - To a certain extent
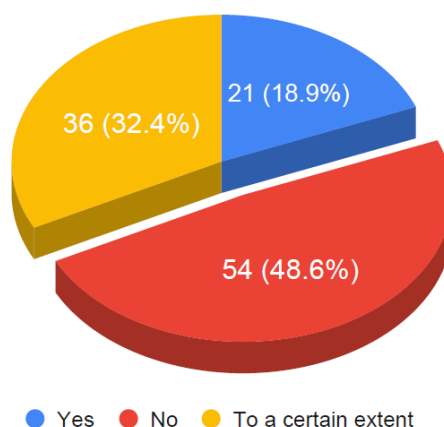
Question 5

The question *"On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent do school guidelines restrict the freedom of teachers' professional performance?"* elicited a variety of answer choices on Likert scale. Thirty-two per cent (32 %) of the teachers, which is the highest percentage, believed that the freedom of their professional performance was 'Somewhat' restricted, followed by twenty-five

per cent (25 %) of them who believed it was only 'Slightly' limited. Nevertheless, twenty-one per cent (21%) of the surveyed teachers opted for the answer 'Not at all' whereas sixteen per cent (16 %) saw that their professional freedom was 'Moderately' restricted. Finally, only five per cent (5%) believed their freedom was 'Completely' confined.

Figure 5

Restricting Teachers' Freedom of Professional Performance
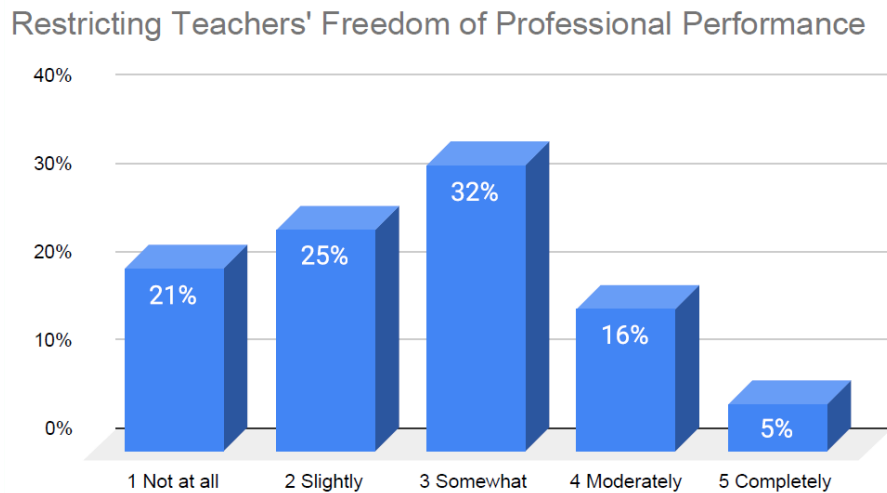
Question 6
In their response to the question 'On a scale of 1 to 5, how effective do you believe professional development is in helping teachers perform more autonomously in the classroom?', the attitude of the majority (77 %) of teachers reflected their positive view of the efficiency of professional development in fostering teacher autonomy. Thirty-nine per cent (39 %) and thirty-eight per cent (38 %) of them believed that professional development was 'Extremely effective' and 'Very effective' respectively. 'Moderately effective' was the answer of sixteen per cent (16 %) of them, 'Slightly effective' went for five per cent (5 %), and 'Not effective' was the answer chosen by only two per cent (2 %).

Figure 6

The Effect of Professional Development on Teacher Autonomy (Agency)
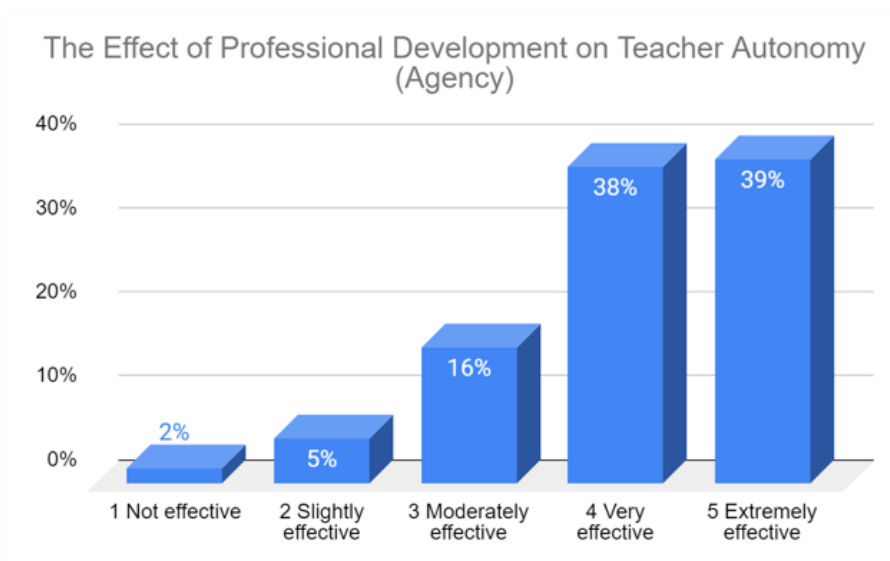
Question 7
In responding to the question "Is/Are there any strategy/ies or method/s you view as boring or

outdated and you prefer to replace but you cannot due to school restrictions? Please name it/them.", sixty-seven point six per cent (67.6 %) of the teachers responded that they had no problem in utilizing the current strategies and methods, and some justified their answer by mentioning that the school did not mind when teachers changed strategies or methods if they were proven to entail better student performance. Less than half (32.4 %) of the above-mentioned percentage went for teachers who showed their need to change methods pertaining to teacher and student performance as well as some activities, skills, and materials used in the classroom.

Figure 7

The Need to Change Methods, Strategies, or Materials

● Have no problem in the current strategies and methods
● Desire to change current methods and strategies but cannot
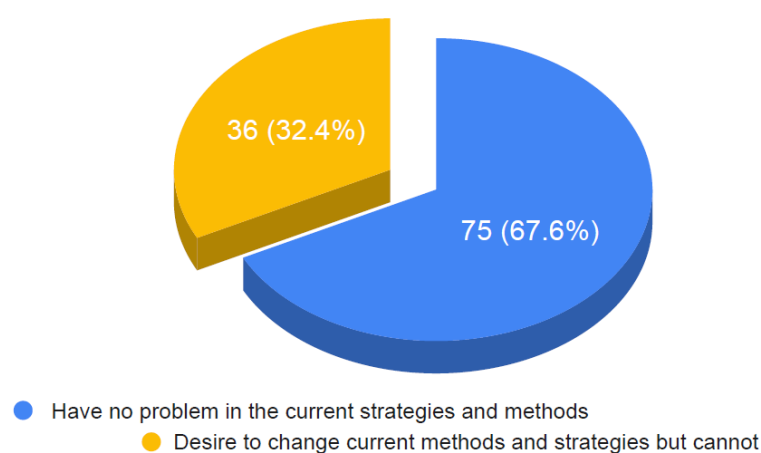
The following were the changes teachers required in their responses.

➢ Wearing school uniform should not be obligatory.
➢ Allow the use of mobile phones.
➢ The official English books are boring and should be changed but we can't do that due to the restrictions of the administration.
➢ Outdated teacher class discussions need to be changed.
➢ Students should be able to move around freely in the classroom. Sitting for too long is boring and makes students lose interest in the topic. Class rules should be updated, and teachers should, to a certain extent, allow students to move. In this way they wouldn't feel like robots. Sadly, schools restrict such strategies as they consider they would lead students to misbehave, and class would become chaotic. However, teacher's role is highly significant in managing students' behavior. With a fun learning environment, the teacher would be able to have more productive students.
➢ What should be changed are rote learning and traditional didactic teaching in which students are always on the receiving end; they are passive followers with no real integration in the learning process. No critical thinking, no tolerance for off-limit topics.

- ➢ Teaching and learning methods are still very traditional. They should be more practical.
- ➢ The teacher-centered class is such an old and boring method which we still apply in our classes.
- ➢ It is important to initiate debates in class and give students the chance to speak and express themselves.
- ➢ Technology is necessary to use, but there is neither electricity nor internet in classes.
- ➢ The whole school curriculum is outdated and must be changed in order to allow teachers greater freedom in choosing teaching methods they deem suitable for their students, rather than adhering strictly to prescribed curricula. This means teachers can organize lessons more flexibly and allocate time and resources based on students' needs and different learning styles.
- ➢ Teachers need to develop their knowledge and skills.
- ➢ Apply interdisciplinary studies.
- ➢ We need innovative workshops that would help in developing our performance to meet the needs of this "artificial intelligence generation".
- ➢ Emphasis on grades should be abandoned, the coursework is excessively difficult, and choices are limited in learning pathways.
- ➢ Skill strategies for the official exam should be changed.
- ➢ Lecturing, parroting, homework...are outdated.
- ➢ Change the seating arrangement.
- ➢ Memorization is no more needed.
- ➢ Direct explanation is not effective.
- ➢ Reading strategies should be updated.
- ➢ Using the blackboard is outdated. Use technology instead.
- ➢ Traditional writing methods should be changed.
- ➢ Use audio-visual material more. If internet were accessible to our classrooms, possibly we would have livelier and more effective learning-based classrooms.

Analyzing the Findings of the Study in Reference to Zeichner's Argument

Zeichner's view on teacher agency was echoed in the teachers' responses. In responding to question 1, more than half of the teachers (55.8 %) conveyed that they either had a limited freedom (37.8 % of the teachers), or had no freedom at all (18 %) to replace a method or strategy with an alternative they believed was better. Similarly, in their response to question 2, fifty-six point seven per cent (56.7 %) of the teachers, which is close to the percentage in question 1, revealed that they either had a certain extent of freedom (28.8 %) to change a text, or they could not do that at all (27.9 %). Additionally, seventy-seven point four per cent (77.4 %) of them were confined to school problem-solving guidelines either partially (42.3 %) or completely (35.1 %) despite that they had better ways to tackle the issues, which was their response to question 3. When teachers responded to question 4, a great majority (81 %) showed that they either had limited discussions of important topics for students (32.4 %), or

they didn't initiate any discussion pertaining to prohibited topics (48.6 %).

In responding to question 5, more than three-quarters of the surveyed teachers (79 %) showed that school guidelines limited the activation of their professional performance, to different extents though. In ninety-nine per cent (99%) of their responses to question 6, teachers believed, to different extents, that professional development helped them perform autonomously in the classroom. Finally, in responding to question 7, thirty-two point four per cent (32.4 %) of teachers focused on the necessity to abandon or change a number of methods, strategies, materials, and some aspects of teachers' performance in class even though sixty-seven point six per cent (67.6 %) of the answers to this question did not show any desire for change. This percentage (67.6 %) revealed that the problem is not in the methods themselves, but rather whether teachers are free to decide on the methods and strategies deemed suitable for their students.

All of the above answers confirmed Zeichner's research observation which has led him to believe that teacher identity is not sufficiently activated in the classroom. When in six out of seven questions in the survey the percentages of the one hundred eleven surveyed English language teachers are always higher than fifty per cent (50 %), and in most of the answers they are above seventy per cent (70 %) showing discontent with school guidelines that confine their freedom of professional performance and decision-making, this indicates that teachers' professional knowledge, education, and academic experience, hence agency, are not seriously taken into consideration when setting curricula in general and school syllabi in particular.

Zeichner's (2019) call for supporting teachers to take part in laying out the foundation of education systems aligns with what the surveyed teachers expressed in answering the open-ended question, the last one in the questionnaire. The changes teachers demanded mirrored their professional knowledge about the teaching field and education in general. They knew what books, discussions, class arrangements, teaching methods, curriculum, and strategies were of no more interest and benefit to their students. They were very conscious of what was needed. They realized that supporting teachers could be fulfilled through 'technology', developing their 'knowledge and skills', participating in 'innovative workshops' and 'developing [their] performance in order to meet the needs of the 'artificial intelligence generation'.

This awareness about the gaps in the teaching and learning process is likely to place teachers in the heart of the preparation process of school curricula and education systems. Teachers' expertise, accumulated through their direct contact with students and the use of materials, methods, strategies, techniques, and modes of learning, makes them the practical experts in the education domain. Their expertise molds their professional identity which can be projected onto the teaching and learning environment through their agency that needs to be utilized in setting education programs as Zeichner (2019) argues.

Answering the Questions of the Study

As the study aimed to address the research questions and was led by them, the findings elicited answers to the three questions. In order to answer the first question "*To what extent is teacher agency activation absent in the English language classroom?*", the findings provided percentages of teachers who believed their professional performance was restricted by school guidelines. The percentages of teachers who showed absence of agency in the classroom ranged between fifty-five point eight per cent (55.8 %) and eighty-one per cent (81 %) depending on the content of each question posed in the survey questionnaire (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). The answer to the second research question "*How is teacher professional development*

effective in activating teacher agency in the English language classroom?" was also part of the study findings. In responding to question 6 in the survey questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of teachers (98 %) agreed, to different extents, on the efficiency of professional development in supporting teacher agency. Only two per cent (2 %) of them believed that professional development did not contribute at all to boosting teacher agency activation in the classroom.

The third research question *"What are the practices teachers need to eliminate as they obstruct the function of teacher agency, and what are the alternatives they need to implement in the English language classroom?"* also had been answered by the study findings. In responding to question 7, teachers mentioned the methods, strategies, skills, seating arrangements, books, curriculum, etc., they considered outdated and boring to teachers as well as students. When teachers' performance has been restricted to the school system they considered outdated or boring, this means that teacher agency was disabled since they knew what was useful for their students and what was not, however, they could not change the reality. In responding to the same question (7), teachers suggested what alternatives for the current teaching and learning practices could be implemented because they considered them solutions after experiencing the current practices and realizing their limited benefits or inefficiency.

Conclusion

This study probed the concept of activating teacher agency in the English language classroom. It provided insights into a group of Lebanese English language teachers' views of their professional performance and agency in relation with school education system. It unveiled the general restrictions imposed upon teachers, and teachers' reaction in response to them. The study revealed teachers' awareness about the negative effects of such restrictions on the teaching and learning process particularly practices that teachers considered ineffective or outdated. Nevertheless, most of the teachers showed tolerance and patience in abiding by school guidelines although they believed they could implement better strategies and methods if they were given the chance.

Teachers' consciousness about the significance of their professional development in backing up and enacting their teacher agency showed how deep the gap is between their professional identity and agency on one hand and the current education system on the other hand. This was made obvious as teachers had already realized what teaching and learning methods worked best for their students and aligned with their needs. Yet, officials responsible for education-policy making have been neglecting the fact that the role of English language teachers is of paramount importance when it comes to incorporating their agency and expertise into building an adequate education structure that can keep pace with the nonstop world development.

Implications

Disabling teacher agency in the English language classroom creates dichotomy between teachers' professional knowledge and expertise on one hand, and what is actually exercised in the classroom on the other hand. This leads teachers to experience a state of uneasiness and confusion. Teachers are already dissatisfied with school restrictions that in many cases control their performance by preventing them from applying what they believe to bring about better student outcome.

This dichotomy also exists between students' performance in the classroom through practicing unbeneficial and outdated strategies and skills and what awaits them in the rapidly

evolving life. Traditional teaching methods are inappropriate to be used for a continuously updating skills the world demands from the future generation.

As a result, reform in the Lebanese education policy is required. Officials can achieve that through acknowledging the significance of teachers' role in designing the curriculum and school education system. Viewing teachers as experts in their field helps a lot in bridging the gaps in curriculum and syllabus plans.

Providing teachers with their professional needs such as building adequate infrastructure, funding schools to make technological devices available for both teachers and students, and organizing up-to-date workshops for teachers' professional development all contribute to support and strengthen teacher agency. Teacher agency is the factor through which teacher professional identity emerges as a catalyst, hence a facilitator and guide, in the teaching and learning environment where the student becomes an autonomous learner.

Building on the above discussion, it is indispensable to change the lenses through which teachers- particularly English language teachers- are viewed. Teachers are the best experts in the education field; they realize very well what their students need, what interests them most, what motivates them to learn, and what is advantageous for their academic development.

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Training Gen Z in Media Literacy via Scholastic Journalism

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Abstract
This paper explores the author's academic-year experience teaching and training high school upperclassmen in the fundamentals of journalism and media literacy at a Kuwaiti American private school at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Topics and themes covered in the elective introductory journalism course are explored, as well as the practical aspect of students applying their theoretical knowledge in the co-production of the quarterly school newsletter. The final project of the year/semester culminated in a student-generated website that showcased their new journalistic knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes.

Keywords: Media literacy, journalism, ELT

Introduction
"If you could teach any elective course, what would it be?" the high school principal asked me on my first day at a bilingual school in Kuwait. Thinking for a few seconds, I replied "Journalism." Thus, the interesting yearlong journey began of teaching an introductory journalism course to Kuwaiti high school students in what would be my first experience teaching both a journalism class and all-female students. Nonetheless, it was a promising challenge I was ready to embrace.

The school publishes a quarterly newsletter every academic year that showcases schoolwide events, student and staff honorable recognition, and direct quotes from the administrators befitting of the theme for that particular issue. School management takes pride in distributing this 20-page publication to parents, students and faculty of the ABS community.

Producing it is no easy feat as I have come to understand as the person who would assume responsibility for its creation as the new journalism teacher. The social media specialist/graphic artist and school photographer knew the ins and outs of creating this media product, and he became my closest ally in showing me the process used to bring the *ABS Times* periodical to life.

Thankfully, I had time to adapt to the school climate and students before launching out into the deep waters of educating teenage girls on the principles and practices of journalism, with an emphasis on teaching them graphic design skills that would enable them to design the newsletter, themselves, under my tutelage.

So, I shadowed my predecessor for a month to learn the ropes. She introduced me to the students, showed me her work pattern and became another ally with whom I could consult and confide in both during and after my "apprenticeship". I still recall us working diligently with the graphic artist to put out the first issue of the newsletter, which was not easy in that neither of us was familiar with the graphic design software used to assemble it.

Hit the Ground Running
Now let's flash forward to the second quarter when I embarked on the role of full-time journalism instructor for the second half of the semester-long course. I knew how I wanted to conduct the class and what I wanted to teach; ergo, I was excited to share my passion for this subject to a group of students who might appreciate all that the course content had to offer.

Infatuated with the textbook because of its user-friendly, practical exploration of scholastic journalism with real-world case studies and sidebars of best practices, I planned to capitalize on the value it would bring to the class. So, I took the students to the inventory shop to check out their student textbooks in our first week of class. They would be responsible for reading the assigned chapters and keeping pace with the lessons and assignments that I would post on their unique Google Classroom page.

While teaching the first semester group of journalism students proved challenging as most of them had no interest in the class and did not choose to be in it, the second semester group of young ladies blew me away with their humble respect, keen interest and diligent work ethic. Several of them already had graphic design and website building experience, which they could and did use to their creative advantage in the class.

It was a breath of fresh air to begin the new semester with a clean slate wherein I could "run the class as I saw fit," according to the headmistress. The second semester group of young ladies demonstrated how much they wanted to learn about journalism. I began this class by distributing a needs assessment via Google form (my school used Google Education Suite) to determine their learning needs/goals/interests. Thus, I'd be able to tailor my lesson planning and teaching techniques in a way to accommodate their objectives as students new to this field of study.

In fact, I later discovered that some of them had preconceived notions that the class would be boring as they wrote in the class evaluation toward the end of the class: "I would totally recommend this class to other students. At first I thought that it would be a boring class, but it was a really fun class. I am so glad that I have chosen journalism." However, over time they have come to relish the class as they pointed out because it allowed them to tap into the creative hemisphere of their brains by working on versatile, practical assignments meant to strengthen their writing, editing, and research skills all while allowing them to be inventive in their work.

Project-Based Learning at Best

For instance, they had to complete an infographic project, and it enabled them to exploit their graphic design savvy by creating an informational graphic (i.e., infographic or infograph) about any current event or on an original story they previously wrote for the class. Indeed, I embraced other student-generated creative ideas as it's my teaching philosophy to promote the 21st century global skills of creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking, which are essential for both the personal and professional success of the next generation, in my classes.

As became the pattern with this ambitious and tenacious class, they managed to wow me with their creative genius by creating infographics representative of their individual tastes. Many of them used a website called Piktochart, a graphic designer's paradise perfect for concocting all sorts of visually appealing projects, including posters, presentations and infographics. The free website has a myriad of templates from which to choose; this was a prime instance of how teachers can learn from their students because I never knew about this online resource until I began evaluating their colorful and aesthetically pleasing infographics.

Another project that they told me they treasured was the interview story assignment in which they had to interview someone about a unique story idea that they would later craft into an article related to one of the four types of interviews that we studied in class. Throughout the semester, I encouraged them to read and explore the textbook because it was very student-friendly and contained many student-written news stories useful for careful analysis.

Working in partners for this real-world journalistic task, they generated interesting story ideas, received helpful teacher tips on interviewing and proceeded to conduct their interviews. Then, they had a week, post-interview, to work on their stories before submission for evaluation. I thoroughly enjoyed reading their stories. One student pair interviewed their mothers about the Gulf War in 1991 when Iraq invaded Kuwait, leaving Kuwaiti citizens desolate and despondent. The story contained original photographs from the historic event and was written in an in-depth Q&A format.

Another student interviewed her father about his experience living and studying in the United States as a working family man. Another student pair interviewed three random foreign expatriates about their lifestyles in Kuwait. This assignment pushed them out of their comfort zones into the realm of the genuine duty of a journalist: gathering and talking to sources for information needed to write a compelling and competent newsworthy story that resonates with readers.

The COVID-19 pandemic unexpectedly truncated the class curriculum and semester once we transitioned to virtual learning. Our hopeful plan of going on a field trip to a real media outlet dissipated, and I could not cover everything that I had hoped to teach prior to the abrupt school closure. Nonetheless, the class managed the e-learning situation well after overcoming initial, inevitable hurdles of adaptability to a brand-new schedule and way of learning from/at home.

An advocate for presentations and public speaking, I assigned students the task of finding a professional journalist to research that they would then create a presentation about for the purpose of presenting it to our virtual class, which worked well pre-spring break in April. Once again, they dazzled me with the diversity and depth of the journalists they chose to research, some of whom are as follows: Anderson Cooper, Christiane Amanpour, Walter Cronkite, Hu Shuli, Shereen Bhan and Louis Theroux.

The Joy of Teaching and Learning

All in all, it's probably no understatement to say that the students found the class rigorous and overwhelming, at times, especially for an elective course that many view as an easy GPA booster; however, their overall positive feedback has shown that journalism is a vivacious and multifaceted subject crucial to the democratic ideals of a flourishing global society.

When asked about what she enjoyed most and/or least about the introductory journalism class, one student wrote the following survey response: "I've enjoyed the whole learning process in this class since it allowed me to improve and develop my writing skills. I also enjoyed how this class allowed me to live the life of a journalist. It gave me the chance to roam around the school to get that perfect story that could eventually make it into the school newspaper. However, all great things come with their bad sides. The thing that I enjoyed least about the class was the fact that it was the first period of our day. I believe that this class deserved to take place after most students are awake. I say this because, during class, most of us are tired and can't function that fast, which may reduce the value of the course."

And for the grand finale! The students' knowledge, awareness, skills and attitude of journalism culminated in a final project wherein they had to build a class website showcasing a reasonable dose of the spectacular work they did all semester both at school and online in what has been deemed an unprecedented era in global education in light of the health pandemic. Visit their novel website here, and peer into the window of this dynamic high school journalism class.