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Table of Contents

Chief Editor's Note

The International Journal of Emerging Perspectives in Education (IJEPE) publishes original, empirical research that explores various key themes and topics that are crucial to contemporary education. We are particularly excited to feature articles that offer new perspectives and innovative solutions to relevant challenges. *IJEPE* is one of the first online journals introduced by the Islamic University of Maldives.

We are delighted to publish the inaugural issue of our journal, *Volume 1, Issue 1*. This issue features five research papers that offer valuable insights on various educational topics. Among the most important topics are improving the quality of life and promoting sustainable development through Muslim retirement villages, looking into how teachers deal with bad behavior among students in Maldivian secondary schools, comparing the digital skills of accounting students in Malaysian universities, and looking into the roles of cooperating teachers in supervising student teachers during practicum. These studies collectively contribute to advancing knowledge and practices in education.

To ensure that the submitted papers are thoroughly assessed for relevance and quality, *IJEPE* maintains a highly dedicated and experienced team of editors and reviewers. The journal›s pursuit of indexing in popular databases necessitates this approach. Experts in the field of education comprise the team. Therefore, the Editorial Board would like to extend its gratitude to the authors and researchers who made contributions to the inaugural volume (Issue 1) of *IJEPE*. We are also deeply appreciative of the invaluable assistance provided by the *IJEPE* advisory board, peer assessors, the Centre of Research and Publication, Kulliyyah of Education, and all other pertinent departments during the publication process. In the forthcoming issues, we anticipate constructive suggestions and critical feedback that will enhance the *IJEPE*.

We are grateful for your interest in *IJEPE-International Journal of Emerging Perspectives in Education* as a publication outlet. The Editorial Board is pleased to accept original research-based articles and anticipates your contribution, suggestion, and support for the forthcoming issue.

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Fostering a learning society through sustainable Muslim retirement villages: Empowering the rights of the elderly

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of rapid aging global population is happening in many countries including Malaysia. Thus, the country should be giving more priorities towards the agenda of empowering the rights of the elderly. This paper examines the development of sustainable Muslim retirement villages as a mechanism in building a learning society while empowering the rights of the elderly. The main objective is to explore how these institutions able to provide a medium for the elderly to have lifelong learning, social engagement and quality ageing life. This alternative lifestyle trend would allow for their rights to be empowered. This paper is a doctrinal research paper analysing laws and policies surrounding elderly in Malaysia specifically on lifelong learning activities. Semi-structured interview with the administrator of the retirement village is also conducted to gain insights on real situation of day-to-day operations of institutions. The findings indicate that sustainable Muslim retirement villages do not just enhance the residents' quality of life but also able to encourage building of learning society amongst the elderly. The study concludes that these institutions can serve as a model for integrating the rights of the elderly into broader societal frameworks, thereby contributing to sustainable development. These findings shall assist the policymakers and industry players in establishing proper legal and working framework in the effort to foster more participation of elderly in learning society.

Keywords: Elderly, Muslim retirement village, laws, policies

INTRODUCTION

As the population of elderly is growing worldwide, more countries are planning to accommodate the needs of these senior citizens. The population over 65 is growing at a faster rate than the population under 65, according to World Population Prospects 2022 (United Nations, 2024a). Accordingly, it is anticipated that the proportion of people 65 and older worldwide will increase from 10% in 2022 to 16% in 2050. According to projections, the global population of individuals 65 years of age or older is expected to surpass that of children under the age of five by 2050 and nearly equal that of children under the age of twelve.

This demographic shift shall cause many significant impacts especially towards the elderly themselves. One of the challenges are to maintain the standard of learning amongst senior citizens by building learning society. Through learning they will not be left behind especially in the rapid grow of technologies nowadays. This paper focuses on the building of learning society amongst senior citizens through the integration of learning Islamic teachings and practices into retirement living institutions.

Taking Malaysian experience as a basis, this country would be significant for this topic due to its diverse population and existing policies on elderly. Malaysia, which is officially an aging nation, and the number of senior citizens is escalating (Ong et al., 2024). According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), individuals aged 60 and above increased from 11.3% in 2023 to 11.6 % percent of the population in 2024 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2024). From 34.1 million of the current Malaysian population, 3.9 million are those aged 60 years and above. Thus, currently there are many efforts, projects, and even policies under scrutiny. This is an urgency to develop sustainable retirement solutions in the light of having learning society in the country.

One of the relevant concepts is the concept of sustainable retirement village. The government is currently active in the efforts to find the suitable concept of retirement village for the country. Practically, for Muslims communities, though not be named as retirement village per se, there are already institutions around the country which was set up to cater the needs of Muslim senior citizens which are known as Pondok Warga Emas in Malay language which can be translated into Golden Citizen Cottage or Muslim Retirement Village (MRV). These MRVs are set up mostly by associations or Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) for those independent healthy elderly residents. The are staying in the small units of homes, or cottages with basic care and needs. Moreover, the main attraction or reason for them to decide to stay in MRVs is due to the learning opportunity factor where here they will learn on Islamic teachings intensively for their spiritual fulfilment. Such environment can help promote the rights of elderly while ensuring them to remain active ageing in the community of the same age.

This concept is indeed aligned with the aspiration of the government. This was explicitly mentioned by the Prime Minister of Malaysia during Presentation on the Twelfth Malaysia Plan Proposal 2012-2025 when he highlighted that the focus of the country would be to explore the potential of retirement village which are inclusive in preparing Malaysia for ageing country in near future (Prime Minister's Office, 2023).

Objectives and Significance of the Research

The aim of this paper is to examine how sustainable MRVs can contribute to establishing a learning society at the elderly level and thus empowering their rights. The laws and policies relating to elderly therefore are examined with a focus on lifelong learning initiatives. The experience of the existing MRVs is then discussed to see how these policies are implemented in real. Through these objectives, it is the aim of the research to provide a comprehensive understanding of how sustainable MRVs in Malaysia may be exemplified for other Muslim-majority countries which have yet explored this concept in enriching their elderly communities. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymakers, as well as industrial players on the benefits of integrating lifelong learning and cultural values into retiring communities. The policymakers may identify the strengths and weaknesses, best practices, issues and conundrums in adapting successful models to fit the local context. This approach can help creating a better model which will sustain for the benefit not just the elderly communities but the country.

The development of sustainable MRVs is seen as one of the practical methods in addressing challenges faced by senior citizens. There are exposed to various impediments such as the feeling of loneliness which may lead to depression, health issues, financial problems and so on. Their rights to have an active ageing also would be more promoted by having a specific institution tailored to their needs. When their challenges have been overcome by having proper living environment in, they will be ready to pursue their learning experiences which suit them at their age. Eventually, this may accommodate them to achieve the graceful ageing.

By fostering a learning society and empowering the rights of the elderly, these communities can serve as a model for other countries who have yet embark on this kind of projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Aging Population and Sustainable Development

The traditional family structure from having to spend older times at own home or children's home is changing modestly through times due to different factors such as lifestyle, education background, financial abilities and so on. This leads to raising need for institutions which provide institutional care and community-based support systems. This is alike to the concept of MRVs which provide for support system and at the same time the opportunity for learning.

This establishment of these institutions apart from catering the healthcare and economic issues, address the social challenges of aging such as social isolation which may bring negative impact to the well-being of older people. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted that amongst the major public health issues which may cause other higher risks of health conditions are social isolation and loneliness (WHO, 2023). Cognitive decline, depression and cardiovascular diseases are amongst the health issues which may cause from these social challenges.

Apart from the issue of managing social and health issues, the establishment of these institutions is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework in facing global challenges. The relevant SDGs to this issue on older population is on the well-being and rights of older adult as underlined under Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). This goal is to ensure healthy living and well-being for all walks of life regardless of the age. Besides that, Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) is also relevant in reducing the gap of age-based inequalities. Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) which is explicitly relevant to retirement villages focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable for all population including aging population. The need for age-friendly cities which may accommodate the older generation need in terms of their mobility, accessibility and social participation shall be promoted in achieving this Goal.

Malaysia, like many other countries, is actively working towards achieving these goals. The Twelfth Malaysia Plan (2012-2025) emphasized the importance of creating a conducive environment for an aging society, including establishment or retirement villages (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia Official Website, 2023). These initiatives reflect Malaysia›s commitment to integrating the needs of its aging population into its broader development agenda.

Learning Society Concept and Role of Sustainable Development

The concept of learning society recognised that it is essential to have continuous learning not just for personal but also societal development. Learning should be fostered at all levels and integrated into everyday life. This may be in the form of formal, non-formal, informal sessions (Rahimah et al., 2017). The prime aim is for everyone to have access to learning regardless of age, background or circumstances. For the old population, learning can provide various benefits to their cognitive abilities, social interaction and sense of purpose (Rachel Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, education and continuous learning may be the basis in materialising many of the SDGs, in multiple area such as health, economy, and social justice.

Focusing on aging population, through having continuous learning or also called lifelong learning, this effort may mitigate the challenges associated with ageing. Older population who fills up their time with learning experienced better health outcomes, greater social connectedness, and

improved quality of life (Hilary H. L. Yee, 2022).

Taking Malaysia as an example, lifelong learning is one of the important agenda promoted for its aging population. This was clearly spelt under the National Policy for Older Persons 2011 and the subsequent action plans. There is a need to provide lifelong learning opportunities for older adults. This will promote active and healthy ageing which is in line in creating a learning society that suits the sustainable development.

In the context of Muslim communities, sustainable retirement villages can play a crucial role in building a learning society and empowering the rights of the elderly. By integrating lifelong learning into the fabric of these communities, we can ensure that older adults remain active, engaged, and valued members of society.

Muslim Retirement Villages: Concept and Examples

MRVs are residential communities which are specially designed for the elderly. These institutions are designed to meet the needs of the older population specifically the Muslims who are keener to find religious knowledge and practices when they have reached their golden age. These villages provide an avenue for the older persons to continue learning especially Islamic teachings. This will ensure that residents can live fulfilling lives in accordance with Islamic principles while promoting active ageing. The added values gained from this type of retirement lifestyle apart from Islamic classes and learning sessions are the activities and opportunities to live with those of similar age in a community.

A notable example of a Muslim retirement village is Pondok Yayasan Al-Jenderami (PYAJ) in Selangor, Malaysia. This institution integrated traditional Islamic sessions with modern care facilities for independent healthy residents. Residents engage in daily religious activities, including prayers, Quranic recitation, zikr, and religious classes, fostering a spiritually enriching environment. PYAJ also provides minimum healthcare services, recreational activities, and opportunities for social interaction, promoting a holistic approach to elderly care (Al-Jenderami, 2024).

Another example is Darul Insyirah in Bangi, Selangor. Darul Insyirah focuses on creating a nurturing environment for elderly Muslims, emphasizing religious education and community involvement. Darul Insyirah have two types of facilities where there are platforms for those who are independent and need minimum continuum of care called Darul Insyirah Aisyah while Darul Insyirah Khadijah is for those needing special care and close monitoring in managing themselves physically and mentally. Darul Insyirah offers various programs, such as Islamic lectures, health and wellness activities, and social gatherings, ensuring that residents remain active and engaged in both their faith and community (Darul Insyirah, 2023).

Another example is Madrasah Ibnu Mas'ud (MIM) which have 2 branches in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan and Segamat, Johor. This institution caters almost 140 residents in both branches coming from all over the country mainly to learn more about Islam. With the tagline of 'living a purposeful life' MIM tries to alleviate the status of MRV into modern-like institutions coupled with nature-like environment in preparing conducive platforms for the elderly (Madrasah Ibnu Mas'ud, 2024).

There are other retirement villages in Malaysia which do not build solely for the Muslims. There are Green Acres in Ipoh, Eden on the Park in Kuching, Sarawak and The Millennia in Seremban.

Integration of Islamic Values and Practices

A key feature of Muslim retirement villages is the integration of Islamic values and practices into daily life. That is the one of the main attractions why older people decide to reside in this kind of institutions. This integration ensures that

residents can continue to observe their religious obligations and maintain their spiritual well-being. Core Islamic values, such as respect for elders, community support, and continuous learning, are central to these institution's operations.

The facilities are designed to fulfil the essential needs of the senior citizens. Musollah or prayer facilities and religious education classes are essential components of these institutions. The elderly should have access to community facilities that meet their physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs (classes and community spaces), as well as their spiritual needs (food and dining facilities) (Majid et al., 2013). A crucial feature of retirement communities should be guest or accommodations when their children come to pay a visit. The children should be able to stay in separate houses or guest facilities or visit them. To respect Islamic guidelines regarding the care of the elderly, this provision is imperative.

For example, at PYAJ, there are designated prayer rooms, regular religious study classes, small clinic, spa, fostering a spiritually enriching environment (Al-Jenderami, 2024). The attractive architecture of the modern type of MRV as can be found at Madrasah Ibnu Mas'ud Nilai is also an added point for the residents to have a more serene and peaceful environment. This kind of modern cottages built for the residents give a new breath to the typical institutions on religious education to be more modern and conducive. On top of that, the serene and tranquil atmosphere enhance more values for the elderly to age gracefully. Most of the MRVs are in the outskirts of towns and some of them have natural background environments such as small streams, small farms for gardening and so on.

Additionally, social activities are often organized around Islamic festivals and events, promoting a sense of community and shared values. Thus, these residents are not isolated from the community outside their institutions. For instance, Madrasah Ibnu Mas'ud Nilai which is located near to Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia always welcome students and communities to do programmes with the residents. Thus, the programmes would range from community services activities to knowledge transfer programmes opening wide opportunities for exchange of knowledge between the communities and the residents.

Rights of the Elderly

Laws and Policies

Elderly rights are enshrined in numerous international and national legal instruments (Abdul Mutalib et.al 2023). Looking at the international level, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons 1991 featured the key components of rights of older people. These include independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment, and dignity. All these shall protect the rights and well-being of older adults.

The goal of adult education and lifelong learning is to give people the skills they need to exercise and realize their rights and take charge of their own lives. It encourages adults to grow personally and professionally and to become more involved in building learning communities and sustainable environments. This makes it an essential tool for lowering poverty, enhancing wellbeing and health, and fostering a society that is learning and sustainable.

As for Malaysia, as mentioned above, the country's policy on older persons lies primarily on the National Policy for Older Persons 2011 and the Action Plan for Older Persons (2011-2020). It emphasises the importance of adequate care, promoting active aging and financial security for the older generation. This illustrates Malaysia's commitment to empower the rights and well-being of elderly in this country.

Looking into the Islamic perspectives, care and support for the elderly is highly emphasised in Islam. The respect for the older generation for their wisdom, experience and services should always be uphold by the younger generations.

Islam accentuates the obligation of caring of parents and elders and respect he, The Quran states that "And your Lord has decreed that you not wordship except Him, and to parents, good treatment" (Quran 17:23).

Nevertheless, although traditionally, family members are expected to look after their parents and elderly relatives, with the changing social dynamics, the establishment of institutions like MRVs help to enrich the elderly by not just staying at homes without having various meaningful activities. MRVs however, suits the elderly who are still independent and healthy whom searching for lifelong learning experiences to fill up their days meaningfully.

MRVs can be said as a valuable model to support the elderly to age gracefully. These institutions provide fulfilling avenues for the elderly not just to be active in their ageing years but also fulfil the spiritual needs that they need especially at their golden age. The development of such communities and institutions offers ways on how to allow older adults to build learning communities amongst themselves.

The fundamental legal and policy framework which promotes lifelong learning and active ageing, combined with religious elements, provide a robust and strong basis for the development of MRVs. This effort can foster a learning society amongst older adults and at the same time empower their rights under the law. All this shall contribute to sustainable development and enhance their quality of life.

Methods

This research employs qualitative study through doctrinal research as the main methodology. This involves examination and analysis of the body of the legal instruments mainly the policies and regulations particularly those related to elderly in Malaysia. This method is vital in understanding deeply the legal context which uphold the rights of elderly and at the same time protecting their interests

and welfare. Primarily, the legal documents are the National Policy for Older Persosn (2011) and the Action Plan for Older Persons (2011-2020). The analysis gives more emphasis on the objectives, strategies and outcomes of these policies.

This paper however does not cover some elderly related legislation or statutes such as Care Centres Act 1993 (Act 506). Although on the surface the statute may be deemed relevant to MRVs, however the focus of the Act is on the senior citizens who need care and dependent on the services provided. This is not the case for residents in MRVs as there are independent and healthy and do not necessarily need full caring services. They only need very minimum health monitoring due to their age factor instead of comprehensive care services. In addition, the research also examines the lifelong learning policies which encourage continuous education especially amongst senior citizens.

Besides that, document analysis is also conducted analysing relevant legal materials from article journals, proceedings, reports from government agencies and NGOs and others. The document analysis is needed as the secondary sources in exploring more on the implementation and commentaries of the legislation.

Complementing the doctrinal research and document analysis, semi-structured interviews are conducted with the administrator of MIM, Malaysia. This interview provides first-hand information in collecting data on the practical experience of managing MRVs, the challenges and opportunities for the future for this type of institutions. The data from the interview are triangulated with the findings from the doctrinal research and document analysis.

These methods approaches are conducted with the aim to achieve robust analysis in developing evidence-based recommendations to improve the well-being of the elderly as well as their rights and interests.

FINDINGS

The findings are set out in two primary sections which are firstly the analysis of the laws and policies on elderly in Malaysia particularly those related closely to MRVs and lifelong learning. Secondly, the findings are categorised under the insights from the interviews and document analysis on the practical experience of MRVs in Malaysia, highlighting the importance of integrating Islamic values and teachings into active ageing avenues. This is to enhance and assist the country in building learning society amongst elderly through sustainable mediums.

Analysis of Laws and Policies on the Elderly in Malaysia

From the analysis of National Policy for Older Persons (2011) and the Action Plan for Older Persons (2011-2020), it is to be noted that comprehensive approach has been moulded to cater the needs of the older persons. These policies focus on the importance of elderly to receive adequate care, active ageing, and financial security. This policy therefore founded the supportive mediums and environment that promotes towards active ageing in the country. As a result, these vulnerable segments of the country's population may not be considered as burden for the country but rather assets for the country's development.

Nevertheless, the problem lies on the implementation part. There are challenges need to be overcome. There are inconsistencies of the implementation of the policies across different places and institutions (Muhamad, 2001). indicate that the support systems are not comprehensive covering the rural areas while some urban areas may have more opportunities due to better facilities and services, which lead to disparities in the quality.

Meanwhile, on lifelong learning, this is one critical component in ensuring that elderly may age gracefully. The Lifelong Learning for Older Malaysians (LILOMA) program for instance not just provides learning sessions but at the same time encourage active ageing amongst the senior citizens (Lifelong Learning for Older Malaysians, 2020). The programme consists of numerous activities from trainings, community education, informal learning sessions in ensuring that elderly are intellectually and socially engaged.

It is interesting to note that, successful initiatives often involve collaboration between government agencies, NGOs and community groups. For example, there are community-based programs which offer language classes, technology literacy courses, and health awareness session in improving elderly quality of life (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, the barriers are there. The are lack of awareness on the part of the senior citizens themselves on the available opportunities prepared for them. Though it is not denied that there are other constraints in terms of financial, transportation and facilities. In addition, it is not yet a culture nurtured in the society for senior citizens to keep engaging in learning activities.

Muslim Retirement Village Experiences: Attractive Elements

It has been mentioned above that the rate of participation by older adults in learning and education still need to be improved. Nonetheless, for Muslims, the situation would be quite different as the religious motivation will drive them to get involve in learning activities. However, they would incline towards Islamic teachings and practices. As mentioned by the administrator of MIM hey received a lot of application from these senior citizens, and they are willing to be in the waiting list to have the opportunity to reside the MRV. The 36 units of small units they have in Nilai, Negeri Sembilan branch and almost 70 units in Segamat, Johor cannot accommodate the demands they receive from those interested to stay and learn in the institutions.

Apart from the learning motivation, the administrator highlighted the importance of creating a supportive and engaging environment for residents. They residents would feel their time are occupied when they are proper schedule of lessons for them from Tahseen Al-Quran, to Aqidah, Fiqh, Tafseer, Hadith and so on.

By opting to reside in MRVs their schedule is tailored to religious observance agenda for example daily prayers, Quranic recitation, and religious classes. These are the central of their routine. Their daily schedule therefore is scheduled for them to be occupied with spiritual activities which will fulfil their need to be closer to Allah (Al-Jenderami, 2024). This makes them feel persistence and live a purposeful life in their golden years.

Additionally, one of the key strategies identified in attracting more participation of elderly is the integration of health and wellness programs into daily activities. These programs include physical exercises, mental health support, and social activities that promote interaction among residents. According to Yoshihara et al. (2023), opportunities to be active in retirement villages play a crucial role in promoting physical activity among residents. This is particularly important in the context of Muslim retirement villages, where empowering the rights of the elderly is a key consideration. These programs not only improve the physical health of residents but also contribute to their overall happiness and sense of community.

Besides that, it is important to provide recreational activities. The residents need friends of the same age to have chit chatting sessions while doing leisure activities together. They should have recreational and community amenities (Majid et al., 2013). The activities that retirees participate in should be balanced to meet their physical needs for leisure and rest.

Activities may range from having small feast together to gardening or light exercise. For example, for MRVs the management ensures

Islamic events such as Eid, Israk Mikraj, Ramadhan are always well celebrated in MRVs. Even the management organised birthday events to appreciate the residents. This approach helps create an inclusive environment where residents feel respected and valued.

Additionally, the institution incorporates community service and volunteer activities as part of its programming, encouraging residents to actively participate in social and religious events. This approach not only enhances the residents' social connections but also reinforces their sense of purpose and community involvement (Madrasah Ibnu Mas'ud, 2024).
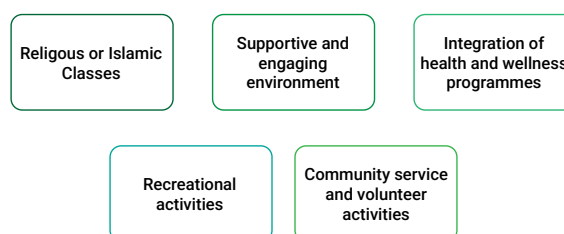
Figure 1 Attractive elements of Muslim Retirement Village

Challenges and Opportunities

There are several legal and regulatory challenges faced by administrators of retirement villages. One significant challenge is the lack of standardized regulations for retirement villages, which can lead to inconsistencies in the quality of care provided. There is a need for clearer guidelines and stronger regulatory oversight to ensure that all facilities adhere to high standards of care (Abdul Mutalib et al., 2023).

Additionally, the other challenges related to funding and financial sustainability. Many retirement villages rely on a combination of private funding, government subsidies, and charitable donations to operate. However, securing sufficient funding to maintain high-quality services can be challenging, particularly for smaller or non-profit facilities (GreenAcres Retirement Village, 2024).

Ample support from various levels of agencies including the government in terms of funding, human resources are needed to encourage the enhancement of senior citizen rights (Waryatun et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, despite the challenges faced by the institution, in expanding the function of retirement village as a medium for building learning society, lifelong learning opportunities for the elderly in retirement villages should be enhanced not just limited to classes prepared day-to-day by the administrators. One key opportunity is the expansion of partnerships between retirement villages and local educational institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). By collaborating with universities, community colleges, learning institutions, retirement villages can offer a wider range of courses and programs tailored to the interests and needs of elderly residents. These kinds of courses may attract not just residents who stayed in retirement villages but also those senior citizens who are their own home but seeking knowledge for lifelong learning.

The community thus should play their role in preserving the welfare of the elderly. The foundation of support may originate from communities, which create settings in which senior citizens are treated with respect, included, and valued (Abdul Halim et al., 2024). This entails not just providing care for family members but also larger social structures that place an emphasis on the welfare of senior citizens.

The use of technology may be benefited wholly in this era where everything is easily accessible. Digital learning platform, virtual classes, online courses specifically designed for elderly should be polished to cater those who have mobility limitations. Classes conducted may also be conducted hybrid through many digital platforms and even social media live medium to raise participation from elderly from various places.

DISCUSSION

It appears that the retirement village industry in Malaysia represents multifaceted nature. There are strengths to be modelled by other countries but there are also rooms for improvement.

From the analysis on law and policies, it is illustrated that the legal foundation is there to support older adults especially in encouraging the building of learning society through the connotation of lifelong learning. This demonstrates a commitment in local legal frameworks and internationally in enhancing the rights of elderly. However, the inconsistency in terms of implementation would be a problem. Increasing participation would allow more numbers of older adults to experience learning at this age which later would give birth to learning society for older generations. The disparities in the quality of services particularly between urban and rural areas should be tackled wisely.

Other barriers such as financial constraints, transport and logistics issues should also be resolved (Fuentes, 2021). One of the ways is by opting to technology by having more online classes and discussions on online platforms. Catching up with the evolution of technology shall assist the senior citizens to experience lifelong learning sessions (Hong, 2024). It appears that, the e-learning platforms should be designed to be more elderly friendly and family stimulation will positively help them to have a quality learning experience (Bai, 2018).

Moreover, the access to these kinds of programmes may be enhanced by improving access to lifelong learning sessions through community partnerships. Not just limited to government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and educational institutions in the effort to promote active ageing in the society may also play their role. Social support activities which may allow them to make friends, socialise, volunteer in charity programmes may help to

prevent loneliness (Abdullah, 2024). Therefore, more community members would be able to join when they are aware of the existing opportunities offered for them.

Nonetheless, there is a hope for a better legal foundation for elderly in Malaysia, since currently the government of Malaysia through the Women, Family, and Community Development Ministry has started the feasibility study to introduce a law for elderly (Bernama, 2024). This law aims to provide more protection and enhance the welfare of the senior citizens.

RECOMMENDATION

In the effort to foster learning society though MRV industry, the industry, several key strategies may be considered:

1. Integration of Health, Wellness, and Religious Programs

In terms of MRVs as a medium of building learning society which is more structured, there is a need to integrate health and wellness programs, alongside religious activities. This is needed in creating comprehensive and supportive environments for the residents. The existing activities particularly the religious activities and lessons are commendable. There should be ways on how to provide these activities to as many older adults as possible especially those who are interested to gain Islamic knowledge. Nevertheless, apart from religious activities, health and wellness programmes should also be included. This is important to ensure that the senior citizens experience healthy ageing not just physically but also mentally. Activities such as brisk walking, gardening, simple exercise should also be in the list of their routines. Medical check-ups and health awareness programmes may also be initiated.

2. Addressing Resource Limitations

As there are limited resources such as numbers of units for more senior citizens to have this priceless chance to have a purposeful life, challenges faced by MRVs in terms of funding, regulatory support need to be tackled by the authorities to maintain the quality of services by the institutions. It should be noted that these institutions are clearly assisting the country to achieve the SDGs as well as the country's aspiration in building learned older generations. Thus, assistance in in various ways need to be channelled to support this industry.

3. Expanding Access to Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning can be a powerful mechanism to foster a learning society. Thus, the access to educational opportunities should be expanded through collaborative efforts between educational institutions, community organisations and retirement villages. These institutions need support to enhance the effectiveness of the programmes and activities offered there to meet the diverse needs of elderly residents. Universities for instance may collaborate to organise inter-generational programmes which may assist the elderly and at the same time provide exposure for the students. This will provide more knowledge exchange and collaboration (Ward et al., 2024).

In addition, educational programmes may also be moulded to include learning on digital literacy, hobbies, language classes, health care and arts in ensuring that they will age gracefully (Puri, 2021). However, these educational programmes must be structured to suit the residents' needs (Flynn & DeVoss, 1986).

4. Incorporating Elderly Rights into Sustainable Development Frameworks

Additionally, the rights of the elderly should be integrated into sustainable development framework to ensure that the senior citizens are not left behind economically and socially. Incorporating elderly agenda into sustainable development initiatives may allow older adults to have active ageing while contributing to broader societal goals. Aligning the policies on elderly with these goals, a country should be able to address the needs of senior citizens while contributing to global sustainability efforts. Thus, legal and regulatory frameworks should be enhanced to remove the current barriers which may hinder more participation of older adults into education or lifelong learning activities. Specific legislation to supplement the current policy is needed. Legal frameworks guarantee elderly people's access to healthcare, vital services, and safeguards against abuse and neglect by formalizing and defending their rights. By codifying these rights into legislation,

societies validate older people's right to care and assistance by recognizing their intrinsic dignity and value (Abdul Halim et al., 2024).

Through these recommendations, it is hoped that more inclusive and sustainable industry of MRVs may be created by the policymakers and industry stakeholders in enhancing the right and welfare of the elderly, ensuring that MRVs contribute effectively in fostering the learning society especially amongst the senior citizens.

CONCLUSION

The development of the concept of retirement village to cater the growing needs of the senior citizens shall be seen as a good avenue in building learning society. However, this concept needs to be sustainable to cater larger groups of older adults and will sustain for a long period of time. This idea is indeed in line. This idea is also in line with the SDGs in the effort to integrate the elderly rights with the goals.

However, in ensuring that this idea would be sustainable, there are challenges faced by current administrators and it is predictable that there will be more hurdles in the future when the number of MRVs grow significantly. Thus, a proper legal framework aligning the registration, monitoring, and evaluation of these institutions need to be worked on. This will allow for the rights of the elderly to be uphold while promoting active ageing amongst them. Additionally, this will also be a tool to facilitate those industry players who are interested to embark on this project. The support from the government and NGOs is also needed to ensure that this valuable medium for elderly shall sustain especially in terms of fundings and training of staff.

Limitations of the study

The study has limitations as it only focused on Malaysia and only one MRV has been examined by the study. Thus, future research may expand by examining more numbers of MRVs and may include MRV which provide also assisted living units for those who need medical assistance apart from the independent living units.

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Educating child marriage applicants: Designing an Islamic pre-marriage education framework

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ABSTRACT

Child marriage remains a persistent issue in Malaysia, raising concerns about the potential harm it poses to young brides and grooms. Statistics show a downward trend in child marriage in Malaysia every year. However, child marriage still occurs because the existing laws are not capable of preventing child marriage in absolute terms. Child marriage below the minimum age can be conducted with the approval of the relevant authorities. Since child marriage cannot be completely banned, actions must be taken to minimize the potential harms (mafsadah) that may affect children involved in this marriage. This study addresses the need for a specialized Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module for children to mitigate these harms. The main objective is to develop a framework for this module, focusing on children's understanding of their rights within marriage and the measures they should take if the marriage brings harm to them. The methodology involves a qualitative case study design, utilizing document and content analysis of previous studies and existing pre-marriage modules. Findings highlight that child marriage negatively impacts various aspects of children's preservation of the aspect of al-kulliyat al-khoms. The improved module aims to educate children on their marital rights, mental and physical health, and financial management so that the potential harm can be rejected from them. This article emphasizes the necessity of this module to protect married children to ensure their well-being.

Keyword (s): Child Marriage, Pre-Marital Course, Maslahah, Mafsadah, al-kulliyat al-khoms.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sexual desire for the opposite gender is an instinct created by Allah SWT. This instinct ensures the continuation of human lineage on earth, as stated in Surah An-Nisa, which mentions that Allah created humans from Adam and Hawa and then made their descendants (An-Nisa: 1). Research shows that most children and adolescents have sexual desires as early as their teenage years due to age development and hormonal changes (Che Anuar, 2018). Therefore, this instinct should be well-controlled to prevent various types of harm. Without proper guidance for children and adolescents going through this phase, there is a risk of social problems in society, such as promiscuity and out-of-wedlock pregnancies.

Based on research conducted by scholars, there are various factors contributing to the occurrence of child marriages around the world, including economic problems and financial hardship (Nor Jana Saim, 2018), local cultural practices (Eucharia et al, 2018), and the involvement in social problems such as out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Uswatun Hasanah, 2018). Besides that, most people believe that child marriage is also a way to prevent premarital sex among children. Based on a study conducted in Indonesia, one of the factors leading to child marriage is the children's desire to marry. Most of these children have become pregnant out of wedlock because of sexual relations with their partners. The study also indicates that one of the reasons for this occurrence is the lack of formal education and parents' attention (Rasyid & Siregar, 2022).

Nurul Ain (2022) in her study discovered that most applicants for child marriage in Kelantan, Malaysia were those who had engaged in premarital sexual relations, with some of them already pregnant. Besides that, another study that has been conducted found that one of the reasons for child marriage is the respondents believe premarital sex is sinful. Marriage is seen as a solution to out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Kohno et al, 2019). Based on the explanation above, we can see that child marriage does not occur in specific countries only, but it happens in many places around the world. In Malaysia, according to the statistics released by the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development (KPWKM) a total number of 1542 Muslim children were married in 2018 out of the overall number of 1856 children who got married in Malaysia, with the rest number being non-Muslim children (UNICEF Malaysia, 2022). The latest data regarding Muslim child marriages show that 912 Muslim children were married between 2022 and 2023 (JKSM, 2024). It is also reported by UNICEF Malaysia that among all the children reported to have married in 2018, 63 percent of them were adolescents who were already pregnant. This data indirectly shows the correlation between pregnancy and early marriage among children.

The Laws in Malaysia generally have provisions regarding child marriage. Although such regulations exist, they still do not completely ban the practice of child marriage. In Malaysia, the laws related to marriage and divorce differ for Muslims and non-Muslims. Muslims are subject to the Islamic Family Law in each state, while non-Muslims are governed by the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 [Act 164]. The law in Malaysia stipulates that the minimum age for Muslim girls to get married is 16 years, while for Muslim boys is 18 years. The minimum age for non-Muslim children to get married is 18 years for both genders. However, this does not mean that marriages below the minimum age are prohibited, they can still take place with the

proper authorization from the relevant authorities. Section 8 of the Islamic Family Law Act (Federal Territories) 2001, requires that those below the minimum marriage age should obtain permission from the Syariah Court Judges before proceeding with the marriage. This indicates that every application for underage marriage submitted to the Syariah Court will be reviewed according to the applicant's situation, and the decision will be made at the discretion and wisdom of the Syariah Judge.

Based on a report provided by UNICEF (2022), most early marriages among children result in negative impacts for the children involved, including the potential to become victims of domestic violence, in addition to being at risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Generally, child marriage is something that should be completely prohibited. In Malaysia, several actions have been taken by various parties in dealing with child marriage, including proposing to raise the minimum marriage age for Muslim girls from 16 to 18. However, child marriage cannot be completely prohibited in Islam because, from a Sharia perspective, things that are generally permissible cannot be classified as haram (forbidden) unless there is clear evidence stating that they are haram. Despite many studies highlighting the negative impacts of early marriage, statistics released by the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) show that 2,288 cases were recorded in 2016, 2,107 cases in 2017, 1,856 cases in 2018, 1,459 cases in 2019, and 1,124 cases in 2020. Although this data indicates a downward trend in early marriages among children, it cannot be denied that child marriage still occurs within society.

Many people, parties, and agencies are opposing child marriage as it is seen to be harmful to the children involved. Although there is a trend of decreasing statistics for underage marriage applications in Malaysia, it is undeniable that this kind of marriage cannot be completely prohibited since it is permitted in Islam. Things that are

permissible in Islam cannot be considered haram unless there is clear evidence stating otherwise. From a legal standpoint, a minimum marriage age does not mean that child marriage is entirely prohibited instead, it depends on the approval from the appropriate authorities. Since child marriage cannot be fully stopped and the negative effects on children are undeniable, it is necessary to take steps to minimize these harmful impacts as much as possible. It is important to note that various actions have been taken by the authorities to address this issue, including the creation of standard operating procedures (SOP) by the Malaysian Syariah Judiciary Department (JKSM) that courts must follow when handling underage marriage applications since the permission is subject to the discretion of the Syariah court judge.

In Malaysia, one of the requirements for the prospective Muslim bride and groom before getting married is to attend a pre-marriage course. They are required to attend an Islamic pre-marriage course organized by their respective state religious departments. The certificate obtained will be used as an important document when filling out the marriage application form. This regulation applies to all Muslims who wish to marry, including minors.

However, considering concerns regarding potential harm that may arise in marriages involving children, the question arises whether the existing Islamic pre-marital course content aligns with the realities of child marriage in Malaysia. Does the existing pre-marital course will provide the children with a clear understanding of their rights within marriage and the actions they should take if their marriage poses a threat to their well-being? Therefore, the researcher feels there is a need to develop an Islamic pre-marital education module specifically for children. However, when developing a module that is appropriate to the realities of child marriage in Malaysia, the question arises, what content should be included in the module?

In addressing the negative effects of child marriage, this proposed module aims to minimize the harms of child marriage and to provide children with an understanding of the realities of marriage and their rights within marriage according to Sharia and law. It also aims to educate them on mental and physical health issues and the actions they can take if the marriage proves harmful, considering that children in marriages are at potential risk of domestic violence. Additionally, the module will include training on household and financial management. This Islamic pre-marriage education module is crucial for children to ensure that married children are aware of their rights in marriage and to ensure they know the steps to take if the marriage becomes detrimental, particularly concerning the aspects of the preservation of the five essentials (kulliyat al-khams).

This study aims to propose an Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Framework specifically designed for children, equipping them with essential knowledge of their rights and protections under Islamic law and contemporary legal frameworks. The primary objectives of this study are to analyze existing Islamic pre-marriage education modules and assess their suitability for child marriage applicants, develop a comprehensive framework that addresses the needs and vulnerabilities of underage spouses, and evaluate the alignment of such a framework with Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah. This study employs a qualitative case study approach, using document and content analysis of existing pre-marriage education modules and scholarly research. This paper will discuss the literature review, followed by an outline of the research methodology, and will discuss the findings and propose an improved framework. In conclusion, this paper will offer recommendations for effective policy implementation

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Child marriage is a practice that occurs globally, especially in marriages involving

underage girls with adult men. This practice was even commonplace among the Malay community before the 1930s (Zanariah Noor, 2013). However, in those days, due to the unfavorable economic conditions and limited educational opportunities, child marriage was not considered a significant issue. Most young girls at that time were prepared with household skills at a young age. Nevertheless, the acceptance of child marriage today is different from the views of society in the past. With educational opportunities now available to all children and the requirement for primary school education, child marriage has become irrelevant.

Although the practice of child marriage in Malaysia has largely been abandoned by society, a study by Noor Aziah and Al-Adib Samuri (2018) reported that the number of girls who married in 2010, aged between 15 and 19, increased by 1.4 percent compared to 2000, which was 1.2 percent. This indirectly indicates that child marriage still occurs today. Furthermore, it was reported that there were 15,000 cases of child marriage across various states in Malaysia between 2007 and 2017 (UNICEF, 2022). Although recent statistics on child marriage show a declining trend, it cannot be denied that child marriage still happens in the community.

Based on the literature review conducted, most contemporary researchers who studying the practice of child marriage conclude that this practice harms children and is no longer suitable for today's society. Eucharia et al. (2018) in their study explain that child marriage deprives married children of their right to receive a complete education and puts them at risk of becoming victims of domestic violence. Sultana and Abdussalam (2017) in their research found that child marriage has negative effects on the health and well-being of married young girls. Their study also revealed that most married young girls tend to experience depression and are at risk of domestic violence due to the significant age gap between spouses. This age gap often leads to young girls being easily influenced by their partners.

Although most previous studies discuss the negative impacts of child marriage, there are a few studies that conclude that child marriage can also bring benefits and positive effects for the children involved, such as preserving family honor and preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Kohno et al, 2020). Child marriage is also seen to help in preventing the birth of children outside of a lawful marriage (Stein J.S, 2013). Furthermore, a study conducted on adolescents in Kuching, Sarawak, found that early marriage can also be beneficial. The study results show that most adolescents in Sarawak believe that early marriage brings many benefits, including preventing immoral acts, fostering independence, nurturing patience, building a sense of responsibility, and maintaining a positive attitude (Nor Jana Saim, 2018). From another perspective, this indicates that some positive aspects and benefits can be achieved from the practice of child marriage.

The reality is that child marriage is a global phenomenon that affects the children involved, and Malaysia is no exception (UNICEF, 2022). Based on research conducted by scholars, various factors contribute to child marriage, including economic problems and financial hardship (Nor Jana Saim, 2018), local cultural practices (Eucharia et al, 2018), underdevelopment in terms of infrastructure and education (Nor Syamila, 2020), involvement in social issues such as out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and to avoid premarital sex among teenagers (Uswatun Hasanah, 2018). Additionally, most studies have found that out-of-wedlock pregnancies and premarital sexual relationships are among the primary factors leading to child marriages (Kohno et al, 2019). Under the theme of religion, some studies indicate that one of the reasons child marriages are accepted by society is the recognition that premarital sex is sinful in Islam, and marriage is seen as a solution to unwanted pregnancies. Furthermore, when a teenager is pregnant with an illegitimate child,

many parents of the involved teenager act by marrying their child to the partner to avoid the sin of abortion (Kohno et al, 2020). This clearly shows that the decision for early child marriage is driven by considerations of rights and wrongs in Islam.

Based on the literature review mentioned above, one of the main factors leading to child marriages is social issues that result in fornication and out-of-wedlock pregnancies among teenagers. Previous studies have undeniably shown that child marriage has negative effects and impacts on the children involved. Among the negative consequences of child marriage are the neglect of educational rights (Eucharia et al, 2018), the potential to become victims of domestic violence (Sultana, 2017), and neglect in terms of both mental and physical health (Eucharia et al, 2018). Additionally, those involved in early child marriages are found to be prone to depression due to being burdened with the responsibilities of being a wife and mother at a young age (Nawal Nour, 2006). These children are also at risk of health problems due to experiencing pregnancy and childbirth at an early age.

From the Sharia perspective, several studies on child marriage have been discussed. Fathoni (2018) discusses underage marriage from the perspective of various schools of thought and finds that one of the reasons child marriages occur in society is because the society itself believes that children who have reached puberty should be married off to avoid harm. Madihah and Fatimah (2011), in their research, discuss the rights of the wali mujbir in marrying off their daughters. Their study finds that although the wali mujbir has the right to marry off their daughters or granddaughters, in Malaysia, the consent of underage girls to marry is subject to the decision of the Shariah Court. Zanariah (2013), in her study, finds that the establishment of a minimum marriage age and the empowerment of the Shariah Court to approve underage marriage applications are appropriate based on the context of Malaysia.

In Malaysia, attending a pre-marriage course before getting married is a requirement for all Muslims. Given the various issues and problems currently affecting family institutions in Malaysia, several studies have suggested that the existing Islamic Pre-Marriage Course Module be updated to align with current issues and challenges. In Penang, there is a suggestion to update the content of the Islamic Pre-marriage Course Module in that state to reflect current conditions and needs, given the various issues and problems affecting the family institution recently, including domestic violence (Berita Harian, April 2023). Various issues such as domestic violence led to divorces in society. Some studies have been conducted on the importance of organizing pre-marriage courses specifically for the hearing impaired as preparation for this group before they get married (Zuliza and Syaidatul, 2020). This indicates that the existing pre-marriage course module is not suitable for all groups, whether in terms of content or implementation. Therefore, just as the differently abled community requires a specialized pre-marriage course, researchers also feel that there is a need for a specialized Islamic Pre-marriage Module for children who wish to get married.

Based on the above discussion, child marriage is a familiar phenomenon in Malaysia, despite the potential harm that can be caused to the children involved. Various efforts have been made by various parties to ensure that child marriage can be addressed, including proposals to raise the minimum marriage age for girls from 16 to 18 years. However, despite all those efforts, child marriages still occur within society. Given the current situation, if child marriage cannot be completely banned, then actions must be taken to ensure that children involved in marriage at a young age do not suffer harm from this kind of marriage. Furthermore, there have been no studies discussing ways to minimize the potential harm (mafsadah) that might occur in child marriages. Therefore, this study aims to develop a framework

for an Islamic Pre-marriage Education module based on Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah specifically for underage marriage applicants to ensure that the marriages conducted bring benefits (maslahah) and minimize as much as possible the potential harms (mafsadah) to the children involved.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study aims to develop a framework for an Islamic Pre-marriage Module specifically for children. It employs a qualitative approach that emphasizes a deep understanding of child marriage issues within the Islamic context and their implications for children's well-being, particularly regarding the aspects of al-kulliyat al khoms (the protection of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property). The study adopts a qualitative case study design, which allows researchers to examine the phenomenon of child marriage in a specific and in-depth context, providing room for comprehensive analysis of the data obtained. Data is collected from two main sources: document analysis and content analysis. The analyzed documents include previous studies related to child marriage and existing Islamic pre-marriage modules.

The study collects data from two primary sources: document analysis and content analysis. Document analysis involves reviewing previous studies, and existing Islamic pre-marriage modules while content analysis focuses on identifying recurring themes and assessing how existing modules align with Islamic principles and child protection measures. The selection of documents follows predefined inclusion criteria to ensure the reliability and relevance of the data analyzed. The documents chosen for this study must be directly related to child marriage education within the Islamic context to ensure their relevance to the research objectives. Only materials from credible sources, such as academic publications, government reports, and recognized religious institutions, are considered to uphold the integrity of the study. Additionally, documents outlining legal provisions and policies related to child marriage in Malaysia and other Islamic contexts are included to provide a comprehensive view of the regulatory framework.

The selected documents are then deeply analyzed using content analysis techniques. This process involves the codification of data to identify the main themes related to the effects of child marriage and the aspects of al-kulliyat al khoms. The data obtained from document analysis are analyzed thematically. A thematic analysis approach is employed to extract key findings from the selected documents. This involves several steps: familiarizing with the data by reviewing documents, codifying data to identify relevant concepts and organizing them into codes, developing themes by categorizing codes into major themes and sub-themes, and interpreting the findings concerning al-kulliyat al-khoms and the protection of children's well-being. This structured analysis ensures that findings are systematically derived and can contribute meaningfully to the development of an improved pre-marriage education framework.

To enhance the validity and reliability of this study, triangulation is employed by cross-referencing multiple data sources. Ethical considerations are also taken into account, ensuring that all analyzed documents are credible and align with Islamic jurisprudence. Through this qualitative approach and comprehensive document analysis, the study identifies the effects of child marriage and its relationship with al-kulliyat al-khoms. The findings will contribute to the development of a comprehensive and relevant framework for an Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module for children, ensuring their well-being within marriage. This study not only adds to the field of Shariah and family studies but also provides practical guidelines for the development of effective pre-marriage education for underage applicants.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the above discussion, it is undeniable that child marriage brings harm to the children involved. Islam concerns the welfare of Muslims. The Shariah itself generally aims to produce benefits (maṣlaḥah) and to eliminate all forms of harm (mafsadah) from Muslims. The scholars (Fuqaha) agree that there are five primary aspects that Shariah seeks to protect, which are the aspect of religion (hifz al-din), the aspect of life (hifz al-nafs), the aspect of mind and intellect (hifz al-aqal), the aspect of lineage (hifz al-nasl), and the aspect property (hifz al-mal) (al-Syatibiy, 1977). These five aspects are known as al-kulliyat al-khoms (al-Ghazaliy, 1413H). Islam also eliminates all forms of harms that can affect the five aspects of al-kulliyat al-khoms. Based on the analysis of the documents conducted, shows that child marriage brings various harms to children, especially in the aspect of Al-Kulliyat al-Khoms. This section will discuss these findings in detail and propose measures that can be taken to minimize the harm in child marriages through the development of a framework for Islamic Pre-Marriage Course for children.

4.1 Analysis of Mafsadah to the Aspect of Al-Kulliyat al-Khoms in Child Marriage

Most child marriages occur to prevent premarital sexual relations and out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Indirectly, these marriages can help preserve the aspect of religious protection. It is because adultery (zina) and all acts that can lead to zina are prohibited in Islam. The preservation of religion is by following all the teachings and prohibitions in Islam. However, based on previous studies, child marriages have negatively impacted the other aspects of al-kulliyat al-khoms, which are the aspects of life, intellect, lineage, and property. Since the protection of religion is one of the most critical aspects above others, in situations where children would otherwise fall into zina if not married, marriage becomes obligatory (wajib) for them. However, to preserve the aspect of religion,

other aspects will be impacted.

Child marriage poses serious health risks to children, especially girls. Pregnancy at a young age can lead to various health complications such as anemia, pre-eclampsia, and premature birth (Nawal Nour, 2006). Additionally, young girls are at a higher risk of experiencing domestic violence (Sultana, 2017). Lack of emotional and physical maturity often makes them unable to handle the pressure and responsibilities of marriage and pregnancy. This situation not only endangers the life of the young mother but also the unborn child. Children born to young mothers are more likely to face health problems such as low birth weight and slow and delayed development. All the situations mentioned above are the negative impacts of child marriage on the aspect of life (hifz al-nafs).

In terms of the preservation of the aspect of intellect (hifz al-aql), child marriage causes children to drop out of school and discontinue their education (Wodon et al, 2015). This hinders their intellectual development and skills, which subsequently harms their future. Without adequate education, these children will face difficulties in securing good employment and are likely to remain trapped in the cycle of poverty. Education is the foundation for the development of intellect and critical thinking which become essential for making sound decisions in life.

Some child marriages in Malaysia occur due to premarital pregnancies. These marriages are intended to preserve the family's honor which indirectly can help illegitimate children avoid negative perceptions associated with being born out of wedlock. Children born in such circumstances often face social stigma and discrimination, which can adversely affect their psychological and emotional development. Marriage can conceal the child's status. However, this marriage can impact the aspect of lineage preservation from Islamic law. According to Shariah, an illegitimate child cannot be considered as their own by the biological

father. This affects inheritance issues, and the father cannot act as the guardian for his daughter. Therefore, marriage due to pregnancy can adversely affect the aspect of lineage preservation in the long term.

Furthermore, in terms of preservation of property (hifz al-mal), child marriage however impacted the children involved in marriage. Children who marry at a young age tend to become trapped in a cycle of poverty due to the lack of education and skills needed to secure good jobs. The absence of formal education often limits their employment opportunities, and they may only be able to perform low-paying jobs. Additionally, the financial responsibilities that come with marriage and starting a family can be a heavy burden for young couples who lack adequate financial management skills. Their immaturity in decision-making also puts them at risk of making financial mistakes, such as falling into burdensome debts. Based on the explanation above, we can see that child marriage negatively impacts the children involved. In situations where child marriage cannot be avoided and banned within society, some actions must be taken so that the negative impacts on other aspects of al-kulliyat al-khoms can be minimized.

4.2 The Preservation of the Aspect of Al-Kulliyat al-Khoms in Child Marriage Through Education.

In Malaysia, Muslims must attend an Islamic Pre-marriage Islamic Course as a prerequisite for marriage. This general course aims to educate the community about the challenges in marriage and to prepare them for the challenges. The existing module consists of 10 main modules that discuss the fundamental religious topics, marriage and its related procedures in Malaysia, responsibilities and communication between spouses, financial management, health management, stress and conflict management, dissolution of marriage, and the wedding ceremony (walimatul urus). These ten modules generally address marriage-related issues

from the formation of a marriage to its dissolution. However, the current module is quite general. Therefore, to expose children who wish to marry to the risks of child marriage and to minimize the potential harms they may face, a specific Islamic Pre-marriage Course Module for children should be developed. Based on the existing Islamic Pre-Marriage Course that consists of 10 modules, only 4 of them emphasize the protections of al-kulliyat al-khoms. The 10 modules are as below:

Table 1 Islamic Pre-marriage Course Modules

No	Modules	Aspects of al-Kulliyat al-Khoms
1	Islamic Teachings	Hifz al-Din
2	Marriage in Islam	Hifz al-Din
3	The Procedure of Marriage in Malaysia	-
4	Responsibilities between Spouses in Marriage	Hifz al-Nafs
5	Communication between Spouses	Hifz al-Nafs
6	Financial Management	Hifz al-Mal
7	Health Management	Hifz al-Nafs
8	Stress and Conflict Management	Hifz al-Nafs
9	Dissolutions of Marriage	
10	Walimatul Urus	

Based on the previous discussion, among the mafsadah caused by child marriage to the children involved is the mafsadah to aspects of life (pregnancies, childbirth, and the potential of becoming the victim of domestic violence). It also affects the protection of the intellect (affects the right to formal education), the aspect of lineage (the status of the illegitimate child in Islam), and the protection of property (financial management). From the existing Islamic Pre-Marriage Module, it seems that the module only emphasizes 2 out of 4 aspects of al-kulliyat al-khoms that have been affected by this marriage. So, to minimize the negative impacts of child marriage on the children involved, it is suggested to build an Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module specific for children.
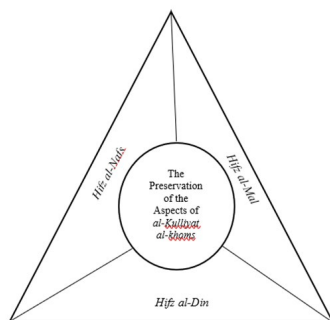
Figure 1: The Preservations of The Aspects of *al-Kulliyat al-Khoms* in Existing Module

Figure 2: The Improved Framework of Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module for Children

The figure above shows the aspects emphasized in the existing module. However, this existing module does not emphasize the aspect of the preservation of intellect and lineage. So, here is the improved Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module for children

In Figure 2, two aspects have been added to the improved frameworks of the Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module for children. The aspects are hifz al-aqal (intellect) and hifz al-nasl (lineage). Based on the analysis of mafsadah to the aspects of al-kulliyat al-khoms in child marriage as discussed above, the proposed module will emphasize these aspects to minimize the harm.

In the context of the preservation of life (hifz al-nafs), it is important to provide educational modules that emphasize the importance of family planning and proper sex education. Medical professionals need to play an important role in delivering this information to ensure that children understand the risks of pregnancy and childbirth at a young age, as well as how to plan pregnancies and manage family planning. This can indirectly help to protect themselves from dangerous health complications. Besides that, comprehensive and appropriate sex education can help children understand their bodies, their reproductive systems, and how to maintain their reproductive health. With proper education, they can make wiser decisions regarding their health to avoid unnecessary risks.

In the aspect of the preservations of intellect (hifz al-aqal), since child marriage affects their right to get a formal education, children should be educated about the importance of education in life. They should be exposed to the importance of having educational certificates for them to have a better future. In this module, speakers should emphasize future planning and the significance of obtaining educational certificates such as the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) or the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM). Both certificates are crucial for helping children secure better employment opportunities, enabling them to break out of the cycle of poverty. The implementation of these aspects in the proposed module will help children understand how important education is in achieving a better and more stable life. In addition, children need to be exposed to the wide range of educational and training opportunities available to them, including technical skills that can help them build successful careers.

Since some of the child marriages that occur are due to pregnancies outside of marriage, it is important to discuss the status of the child conceived from the perspective of shara'. In the context of the protection of lineage (hifz al-nasl), this suggested module will educate the involved children about the status of illegitimate children in Islam and its implications, ensuring that young couples understand their child's position and the steps they can take to protect their future lineage. Although a couple who has conceived an illegitimate child marries, the marriage does not change the child's status in Islam. Education on the Sharia perspective regarding this issue and the rights of children in Islam must be emphasized to ensure that these young couples can make the right

and responsible decisions. Children and teenagers need to understand that marriage is not a solution to the issue of premarital pregnancy and that there are better ways to handle the situation, such as seeking family and community support, as well as professional help.

One of the concerning issues when children are involved in marriage is their ability and maturity to manage finances within a marriage. In this module, explaining ways to manage household finances and smart financial planning is essential. This includes budgeting, savings, and appropriate investments to ensure young families can lead financially stable lives. Exposure to proper financial management will help them plan their future better and to avoid poverty. Besides that, young couples need to be educated about job opportunities that can help them improve their living standards. They should be taught to leverage technology and social media to generate financial benefits. Furthermore, one of the most important aspects is to plan the size of their families according to their economic capacity.

From the explanation above, here is the new outline for the improved Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module for children:

Table 2. Improved Islamic Pre-marriage Course Modules

No	Modules	Aspects of Al-Kulliyat al-Khoms
1	Islamic Teachings	Hifz al-Din
2	Marriage in Islam	Hifz al-Din
3	Family in Islam	Hifz al-Nasl
4	The Procedure of Marriage in Malaysia	-
5	Responsibilities between Spouses in Marriage	Hifz al-Nafs
6	Communication between Spouses	Hifz al-Nafs
7	Financial Management	Hifz al-Mal
8	Health Management	Hifz al-Nafs
9	Stress and Conflict Management	Hifz al-Nafs
10	Education and Job Planning	Hifz al-aqal
11	Dissolutions of Marriage	-
12	Walimatul Urus	-

5.0 CONCLUSION

Child marriage brings various harms to children in terms of the preservation of *Al-Kulliyat al-Khoms*, which are the aspect of *hifz al-nafs, hifz al-aqal, hifz al-nasl* and *hifz al-mal.* Therefore, it is important to take effective steps to minimize these harms. This improved Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module can be a proactive step to provide knowledge and awareness to children who wish to marry. With a better understanding of the risks and ways to manage them, it is hoped that these children can make wiser decisions to avoid unwanted harm.

In preserving the welfare of married children, it is important to involve various parties in the effort to address the negative impacts of child marriage and to provide the necessary support to children and their families. Through a holistic and comprehensive approach, we can ensure that children who wish to marry are given proper guidance and appropriate exposure and education. This will not only help them understand the risks involved but also equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to face future challenges.

Overall, child marriage is an issue that requires immediate attention and action. By taking appropriate steps and providing proper education, we can protect children from the potential harm of marrying at a young age. The preservation of *Al-Kulliyat al-Khoms* should be a priority in every action taken to ensure that every child receives the protection and support they need to grow up healthily and prosperously.

Therefore, the proposed awareness module needs to be implemented as best as possible and constantly reviewed to ensure its effectiveness. Only through continuous efforts and cooperation from all parties can we achieve the goal of minimizing harm in child marriage and protecting the future of our younger generation.

However, based on this study, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the study is based primarily on document

analysis, which limits its ability to capture the lived experiences of child marriage applicants. Future research should incorporate empirical data from interviews and surveys with young spouses, religious authorities, and educators to validate the proposed framework. Secondly, the study focuses on the Malaysian context, and while its findings may be applicable to other Muslim-majority countries, cultural and legal variations may affect its implementation. Comparative studies across different jurisdictions would provide deeper insights into the adaptability of this framework. Lastly, this research does not evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed education module in practice. Future studies should conduct pilot implementations of the module and assess its impact on child marriage applicants through longitudinal studies.

Given these limitations, further research is necessary to refine the framework and ensure its practical applicability. Collaboration between policymakers, educators, and religious institutions is crucial to developing a comprehensive pre-marriage education program that effectively safeguards the well-being of child marriage applicants. By addressing these gaps, future research can enhance the efficacy of Islamic pre-marriage education and contribute to the broader effort of mitigating the negative effects of child marriage.

The findings demonstrate that child marriage has significant negative implications across multiple dimensions of al-kulliyat al-khoms. By incorporating religious knowledge, health education, legal awareness, financial management, and educational planning into a structured Islamic Pre-Marriage Education Module, the potential harms of child marriage can be mitigated. Future research should focus on the practical implementation of this framework to assess its effectiveness in real-life scenarios.

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Exploration of factors influencing teachers' responses to student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines teachers› responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary schools. The study was guided by two research questions that explored the disciplinary strategies teachers use and how these strategies influence student behaviour. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, collecting data from 141 secondary school teachers through online questionnaires. These participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different school settings. The findings indicate variability in teachers› intervention methods, with reinforcement emerging as the most used strategy. These results highlight the need for teacher training programs that emphasize effective classroom management techniques. Additionally, the study suggests policy-level interventions to support evidence-based discipline strategies in Maldivian schools. Further research with a larger sample size is recommended to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of various disciplinary approaches.

Keywords: behvaiour management styles, secondary schools, students, student misbehaviours, teachers

INTRODUCTION

The issue of students› misbehaviour in the classroom has raised concerns among main stakeholders in the education sector around the world (Mwaniki, 2018). One of the most difficult tasks that teachers have to cope with, is managing students behaviour in the classroom (Caner & Tertemiz, 2015). Although differences exist between societies, student misbehaviour has always existed in all teaching processes, in all levels of schooling (Mahvar et al., 2018; Mehmet, 2015). These behaviours occur regularly making it difficult for teachers to manage; hence. teachers employ strategies to deal with such ineffective behaviours (Sullivan et al., 2014). However, there is immense evidence that teachers› perceptions of learner›s behaviour can impact teachers' responses especillay to those misbehaving learners (Malak

et al., 2018). The findings also provide strong evidence that most of the misbehaviour in the classroom is environment-specific phenomena (Malak, 2019), which occur regularly (Karaj, 2012), and due to factors associated with schools (Ibrahim, 2017). According to researchers, students› misbehaviour has been correlated to teachers› emotional exhaustion and decreased work passion (Aldrup et al., 2018), teachers' mental exhaustion and stress (Aloe et al., 2014; Hanson, 2013), teachers› infuriation (Hagenauer et al., 2015), and determinants of teachers› well-being (Karaj, 2012). Misbehaviour among students is becoming more diverse and serious and it is deemed important to investigate how teachers respond to students› behaviour in the classroom (Sueb et al., 2020).

Students' misbehaviour has been described in the literature using variety of terms. As an example, actions that denigrates others, infringe classroom laws, or else conflicting with societal rules or, legitimate rules is known as misbehaviour in school (Charles, 2014). Misbehaviour refers to any behaviour that is off task in a classroom enough to distract the teacher or classmates from the task (Nash et al., 2016). Misbehaviour is defined as any activity that prevents students from learning (Onasanya, 2020). According to (Menikdiwela, 2020) there is no precise definition of students' misbehaviour. The ability of the teachers to effectively control the school environment is one of the most important factor that leads to meaningful and effective learning (Korb et al., 2016). Misbehaviour by students reduces the success of teaching and learning mechanisms as well as causing disruption in the classroom (Menikdiwela, 2020). This issue continues to be a source of concern for both new and experienced teachers, as well as to the school staff (Tarman, 2016). Misbehaviour of students can be addressed through the teacher's preparedness, stimulating students, having an affirmative learning ambience, boosting students› self-esteem, and being inventive and innovative in everyday lessons (Chandra, 2015).

When attempting to investigate students› misbehaviour, it is critical to first identify the source of the problem (Mwaniki, 2018). Misbehaviour in the classroom can be viewed as a sign of a crisis in the teaching process (Oliveira & Graça, 2013). The leading reasons of misbehaviour in schools include lack of parental care, peer influences, lack of consistency in punishments measures in schools, drug abuse and colloquial speaking (Mwaniki, 2018). Disciplinary problems in schools are also caused by the unclear boundaries, therefore, before they›re violated teachers must inform students clearly and specifically about school rules, and boundaries (Gyan, 2015). There is no specific method to educating children because each child is unique and may necessitate a different level of attention (Tarman, 2016). To comprehend misbehaviour and teachers› responses to it, one must investigate teacher's attributions or beliefs about the causes of misbehaviour (Kulinna, 2008).

The previous findings showed teachers used various strategies to respond to students' misbehaviour. There are variations in the recommended strategies. E.g. two styles by (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Marciniak, 2015), three styles (Kyriacou, 1980; Lewis et al., 2011), four styles (Latack & Havlovic, 1992), and six styles (Ningsih et al., 2019). Generally building and implementing rules in a school environment in order to enhance learning opportunities is a huge challenge for teachers (Caner & Tertemiz, 2015). Teachers› classroom management strategies play an important role in an learning progress of children, success in life, healthy education process, and children gaining essential skills (Mehmet, 2015). Although the use of such effective strategies can avoid misbehaviour, students can still disturb lessons and require teachers to respond and handle their behaviour (Glock & Kleen, 2019). Effective class management not only means identifying successful ways to respond to the problems, but also avoiding problems seen even before they arise (Mehmet, 2015). It would also be useful to question whether teachers use different tactics to address the same pupil›s misbehaviour (Glock & Kleen, 2019). As a result, understanding teachers› responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in secondary school is critical.

Research repeatedly indicates that misbehaviour among students hinders the teaching atmosphere and adversely effects on scholastic outcomes of students (Sun & Shek, 2012). Teacher is the one who is accountable for what happens in the classroom, including the classroom activities and student's behaviour (Onasanya, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between preventive and reactive management techniques in classrooms (Korpershoek et al., 2014). For instance, setting up rules, guidelines and foster healthy relations

between teachers and students are regarded as preventive strategies, while disciplinary initiatives such as warning or punishing are seen as reactive strategies (Korpershoek et al., 2014). While it is widely believed that preventive strategies are more efficient than reactive strategies, reactive strategies are sometimes required to minimize disruptive or other undesirable student behaviour when preventive strategies fail(Marzano, 2003).

According to studies, teachers› reactions to students› misbehaviour in the classroom are evolving. For example, previous research has found that a majority of teachers employ punishment to respond to students' misbehaviour (Elbla, 2012; Feinstein & Mwahombela, 2010; Lewis et al., 2005; Mweru, 2010). However, later research strongly supports the use of alternative approaches to responding to students› misbehaviour. For instance consider the use of mild punishment (Cheah, 2015), reward recognition, hinting and discussion (Tran, 2015), supportive strategies (Mensah et al., 2020), after class conversation (Ding et al., 2010), rewards and preventive practices (Tekindal et al., 2017; Tulyakul, 2019). Punishment is a response to correct misbehaviour (Sadik, 2018). Even so, it only has a short-term impact on students› behaviour (Sadik, 2018; Sun, 2015). In contrast, positive discipline emphasizes the prevention of recurrence and the resolution of issues. This approach emphasizes the importance of educators comprehending the fundamental causes of misbehaviour and taking proactive measures to mitigate them. Additionally, they assist children in understanding the repercussions of their actions on others (Sadik, 2018). Therefore, in an education system, proper discipline is a fundamental requirement for learners to feel secure, to be protected from harms, and to show due regard to their peers (Onasanya, 2020).

In short, the research focused on two main aspects. Firstly, teachers' response to classroom discipline, secondly, the relationship between students' misbehaviour and classroom discipline, in relation to the Maldivian context could be examined. Students' misbehaviour can negatively impact on the effectiveness of a learning environment. The concern of how to efficiently control the students in classrooms is of a continuous worry to the community (Lewis et al., 2005). Creating a safe classroom ambience is a crucial skill for teachers. This teaching skill provides students with a learning environment that they can benefit the best (Mehmet, 2015).

Research on teachers' responses to classroom discipline has been widely explored in various educational contexts (Glock & Kleen, 2019; Hughes, 2017; Korpershoek et al., 2016; Menikdiwela, 2020; Mensah et al., 2020; Okigbo & Okoli, 2016; Paramita et al., 2020; Sueb et al., 2020), Similarly, studies on student misbehaviour have been conducted by (Crawshaw, 2015; Henry, 2019; Mahvar et al., 2018; Mareš, 2018; Mwaniki, 2018; Riley et al., 2012). However, teachers' responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary schools remain an unexplored area of research.

In the Maldivian education system, secondary education consists of Grades 7 to 10, with students aged approximately 12 to 16 years, followed by higher secondary education (Grades 11 and 12). Public secondary schools in the Maldives face unique challenges, including large class sizes, diverse student backgrounds, limited resources, and a growing concern over behavioural issues. While the 2014 curriculum reform aimed to improve student engagement and holistic development, misbehaviour among students continues to be a pressing issue, affecting both classroom management and learning outcomes. Given the lack of systematic research on how Maldivian secondary school teachers manage student misbehaviour, this study is the first attempt to examine teachers' responses to classroom discipline and student misconduct within the Maldivian educational landscape.

A review of the existing literature on teachers› responses to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour revealed some gaps that support the current study. The limited availability of literature on the correlated variables and factors influencing teachers› responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour is the first gap identified. No articles reviewed explicitly looked at factors that could affect the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour, particularly in the context of the Maldives. Furthermore, only a small number of theories—including the choice theory, reinforcement theory, and teacher self-efficacy theory employed in this study—could be relied upon to assess the factors associated with teachers› responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour as well as the construct that might explain its occurrences.

Objective of the Study

The main aim of the study is to find the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour in secondary schools of the Maldives. The specific objectives of this study are:

- To find out the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour in secondary schools of the Maldives.

- To find out if there is any significant difference in teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour in secondary schools of Maldives with regard to their gender, educational qualification, and professional experience.

Research Method

This study employed a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between teacher characteristics, communication styles, and their responses to student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary schools. The population included secondary teachers (teachers from 7, 8, 9, and 10) from government schools in the Maldives. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure balanced representation of male and female educators, and a sampling frame was a list of secondary teachers obtained from the Ministry of Education. The final sample size consisted of 141 teachers, determined to use a sample size calculator with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval. An online questionnaire was used to collect data, with sections covering demographics, teacher traits (extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism), communication styles (assertive and responsive), and misbehaviour prevention responses. The questionnaire was disseminated via email, ensuring wide participation across various schools. Instruments were adapted from Oliver & Srivastava (1999), McCroskey & Richmond (1996), and Díaz et al. (2018), and responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The response rate was carefully monitored to ensure sufficient data representation. We used SPSS to look at the data and used correlational and regression to see how the variables were related and to see if teaching experience changed the relationship between communication styles and responses to stop bad behaviour. This methodological approach ensures empirical, generalisable insights into teacher behaviours and classroom management in the Maldivian education system.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents of this study included 141 teachers from secondary grades, whose ages ranged from 18 to 55 with a mean age close to 27. Twenty- six percent (26%) were males and 73.8% were females. In terms of teaching experience, 3.5% of teachers had 0-1 years of experience, 24.1% of teachers had 2–5 years of experience, 30.5% of teachers had 6–10 years of experience, 20.6% of teachers had 11–15 years of experience, and 21.3% of teachers had an experience of 15 years and above. In terms of educational qualification 0.7% of the teachers were certificate level, 36.9% of the teachers had bachelor's degree, 61.7% of

the teachers had master's degree and 0.7% of the teachers had other qualifications.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the respondents (n = 141)

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	37	26.2
	Female	104	73.8
Age	18 – 24 Years	6	4.3
	25 – 34 Years	58	45.4
	35 – 44 Years	52	82.3
	45 – 54 Years	22	97.9
	55 Years and above	3	
Teaching Experience	0-1 Years	5	3.5
	2 – 5 Years	34	24.1
	6 – 10 Years	43	30.5
	11 – 15 Years	29	20.6
	15 Years and above	30	21.3
Academic Qualification	Certificate Level	1	0.7
	Diploma	-	-
	Bachelor's Degree	52	36.9
	Master's Degree	87	61.7
	Other	1	0.7

Teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour

This section describes how often the teachers use the given strategies as a response to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour. The teachers were presented with 13 Likert-scale statements to which they had to rate from 1 to 5, where 1 is never use the strategy, to 5 is always use the strategy, as a response to students' misbehaviour. The table 2 below shows the rubric used to identify the level of usage and the Table 3 shows the level of usage of the given 13 strategies as a response to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour.

Table 2 Mean score and Level of usage.

Mean Score	Level of Usage
1.00 – 2.33	Rare
2.34 – 3.66	Sometimes
3.67 – 5.00	Often

Table 3 Level of Agreement among Teachers

Construct	N	Mean	SD	Level of Usage
I involve students in establishing rules and procedures.	141	4.39	0.73	Often
I share with students the reasons behind the disciplinary approach(es) I use.	141	4.50	0.63	Often
I provide positive reinforcement to students for appropriate behaviour (e.g. special helper, extra computer time, tangible rewards)	141	4.55	0.64	Often
I make students aware of consequences for misbehaviour (e.g. loss of break time, extra classroom time).	141	4.42	0.72	Often
I use class time to reflect on appropriate behaviour with students as a group.	141	4.28	0.75	Often
I redirect inappropriate behaviour on the spot, using loud voice.	141	2.86	1.34	Sometimes
I ignore misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class.	141	2.66	1.17	Sometimes
I use short verbal cues to stop misbehaviour (e.g. say student's name aloud, use "shh" sound).	141	3.77	1.11	Often
I use nonverbal signals to stop misbehaviour (e.g. make eye contact, approach and touch disruptive students).	141	3.92	1.21	Often
I use self-assessment forms for students to evaluate their own behaviour (e.g. checklists).	141	3.43	1.19	Sometimes
I inform parents about classroom expectations.	141	3.84	1.04	Often
I send for parents to report inappropriate behaviour.	141	3.45	1.20	Sometimes
I send for parents to report good behaviour.	141	3.96	1.11	Often

The results in table 3 show that four statements received relatively low rating from the teachers. Amongst these four items, the item "I ignore misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class" received lowest rating with a mean value of 2.66 showing that this is the least used strategy by the teachers. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous researches (for exmaple, Nasey, 2012; Powell, 2014; Wirawan, 2019).

The strategy that is mostly used by the teachers and hence most popular among Maldivian teachers to avoid misbehaviour in their classroom is, the strategy of providing reinforcement. That is, the statement "I provide positive reinforcement to students for appropriate behaviour (e.g., special helper, extra computer time, tangible rewards)" received highest mean value with M=4.55, SD = 0.64, indicating that this strategy is widely used among Maldivian teachers. This finding is

consistent with the findings of previous studies (For example, Leonidou & Kartasidou, 2019; Powell, 2014; Quinn, 2017). This result was also in agreement with (Rahimi & Hosseini K., 2012) findings. The result indicated that, rewarding strategies were found to be the most common classroom discipline strategies of teachers. This outcome also supports the Ningsih and Ramendra (2019) findings. This finding revealed that when dealing with misbehaving students, teachers used reward and recognition as coping strategies. According to (Korb et al., 2016) positive behaviours should be praised because praise motivates students. Furthermore, praising other students for good behaviour can encourage the entire class to behave well.

Teachers' Response Based on their Gender

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference between gender (male and female) and the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour. Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour between male and female teachers of the Maldives. A t-test failed to reveal a statistically reliable difference between the Male (M = 49.84, SD = 6.18) and females (M = 50.11, SD = 6.21); t (139) = -.226, p =.822, α = .05. This shows that both male and female teachers' response to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour is the same.

Table 4 Result of t - test comparing Male and Female teachers on their Response to classroom Discipline.

Gender	n	Mean	SD	T	df	p
Male	37	49.84	6.18	-.226	139	.822
Female	104	50.11	6.21			

Teachers' Response based on their Educational Background and Professional Experience

A one-way between groups analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted to analyze the difference between educational qualification, professional experience of teachers and their response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour. For educational qualification, the teachers were divided into three groups according to the type of qualification they have attained. That is, Group 1: Degree level; Group 2: Masters level; Group 3: Others (including certificate, diploma and PHD). For professional experience, the teachers were divided into five groups based on the years of experience they have attained. That is, Group 1: 0 to 1 Years; Group 2: 2 to 5 Years; Group 3: 6 to 10 Years; Group 4: 11 to 15 Years; and Group 5: 15 Years above.

Table 5 and shows that there was no statistically significant difference at p < 0.05 level between the teachers' response to classroom discipline and the educational qualification, F (2, 138) = 1.143, p = 0.322 and professional experience, F (4, 136) = 0.705, p = 0.590. This result indicates that there is no difference in how teachers with any type of educational qualification (i.e. degree, masters or any other) respond to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour, i.e. they all respond in similar manner irrespective of their qualification levels. Moreover, teachers with various years of professional experience in their field also respond in a similar manner to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour.

Table 5 One-way ANOVA test comparing Teachers' Educational Qualification and Professional Experience on their Response to Classroom Discipline

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	Df	F	sig
Educational Qualification	Degree level	52	49.04	5.99	2,138	1.143	.322
	Masters level	87	50.66	6.25			
	Other	2	49.00	8.49			
Professional Experience	0 to 1 Years	5	49.40	3.04	4,136	.705	.590
	2 to 5 Years	34	51.38	5.68			
	6 to 10 Years	43	50.05	7.33			
	11 to 15 Years	29	49.79	5.02			
	15 Years above	30	48.83	6.36			

Significant at α =0.05

DISCUSSION

We conducted this study to investigate the relationship between teachers› response to classroom discipline and students› misbehaviour in secondary schools in the Maldives. The overall pattern of results suggests that teachers employed a wide range of strategies to respond to classroom discipline and students› misbehaviour. Some of the strategies were very often used, and others were rarely used. It is fascinating to examine the most frequently ranked, as well as the least frequently ranked strategies. All these approaches guide teachers and encourage them to demonstrate and maintain a positive way to respond to student›s misbehaviour.

The current study aims to understand student misbehaviour about teachers› intervention strategies. The results show that the top five ways teachers deal with bad behaviour from students are: letting students help make rules and procedures; explaining why certain behaviours are punished; rewarding good behaviour; enforcing consequences for bad behaviour; and using class time to talk about good behaviour as a group. Among these, reinforcement emerged as the most widely used strategy in Maldivian secondary schools. These findings align with previous literature emphasizing the effectiveness of positive reinforcement and student involvement in behaviour management (Korpershoek et al., 2016; Hughes, 2017). Studies have shown that engaging students in rule-setting fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, thereby reducing disruptive behaviour (Glock & Kleen, 2019). Thus, the findings of this study are supported by existing research, reinforcing the importance of structured, student-centred disciplinary strategies in secondary education.

Findings of this study indicate that teachers frequently use short words and body language signals to stop inappropriate behaviour. If nonverbal techniques seem ineffective and insufficient, the teachers should use verbal methods. One way to alleviate the problem is to call out the disruptive student›s name during class to get the student to focus on the teacher and the subject (Marciniak, 2015). This finding backed up the findings and recommendations of (Marciniak, 2015). Researchers found that nonverbal techniques, like maintaining eye contact and looking at the student, were more effective than verbal techniques in reducing misbehaviour. Moreover, the result has shown that all respondents admit that, while solving the behavioural problems, they use nonverbal techniques. Onasanya (2020) found that a teacher›s nonverbal behaviour has a substantial influence on students' misbehaviour.

The present study also discovered that, addressing in an inappropriate behaviour on the spot, using loud voice, ignoring misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class, using short verbal clues to stop misbehaviour, using self-assessment forms for students to evaluate their own behaviour and sending for parents to report inappropriate behaviour are the top five least common strategies used by the Maldivian teachers to respond to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour. Ignoring misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class is the least strategy among all. Koran and Koran (2018) made some recommendations on preventive strategies for managing student's misbehaviour, including the use and impact of efficient rules and practices, setting the expectations of teachers from pupils and involvement by parents to manage misbehaviour amongst students. Further Korb et al. (2016) found that teachers frequently used to set clear rules with the assistance of students and the majority of teachers would counsel students who frequently misbehaved. Furthermore, Korb et al. (2016) discovered that teachers discussed the consequences of violating the rules and misbehaviour.

In addition, this study confirms and demonstrates that teachers often report good conduct to parents and sometimes send for parents

to report misbehaviour. This contradicted a study by Quinn (2017) which found that "sending positive behaviour notes to students' homes" and "calling parents to report good behaviour" are only used rarely. Parents and stakeholders should hold a discussion session to discuss the issues of misbehaviour and formulate corrective actions (Ababa & Eshetu, 2014). The main reason for the disciplinary problems in the secondary schools seems to be the lack of parents involvement (Ababa & Eshetu, 2014).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, teachers employ a variety of strategies to manage classroom discipline and student misbehaviour, recognizing that each learner has unique needs and potential. The findings of this study contribute to existing theories and models by offering insights into teacher intervention strategies in Maldivian secondary schools. The results indicate that reinforcement was the most widely used strategy among Maldivian teachers, while ignoring non-disruptive misbehaviour was the least common approach. These findings align with prior research that has highlights the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in behaviour management. However, given the relatively small sample size (N = 141), these results should be interpreted with caution. Further research involving a larger sample across more schools in the Maldives is recommended to explore why teachers favor certain intervention strategies over others. A more comprehensive study could provide deeper insights into the factors influencing teachers' disciplinary choices and contribute to developing evidence-based approaches to classroom management.

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A comparative study on digital competency among accounting students between public university and private university in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Digital competency is a crucial soft skill for accounting students to meet job requirements. In the accounting field, digital competency is particularly important due to the increasing reliance on technology for data analysis, reporting, and compliance. This study aims to: (1) identify the digital competency levels of accounting students and (2) compare these levels between public and private university students in Malaysia. This quantitative study collected data via questionnaires from 202 accounting students in Malaysia, achieving a 67% response rate. This sample size is representative of the broader student population. The comprehensive assessment covers six elements of digital competence: technical competency, informational competency, problem-solving competency, communication and collaboration competency, safety competency, and accounting competency. The level of digital competence among accounting students is mixed. Safety competency scored the highest at 4.17, indicating strong awareness of digital safety practices. Communication and collaboration competency was also high at 4.03, reflecting effective teamwork and communication skills in digital environments. Informational competency was medium-high at 3.92, suggesting moderate proficiency in managing digital information. Technical competency (3.54) and accounting competency (3.58) were relatively lower, while problem-solving competency was the lowest at 3.39, indicating a need for improvement in applying digital tools to solve complex problems. The t-test analysis revealed that public university students exhibited significantly higher competency levels in technical competency ($p < 0.05$), informational competency ($p < 0.05$), and problem-solving competency ($p < 0.05$) compared to private university students. No significant differences were found in communication and collaboration competency, safety competency, and accounting competency between the two groups. This research provides valuable insights into the digital competencies of accounting students and suggests a model for enhancing digital skills in accounting education. Integrating digital competencies into the accounting curriculum can better prepare students for the digital demands of the accounting profession improving by their proficiency in essential areas such as technical skills and problem-solving. Future research should explore the complex relationships between digital competency, digital awareness, and performance to further refine educational strategies.

Keywords: Digital Competency, Accounting Students, Public University, Private University, Digital Skills Assessment, Higher Education, Quantitative Research

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the accounting profession, digital competency has emerged as a critical skill set for accounting students. Advanced technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, and big data analytics have transformed traditional accounting roles and processes (Quinn, 2020). As a result, the ability to effectively utilize digital tools and technologies is essential for aspiring accountants to remain competitive and relevant in the job market.

Digital competency encompasses a range of skills, including the ability to use accounting software, understand data analytics, and leverage emerging technologies to enhance decision-making processes (McKinney, Yoos, & Snead, 2017). These competencies are vital for accountants to provide value-added services, improve efficiency, and ensure accuracy in financial reporting and auditing. Therefore, accounting education must adapt to equip students with these necessary digital skills.

This study aims to identify the digital competency levels of accounting students and compare them between students in public and private universities. There is a growing interest in understanding how different educational environments impact the development of digital skills among students. Public universities often have larger student bodies and may have different resource allocations compared to private universities, which might influence the quality and extent of digital competency training provided (Tapscott, 2019). Specific challenges or gaps in digital competency among accounting students include the need for advanced digital skills such as data analytics, blockchain technology, and cybersecurity, which are often not adequately covered in current curricula.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature is divided into three sections: (1) Digital Competency Levels of Accounting Students in Malaysia, (2) Comparison of Digital Competency Levels Between Accounting Students in Public and Private Universities, (3) Elements of Digital Competency Among Accounting Students

Digital Competency Levels of Accounting Students in Malaysia

The digital transformation of the accounting profession necessitates that accounting students possess strong digital competencies. Digital competency, defined as the ability to use digital technologies efficiently and ethically, is critical for modern accountants (Smith, 2020). In Malaysia, the emphasis on digital skills in accounting education has been growing, reflecting the global trend of integrating advanced technologies into the accounting curriculum (Rahman et al., 2021).

Recent studies have shown varying levels of digital competency among accounting students in Malaysia. According to a study by Lee and Wong (2022), while Malaysian accounting students are generally proficient in basic digital tools such as spreadsheets and accounting software, there is a significant gap in more advanced digital skills, such as data analytics, blockchain technology, and cybersecurity. The study highlights that although students are exposed to digital tools during their education, the depth and breadth of this exposure are often insufficient to prepare them fully for the demands of the modern accounting profession.

Moreover, the rapid evolution of digital technologies necessitates continuous updates to the curriculum to keep pace with industry standards. A study by Abdullah et al. (2022) found that while Malaysian universities are making strides in integrating digital competencies into their accounting programs, the pace of change varies significantly between institutions. The study suggests that a more standardized approach to curriculum development, with input from industry stakeholders, could enhance the digital competency

levels of accounting students nationwide.

Comparison of Digital Competency Levels Between Accounting Students in Public and Private Universities

The comparative analysis reveals notable differences in digital competency levels between accounting students in public and private universities. Public universities, with their larger student populations and often more limited resources, face unique challenges in providing up-to-date digital training (Tapscott, 2019). Conversely, private universities, which typically have more flexibility in curriculum design and resource allocation, may offer more advanced and specialized digital training.

A study by Ibrahim and Yusoff (2021) compared the digital competency levels of accounting students from several public and private universities in Malaysia. The results indicated that students from private universities generally exhibited higher levels of digital competency, particularly in areas such as data analytics and the use of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems. The authors attribute this disparity to the smaller class sizes, better access to resources, and closer industry linkages often found in private universities.

Additionally, research by Tan and Cheong (2022) supports these findings, noting that private universities tend to invest more in state-of-the-art technology and provide more opportunities for hands-on learning experiences through internships and collaborations with industry partners. This proactive approach enables students to gain practical skills and stay abreast of the latest technological advancements.

However, it is also essential to recognize the efforts made by public universities to enhance digital competency among their students. A case study by Mohamad et al. (2022) highlights several public universities that have successfully integrated comprehensive digital training programs into their accounting curricula. These programs often involve partnerships with technology firms and the incorporation of certification courses in digital accounting tools, which have been effective in bridging the competency gap.

The literature indicates that while Malaysian accounting students are making progress in acquiring digital competencies, significant disparities exist between public and private universities. Private universities generally provide more extensive and advanced digital training, attributed to better resource allocation and stronger industry connections. In contrast, public universities, despite facing resource constraints, are also making significant strides through innovative partnerships and curriculum enhancements.

There are many elements in digital competence, and this study has identified six (6) elements of digital competence. These elements will be discussed in the next section.

Elements of Digital Competence

There are six elements of digital competence have been identified by this research include technical competency, informational competency, problem solving competency, communication and collaboration competency, safety competency and accounting competency.

The first element of digital competence is technical competency which is also considered an important need to improve digital transformation in the organization. Technical order of competency refers to user's interaction with a digital device and involves skills such as operating digital devices, managing accounts or systems, and creating or editing documents, audios, videos, and multimedia content (Desjardins, 2005). Knowing that technical competency is important, we explored past literature and found that there was only one study involving accountants and level of digital literacy (Mohammadyari & Singh, 2015).

The second element of digital competence is informational competency. Informational order of competency refers to users' interaction with

information using digital technology and involves skills such as searching for journal articles, videos, movies, music, and e-books and using digital maps and multiple kinds of aggregators (Desjardins, 2005). In terms of the informational order, both students and instructors employed smartphones frequently to search for short videos and maps, and for sharing calendars, while epistemological uses were generally low in frequency and confidence.

The third element is problem-solving competence. Problem-solving competence is an essential component of the skills required to perform interpersonal and non-routine analytic tasks successfully. In both kinds of tasks, workers need to think about how to engage with the situation, monitor the effect of their actions systematically, and adjust to feedback (OECD, 2014). Problem-solving competency is identifying digital needs and resources, making informed decisions as to which are the most appropriate digital tools according to the purpose or need, solving conceptual problems through digital means, creatively using technologies, solving technical problems, updating one's own and others' competencies. According to Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2012 (OECD, 2014), problem solving is an individual's capacity to engage in cognitive processing to understand and resolve problem situations where a method of solution is not immediately obvious.

The fourth element is communication and collaboration competency. This area of competence refers to the necessary skills to establish communication and collaboration with others within digital environments (Carretero et al., 2017). Communication and collaboration competency is skills related to communication and collaboration in digital environments, cooperation and sharing documents and resources through online tools, collaborating with others through these media, as well as participating in scientific communities, forums, and spaces for interaction (Rodríguez, 2022). Most students demonstrated digital competence in several areas such as information and data literacy, communication, and collaboration (Zhao et al., 2021).

The fifth element is safety competency. Safety competency is the ability for self-protection in the digital environment, data and digital identity protection, and the use of healthy, safe, and sustainable digital media (Aisyah & Susanty, 2017). Vishnu et al. (2022) stated that more than one-third of the students were found to be moderately competent with regard to their ability to adapt and mix various media for study purposes, protect personal data and privacy, protect health and well-being while using digital technologies, and understand the impact of digital technologies on the environment.

The sixth and last element is accounting competency. Accounting competency is the ability to perform tasks and play roles as a professional accountant (Palmer et al., 2004). The fourth industrial revolution has disrupted many workers or professions, including accountants. To survive and exist, the accounting profession requires accountants to take action to survive in their fields (Prinstin et al., 2022). In order to succeed in the field, accountants must upgrade their skills and broaden their core capabilities to get ready and fortify themselves with the latest technological knowledge and skills (Azuraidah et al., 2022). The most useful phase for implementing information technology is the process of technology adoption and transfer to enhance the user's competency. To communicate with the involved decision-maker, these competent accountants must perform analysis and interpretation (Ado et al., 2020).

Hypothesis Development

The previous research has highlighted several key findings that inform the development of our hypotheses. Firstly, there is a growing emphasis on digital skills in accounting education globally, including in Malaysia (Rahman et al., 2021). However, the pace of integrating digital

competencies into accounting programs varies significantly between institutions (Abdullah et al., 2022). Studies have shown that Malaysian accounting students generally possess proficiency in basic digital tools but exhibit gaps in more advanced digital skills (Lee & Wong, 2022). Additionally, the comparative analysis of digital competency levels between accounting students in public and private universities reveals notable differences, with private universities often providing more advanced and specialized digital training (Ibrahim & Yusoff, 2021; Tan & Cheong, 2022).

Based on these findings, the following hypotheses are proposed to explore the differences in digital competency levels between accounting students in public and private universities in Malaysia:

Hypothesis 1: There are significant differences in the levels of technical competency between accounting students from public university and private university.

This hypothesis is derived from the observation that private universities may offer more advanced digital training, potentially leading to higher technical competencies among their students.

Hypothesis 2: There are significant differences in the levels of informational competency between accounting students from public university and private university.

This hypothesis is based on the need for students to effectively manage digital information, an area where disparities in training resources and approaches between public and private universities could lead to differences in competency levels.

Hypothesis 3: There are significant differences in the levels of problem-solving competency between accounting students from public university and private university.

This hypothesis is informed by the importance of problem-solving in the application of digital tools and the potential impact of different educational environments on the development of this skill.

Hypothesis4: There are significant differences in the levels of communication and collaboration competency between accounting students from public university and private university.

This hypothesis is proposed considering the role of digital environments in enhancing communication and collaboration skills, which may vary between public and private universities due to differences in available resources and training.

Hypothesis 5: There are significant differences in the levels of safety competency between accounting students from public university and private university.

This hypothesis is based on the critical need for digital safety awareness and the potential variations in the emphasis placed on this aspect in the curricula of different types of universities.

Hypothesis6: There are significant differences in the levels of accounting competency between accounting students from public university and private university.

This hypothesis is derived from the recognition that the integration of digital competencies into accounting education is essential for preparing students for the digital demands of the accounting profession, an area where differences in educational approaches could lead to varying levels of competency.

These hypotheses aim to systematically explore and compare the digital competencies of accounting students across different types of universities in Malaysia, providing insights into the effectiveness of current educational approaches and identifying areas for improvement.

Materials and methods

This is a descriptive quantitative study that uses a questionnaire and is distributed face-to-face. The

study aimed to collect data from a diverse sample of accounting students across Malaysia. A total of 300 Bachelor of Accounting students from various public and private universities were targeted for participation. The selection of respondents was stratified across five distinct regions in Malaysia to ensure a representative sample of the broader population of accounting students. These regions included Central (Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Selangor), Southern (Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor), Northern (Perak, Pulau Pinang, Kedah, Perlis), East Coast (Pahang, Kelantan, Terengganu), and Eastern (Sabah, Sarawak, Labuan). A total of 212 respondents responded to the form and only 202 forms could be used.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the lead researcher's university. This approval ensured that the study adhered to ethical standards regarding the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous and used solely for research purposes.

The study instrument used consisted of a set of questionnaires which were divided into three parts, namely part A and part B. Part A was related to respondents' information. Part B is related to digital competency. The measurements of digital competency are as follows:

Table 1 Variable Measurements

Study Variables	Measurement	Reference
Technical competency	14	Zhou et al. 2021; Silva & Morales 2022; ACCA Report: The Digital Accountant 2020
Informational competency	9	Zhou et al. 2021;Silva & Morales 2022.
Problem solving competency	6	Zhou et al. 2021
Communication and collaboration competency	12	Zhou et al. 2021
Safety competency	5	Zhou et al. 2021
Accounting competency	7	ACCA Report: The Digital Accountant 2020

This study was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS) version 26. The analysis used is descriptive analysis to measure the level and compare means by using independent t test..

Findings

The findings will be divided into respondent demography, reliability analysis, levels of digital competency and compare means between respondents from public universities and private universities to answer the hypotheses of the study.

Respondent Demography

The respondent demography was formed to see the characteristics of the respondents in the study. The characteristics of the respondent should be identified in order to provide the respondent background information. Table 2 shows the respondent's demography:

Table 2 Respondent Demography

Description		Sum	Percentage%
Gender	Male	47	23.3
	Female	155	76.7
	Total	202	100.0
Educational Institution	Public University	130	64.4
	Private University/ College	72	35.6
	Total	202	100.0
Age	19-20	16	7.9
	21-22	133	65.8
	23-24	44	21.8
	25 and above	9	4.5
	Total	202	100.0
Academic Semester	2	1	.5
	3	15	7.4
	4	7	3.5
	5	95	47.0
	6	19	9.4
	7	49	24.3
	8	12	5.9
	More than 8	4	2
	Total	202	100.0
Race	Malay	174	86.1
	Chinese	11	5.4
	India	8	4.0
	Others	9	4.5
	Total	202	100.0

Table 2 shows a detailed profile of the respondents in this study. Among the 202 participants, the majority are female (76.7%), and there is a diverse distribution across different educational institutions, with 64.4% from public universities and 35.6% from private universities/ colleges.

In terms of age, the majority fall within the 21-22 age range (65.8%), and participants are spread across various academic semesters, providing a comprehensive representation of the student population. The ethnic composition is predominantly Malay (86.1%), with smaller percentages of Chinese (5.4%), Indian (4.0%), and other ethnicities (4.5%). To sum up, these in-depth demographic insights give us a solid base for understanding the different traits of the people who answered our study›s questions, especially when it comes to accounting and information systems.

Reliability Analysis

The validation of a questionnaire is a crucial step in the research process, ensuring that the instrument effectively measures what it is intended to measure and produces reliable and valid results. Validation involves assessing the accuracy, consistency, and appropriateness of the questionnaire for the research objectives. The key aspects to consider when validating a questionnaire includes: (1) Content validity assesses whether the questionnaire covers all relevant aspects of the construct being measured. It includes a revision of the questionnaire by the experts to ensure it includes appropriate and comprehensive items. The questionnaires have been reviews by expert, (2) Face validity refers to the extent to which the questionnaire appears, on its face, to measure the intended construct. This is a subjective judgment by researchers or potential respondents. It involves assessing whether the questions seem relevant and appropriate for measuring the intended concept, (3) Construct validity assesses whether the questionnaire measures the theoretical construct it is intended to measure. It can be established through statistical techniques such as factor analysis, which examines the underlying structure of the questionnaire items. If the items cluster together as expected, it supports construct validity, (4) Criterion-related validity assesses whether the questionnaire is correlated with a criterion or external measure that it should theoretically be related to. This can be concurrent (measured at the same time as the criterion) or predictive (measured at a later point). Correlation coefficients are often used to establish the strength and direction of the relationship.

To test the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot test had been done on thirty selected respondents which include the Bachelor of accounting students from Universiti Islam Selangor (UIS).

Through the collection of data received by the respondent, the most important analysis is to measure or verify the reliability value according to the items in the questionnaire. This analysis of validity and reliability is carried out to ensure that the questionnaire has stability for use by the community.

This reliability analysis is measured using Alpha Cronbach. The closer the Alpha value is to the value of 1, it indicates that the item has a high reliability value. According to Nurulhuda et al. (2009), alpha croncbach is a numerical coefficient to represent reliability. It is used to identify the consistent level of the questionnaire instrument with a value above 0.70 is categorized as its high reliability. According to Ranjit Kumar (2019), the higher the reliability of an instrument, the lower the degree of error for the instrument. Therefore, a study instrument is said to be reliable even if the measurements are made repeatedly but the results are still the same.

Table 3 Reliability Analysis

Variable	Item	Cronbach Alpha α
Technical Competency	14	0.908
Informational Competency	9	0.854
Problem Solving Competency	5	0.831
Communication and Collaboration Competency	12	0.920
Safety Competency	5	0.896
Accounting Competency	6	0.823

In this study, the reliability value of all 6 variables exceeded 0.8. (Based on Table 3: Reliability Analysis). This suggests that the questionnaire instrument used is capable of measuring the variables to be studied. However, there are items that need to be discarded for problem solving competency variables (1 item) and accounting competency (1 item).

Level of Digital Competency

Table 4 below shows the descriptive analysis of digital competency.

Table 4 Descriptive Analysis

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Technical Competency	202	1.93	5.00	3.5385	.67006
Informational Competency	202	2.00	5.00	3.9219	.67264
Problem Solving Competency	202	1.40	5.00	3.3881	.80537
Communication and Collaboration Competency	202	1.75	5.00	4.0334	.75086
Safety Competency	202	1.20	5.00	4.1693	.75577
Accounting Competency	202	1.00	5.00	3.5776	.77519
Valid N (listwise)	202				

Based on Table 4, Technical Competency has a mean of 3.5385, reflecting diverse technical skills with a moderate standard deviation of 0.67006. Informational Competency stands out with a mean of 3.9219, suggesting a high proficiency in information-related skills and a relatively low standard deviation of 0.67264.

Problem Solving Competency, with a mean of 3.3881 and a standard deviation of 0.80537, indicates varied levels of problem-solving skills among respondents. Communication and Collaboration Competency demonstrates a strong mean of 4.0334, highlighting high proficiency in these areas, with a standard deviation of 0.75086. Safety Competency is notable, with a high mean of 4.1693 and a standard deviation of 0.75577, indicating a robust awareness and adherence to safety practices.

In terms of accounting skills, Accounting Competency has a mean of 3.5776 and a standard deviation of 0.77519, suggesting a moderate level of proficiency.

As a conclusion, the level of digital competence of students is mixed. The highest level of digital competency among the respondents was safety competency at 4.17, followed by communication and collaboration competency at 4.03 which was also high. Informational competency is at a medium high level of 3.92. The technical competency level is relatively low at 3.54, accounting competency 3.58 and the lowest is problem solving competency at level of 3.39 only.

Compare Means

Table 5 shows the comparative mean analysis of all elements of digital competence between accounting student from public universities and private universities.

Table 5 Comparative Mean Analysis

	Educational Institution	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TTC	Public University	130	3.6330	.69542	.06099
	Private University/ College	72	3.3681	.58873	.06938
TIC	Public University	130	4.0359	.65336	.05730
	Private University/ College	72	3.7160	.66219	.07804
TPS	Public University	130	3.5523	.80917	.07097
	Private University/ College	72	3.0917	.71281	.08401
TCC	Public University	130	4.0474	.71791	.06296
	Private University/ College	72	4.0081	.81159	.09565
TSC	Public University	130	4.1923	.74434	.06528
	Private University/ College	72	4.1278	.77953	.09187
TAC	Public University	130	3.6474	.80391	.07051
	Private University/ College	72	3.4514	.70845	.08349

Table 5 presents the comparative mean analysis of digital competency levels among accounting students from public and private universities/ colleges. The table reports the mean scores, standard deviations, and standard error of the mean for six elements of digital competency areas: technical competency (TTC), informational competency (TIC), problem solving competency (TPS), communication and collaboration competency (TCC), safety competency (TSC) and accounting competency (TAC).

The mean score for technical competency is higher for public university students (3.6330) compared to private university/college students (3.3681). The standard deviation indicates that the variability in scores is slightly higher in public universities (0.69542) than in private universities/colleges (0.58873). The standard error means are relatively close, suggesting a similar level of precision in the estimates for both groups.

For informational competency, public university students again show a higher mean score (4.0359) compared to their private university/college counterparts (3.7160). The standard deviations are quite similar for both groups, indicating comparable variability in scores. The standard error is slightly lower for public university students, indicating a slightly more precise estimate.

In the area of problem solving competency public university students score significantly higher (3.5523) compared to private university/college students (3.0917). The standard deviation is higher for public universities, suggesting greater variability in problem-solving competencies among their students. The standard error indicates that the estimate for public universities is more precise.

For communication and collaboration competency, both public and private university students have very similar mean scores, with public university students slightly higher (4.0474) than private university/college students (4.0081). The standard deviations are comparable, though slightly higher for private universities/colleges, indicating slightly more variability in scores. The standard error is lower for public universities, suggesting a more precise estimate.

In safety competency, public university students have a marginally higher mean score (4.1923) compared to private university/college students (4.1278). The standard deviations and standard errors for both groups are similar, indicating comparable variability and precision in the estimates.

The mean score for accounting competency is higher for public university students (3.6474) compared to private university/college students (3.4514). The standard deviation indicates that the variability in scores is slightly higher in public universities (0. 80391) than in private universities/colleges (0.70845). The standard error means are relatively close, suggesting a similar level of precision in the estimates for both groups.

The analysis of the mean scores indicates that, generally, public university students demonstrate higher digital competency levels across all six elements compared to private university/college students. The most substantial differences are observed in technical competency (TTC), informational competency (TIC), problem solving competency (TPS), where public university students score significantly higher. The differences in communication and collaboration competency (TCC), safety competency (TSC) and accounting competency (TAC) are minimal, suggesting comparable proficiency levels in these areas between the two groups.

These findings suggest that public universities in Malaysia may be providing more comprehensive training in certain digital competencies, particularly in areas directly related to practical and problem-solving skills. However, the variability in scores also indicates that there is room for improvement in both public and private universities to ensure that all students achieve a high level of digital competency necessary for the modern accounting profession.

Additional analysis to examine the hyphotheses, the independent T-test analysis have been tested. The result of the analysis are stated in Table 6.

Table 6 Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
TTC	Equal variances assumed	2.654	.105	2.734	200	.007	.26491	.09689	.07386	.45596
	Equal variances not assumed			2.868	167.936	.005	.26491	.09238	.08254	.44729
TIC	Equal variances assumed	.001	.977	3.316	200	.001	.31985	.09644	.12967	.51003
	Equal variances not assumed			3.304	145.002	.001	.31985	.09682	.12849	.51121
TPS	Equal variances assumed	2.303	.131	4.039	200	.000	.46064	.11405	.23575	.68553
	Equal variances not assumed			4.189	162.856	.000	.46064	.10997	.24349	.67779
TCC	Equal variances assumed	1.559	.213	.356	200	.722	.03933	.11055	-.17865	.25732
	Equal variances not assumed			.343	132.206	.732	.03933	.11451	-.18718	.26585
TSC	Equal variances assumed	.388	.534	.580	200	.562	.06453	.11121	-.15477	.28383
	Equal variances not assumed			.573	141.020	.568	.06453	.11270	-.15827	.28733
TAC	Equal variances assumed	1.606	.206	1.730	200	.085	.19605	.11332	-.02741	.41950
	Equal variances not assumed			1.794	162.804	.075	.19605	.10928	-.01974	.41184

Hypothesis 1 suggested that there are significant differences in the levels of technical competency between accounting students from public university and private university. Based on Table 6, The p-values (0.007 and 0.005) are less than 0.01, indicating a significant difference in technical competency between public and private university students and this hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Hypothesis 2 suggested that there are significant differences in the levels of informational competency between accounting students from public university and private university. Based on Table 6, the p-values (0.001) are less than 0.01, indicating a significant difference in informational competency between public and private university students, so the hypothesis 2 is also accepted.

Hypothesis 3 indicated that there are significant differences in the levels of problem solving competency between accounting students from public university and private university. The Table 6 shows that the p-values (0.000) are less than 0.01, indicating a significant difference in problem solving competency between public and private university students, so hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Hypothesis 4 stated that there are significant differences in the levels of communication and collaboration competency between accounting students from public university and private university. The Table 6 above shows that the p-values (0.722 and 0.732) are greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference in communication and collaboration competency between public and private university students, so hypothesis 4 is rejected.

Hypothesis 5 suggested there are significant differences in the levels of safety competency between accounting students from public university and private university. The p-values (0.562 and 0.568) are greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference in safety competency between public and private university students, so hypothesis 5 is also rejected.

Hypothesis 6 stated that there are significant differences in the levels of accounting competency between accounting students from public university and private university. The Table 6 shows that the p-values (0.085 and 0.075) are greater than 0.05, indicating no significant difference in accounting competency between public and private university students.

Discussions and conclusion

The level of digital competence among accounting students is mixed, with safety competency being the highest and problem-solving competency the lowest. Public university students exhibit significantly higher competency levels in technical competency, informational competency, and problem-solving competency compared to private university students. No significant differences were found in communication and collaboration competency, safety competency, and accounting competency between the two groups.

These findings suggest that public universities may be more effective in imparting certain digital competencies, particularly those related to practical

application and problem-solving. However, communication and security skills are about the same level of proficiency at both public and private universities. This shows that both types of schools are doing about the same in terms of digital skills. This analysis underscores the need for targeted improvements in specific areas to enhance the overall digital competency of accounting students across all educational institutions.

Future research should explore the complex relationships between digital competency, digital awareness, and performance to further refine educational strategies. Practical implications include the integration of digital competencies into the accounting curriculum to better prepare students for the digital demands of the accounting profession.

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Exploring cooperating teachers' perceptions of their roles and practices in guiding student teachers during practicum

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ABSTRACT

The practicum plays a critical role in teacher education, providing student teachers (STs) with the opportunity to develop essential teaching skills through real-world experience under the guidance of cooperating teachers (CTs). Despite the recognized significance of CTs in shaping the professional development of STs, little is known about how CTs perceive their roles and practices during the practicum. This study aims to explore CTs' perceptions of their responsibilities and practices in guiding STs. A quantitative survey was conducted with 205 CTs across 21 placement schools in four geographical zones, focusing on their roles as feedback providers, advocates for practical application, supporters of reflection, socialization agents, and models of practice. The findings reveal that CTs recognize the importance of these roles, particularly their role as feedback providers, however, the study also identifies a notable gap between their perceived roles and actual practices. Specifically, a significant discrepancy was found in their role as modelers of practice, with 68% of CTs reporting challenges in fulfilling this role. These results highlight the need for further investigation into the barriers that prevent CTs from fully aligning their perceptions with their practices. Addressing these challenges could improve the effectiveness of the practicum and better prepare future teachers.

Keywords: Cooperating Teachers, Practicum, Placement Schools, Student Teachers.

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental objectives of teacher education is to prepare capable, competent, effective, efficient and qualified classroom teachers (Ali & Parveen 2013; Elligate, 2007; Karammustafaoglu, 2009). These indispensable qualities are primarily developed in student teachers (STs) through hands-on authentic experiences during the practicum. Therefore, without a doubt the practicum has become one of the most crucial and cornerstone elements of any teacher education program (Alger & Kopcha, 2009; Cuenca, Schmeichel, Butler, Dinkelman, & Nichols, 2011; Gursoy, 2013; Gronn, Romeo, McNamara, & Teo, 2013; Loizou, 2011; Lind, 2004; Zhang, Cown, Hayes, Werry, Barnes & France, 2015).

Theoretically, the practicum is defined as a supportive journey of professional development and learning, gained through immersion in the real world of teachers' workplace (Keogh, Dole, & Hudson, 2006). Several authors have sought to define the term 'practicum' (Al-Mekhlafi, 2012; Dymond, Renzaglia, Halle, Chadsey, & Bentz, 2008; Elligate, 2007; Morrison, 2016). For example, Beak and Ham (2009) defined the teaching practicum as a course which allows STs to play the role of a teacher on the basis of theoretical understanding on teacher education and under the guidance and coaching of a CT to develop practical

competence. On the other hand, some authors have highlighted a broader conception of the practicum and viewed it as an invaluable opportunity for STs to experiment and examine the theories that they were exposed to in their theory classes (Hamaidi, Al-Shara, Arouri, & Awwad, 2014).

Similarly, Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2013) described practicum as an extended field experience under the guidance of an experienced teacher who is often referred to as a cooperating teacher (CT). Supporting this definition, Elligate (2007) described practicum as a course which allows the learner to perform a practice under coaching from an expert to develop the learner's practical competencies. However, a slight variation is evident from the definition provided by Al-Mekhlafi (2012). He considered the practicum as 'a strategy': a strategic endeavor that provides incremental and integrated real-life experiences for the STs. Another variant is suggested by Ali and Al-Adawi, (2013) who viewed the practicum as a setting designed to learn the task of 'learning to teach' (i.e., a metacognitive component). In this regard, Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2013) state that the practicum is an opportunity for STs to observe and experience various images of teaching both modelled and articulated by CTs. This modelling mainly focuses on teaching techniques, impulse, traditions and authority.

The practicum is a journey of discovery for the STs that includes both ups and downs associated with any such new adventure. Hamman and Romano (2009) stated that teaching practicum is a situation where STs discover their own teaching styles and management techniques through experimentation which help them to improve their teaching practices. Supporting this definition, Atputhasamy (2005) stated that during the practicum, STs attempt to put into practice the many theories they have been exposed to during the teacher education programme in the actual classroom situation. Thus, it is a period of anxiety, apprehension and adjustment for STs. In this journey of discovery and exploration filled with excitement, anxiety and apprehension, CTs play a crucial role in enculturing STs into the teaching profession. They are considered to be one of the key players who have the most powerful influence and pivotal role in shaping the behavior of STs (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen 2014; Le Cornu, 2010; Thorsen, 2016). They play a significant role in the professional, social, and emotional development of STs as they are the people who spend most time with the STs (Beckford & Roland, 2010; Jusoh, 2013).

Despite the recognized importance of CTs in shaping STs, little is known about how CTs perceive the roles they play and their practices in this transformative experience. This paper seeks to fill this gap by exploring CTs' perceptions of their various responsibilities and their practices in guiding STs during the practicum.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptions of CTs. The concept of CT emerged in North America after World War II (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014). The major reasons for the emergence of the term CT include: the change of teacher education institutions to universities which made the faculty members distance themselves from the schools and saw teachers as merely cooperating with the universities, closure of most laboratory schools due to budget cuts, and the rapid growth of student population demanding increased practicum placements from schools. However, since the faculty members saw themselves as experts they expect that classroom teachers 'to cooperate' with them. In other words, it was at the time a condescending not a complementary term. However, during mid-1980s, due to public and political criticism of university-based teacher education, some institutions began to call CTs 'mentors' or 'associate teachers' as this relationship began to be reviewed and appreciated more fully. Though the practicum has been considered an important aspect of teacher education since 1948,

benefits of the practicum are still not fully reaped, and conditions of effective mentoring have not yet been met.

The term CT is still the most commonly used in the context of teacher education to describe the teacher who works with the student teacher (ST) during the time of practicum. CTs are most often experienced classroom teachers who are assigned a ST for an extended period of time (Atputhasamy, 2005). They host, supervise, and work with the ST on a daily basis during the field experience, and play a fundamental role in the STs' growth and development as a professional (Petrarca, 2013).

According to Wilhem (2007), a CT is variously described as a mentor, supporter, coach, and evaluator. In support of this description, the meta analysis by Clarke, Triggs, and Nielsen (2013) also provided other terms that are in use such as school advisor, school associate, supervising teacher, sponsor teacher, school based teacher educator and mentor. Their meta-analysis revealed that there have been three commonly accepted conceptions highlighted in the literature regarding the role of CTs. Those include; classroom placeholder, supervisor of practicum, and teacher educator. The Figure 1. depicts their level of participation (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen 2014).
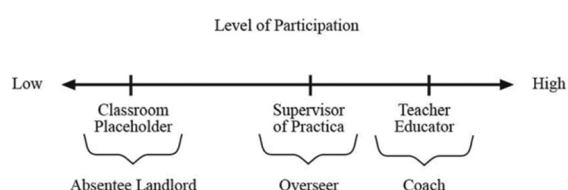

Figure 1 CTs' Level of Participation.

Each of these conceptions illustrates different roles and levels of responsibility. For example, the classroom placeholder often acts as an absentee landlord in the practicum setting – the least engaged of all three conceptions. These types of CTs most often emulate their own CTs when they were STs. Their role is for the STs to replace them in the class

as soon as s/he commences the practicum. On the other hand, the supervisor of the practicum operates as an overseer. As the name suggests, this type of CT supervises the work of STs by observing, recording and reporting their success, or failure of the ST. The deficiency in this type is having unidirectional interaction, where the ST acts as a passive receiver. However, the conception of the CT as teacher educator has maximum involvement in coaching, guiding, encouraging, facilitating and eliciting meanings in concert with the ST. This category demands that the CTs be equipped with most up-to-date knowledge and debates related to working with STs.

STs seek a lot of support from CTs to develop their teaching skills (Arnold, 2006). They consider CTs to be the most important person to them in making a successful entry to the profession (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen 2014). It is evident from the literature that the support from CTs is highly imperative as it gives STs opportunity to develop their teaching skills through observing and modelling CTs (Jusoh, 2013). Therefore, the greater level of participation by the CT, the more significant the role they play in the process of ST development. This differing level of participation (see Figure 1) stems from the level of their motivation to become a CT and the rewards or benefits arising from their participation.

Various roles CTs play during the practicum.

The review of extant literature on CTs revealed that they play a range of roles (Kwan & Lopez-Real, 2005). These include provider of feedback, counsellor, observer, a role model, an equal partner, a critical friend, and an instructor. Similarly, a mixed methods research conducted on 264 mentor teachers revealed that they played roles such as provider of support, provider of feedback, modellers of practice, teach teacher, critical evaluator, providers of context, and supporters of reflection. In addition, these roles were reflected in a meta-analysis of literature on CTs by Clark et al (2014).

From their meta-analysis of 400 papers published within the past 60 years, Clarke and his team categorized eleven different ways that CTs participate with STs during practicum (Clark et al,2014). These categories were identified based on pragmatic philosophy are shown in the Figure 2., and a review of each follows.
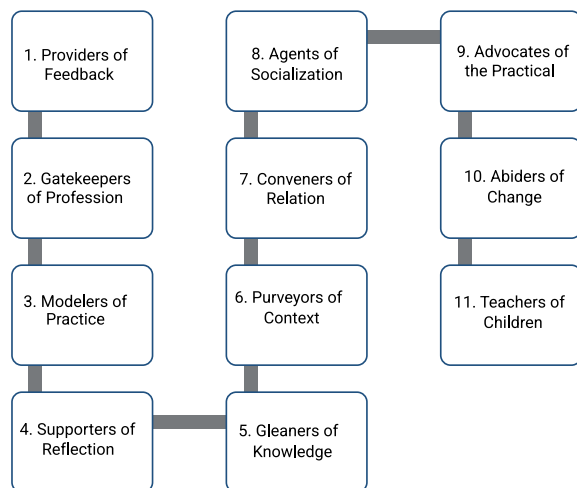

Figure 2 Various Roles of a CT.

Providers of feedback. The first and foremost category identified is CTs' role as the providers of feedback. It was reported in the review that providing feedback to ST is the most important role of CTs. However, the feedback they provide usually tends to be particularistic, technical, and does not reflect the underlying reasons for the feedback. In other words, very rarely do CTs provide constructive and reflective feedback to STs. The most common types of feedback tend to be the 'follow me model' where CTs offer uni-directional conversation. Authors have noted that CTs are more confident with giving oral or verbal feedback than that of written feedback. The underlying reason for the provision of ineffective written feedback is the lack of necessary skills required to provide this sort of feedback. On the contrary to this view, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005) found from their study that some CTs provide very constructive written feedback to enhance the development of STs' own teaching style. They also

have noted that the type of feedback is independent of the type of teaching model. In addition, the type of feedback tends to be the same, irrespective of the stages of the practicum and the developmental levels of STs. This means that STs who are in different level of development tend to get the same type of feedback.

Gatekeepers of profession. CTs as the gatekeepers of the profession is identified as the second category. As the name suggests, CTs shoulder the responsibility of deciding STs entry into the profession by providing a summative evaluation at the end of the practicum. During the mentoring process, CTs are required to evaluate the teaching and learning undertaken by STs. To take this critical decision, the CTs need to be competent enough for summative evaluation. But, the literature suggests that the CTs perform this essential task without having sufficient formal preparation. They do not have adequate knowledge on summative evaluation procedures and lack the relevant tools for this sort of evaluation. Neither do, the tools used by CTs measure the individual differences and the standards of performance of STs accurately. As a result, both halo and leniency effects plague CTs when doing evaluations. Apart from this challenge, due to the deficiencies in available tools, CTs are unable to give detailed accounts of individual differences. Thus, they tend to report only the general impressions and often cannot make a clear distinction justifying pass or fail for STs. All of these roles make their gatekeeping role complicated.

Modelers of practice. Analysis of the literature demonstrates that modelling is an essential aspect of CT participation in teacher education. During the practicum, STs may work with many CTs in different contexts. In other words, the practicum provides a great opportunity for the STs to observe a variety of images of teaching. This modelling by the CT mainly focuses on, techniques, impulses, traditions and authority which are in consistent with the focus of the apprenticeship model. However,

the tension in this modelling arises when the CTs expect STs to simply emulate their practices without integrating other approaches that STs have learnt on-campus, which may have significant impact on learning to teach. Two different categories of CTs are evident from the recent literature on modelling by CTs. That is, 'maestros' and 'mentors'. Maestros follow expert-novice approach to modelling, which is similar to the previously mentioned apprenticeship model. But, those who use a mentors' approach to modelling follow a different approach where they discuss and analyse the classroom teaching, and related matters with the STs. Apart from that, they allow the STs to construct their knowledge in light of the observations and discussions. However, most of the CTs expect the SLs to play the role of mentor rather than themselves. Further, CTs believe that the university course works is too theoretical, so they balance this by acting as modellers of practice and largely as maestros. The literature suggests that student teachers undergo two distinctive stages underpinned by a modelling approach. That is, initially, they mimic experts teaching styles and then (hopefully) move onto more independent and reflective styles of their own teaching.

Supporters of reflection. CTs act as supporters of reflection. Reflection in the context of teacher education is defined as framing and reframing of teaching practice in light of past experience or new knowledge (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2013). Almost universally, teacher education programs emphasize reflection. In addition, CTs are usually familiar with this essential feature of the reflection. However, the degree and extent to which they employ it varies greatly. According Stegman (2007), CTs use different strategies to improve their reflective process Those strategies include: telling stories, providing advice and insight, and validating good practice and preparation. Keogh, Dole and Hudson (2006) argued that the most effective and efficient CTs' exhibit and support reflective dispositions which lead to inquiry into practice by the student teachers.

Purveyors of context. One of the vital roles that the CTs play in practicum is to provide knowledge about the contexts of schooling to STs (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2013). They introduce STs to both concealed and unconcealed dimensions of teaching, and mediate the STs' interactions with and among contexts. The contexts provided as part of the STs' learning environment by CTs determines whether STs acquire the necessary skills required for them to be successful in the profession. In addition, the contextual factors are recognized as more important than the individual interactions that take place among stakeholders. Therefore, CTs need to be aware of the cultural and political contexts of the schools and must be well informed about the changes in the contexts, so that they could manage the contexts well to ensure that practicum is beneficial to the STs.

Convenor of relation. As convenors of relation, the CTs relationships with STs and other stakeholders are very important. Especially, a personnel connection with ST and CT is important for them to benefit from all that the CT has to offer. A strong relationship with the ST is the key enabler of the success, and it is considered as the second largest contributor to a positive practicum experience. The ideal relationship is not just doing what is required; it is more than sharing required information. It is and is dependent on the network of collaborative relationships developed and established during the practicum to which the ST then has access.

Agents of socialization. CTs act as agents of socialization. They socialize STs into ideologies, dispositions and habits of the professions. Their influence is greater than the influence of SLs on STs' socialization. This process of socialization, discussed in detail earlier, becomes more effective and efficient when the values of CTs and STs match each other. However, the STs deeply held beliefs about teaching are often unaffected by this process of socialization. The most challenging features of socialization for STs is in fact that they become

more controlling in their relationship with pupils and conforming to the existing school culture.

Advocates of the practical. One of the major roles of CTs is to introduce STs into the practicalities of the school classroom. As mentioned earlier, during the mentoring process, CTs carefully introduce STs into the practicalities of the profession. The emphasis on practicalities together with the emphasis on reflective perspectives and critical judgment are equally essential for the practicum. But, CTs are so preoccupied with the practicalities of daily practice like developing lesson planning, the effective use of teaching aids, and classroom management that their observations by ST may overlook the essential role of reflection and critical judgement.

Abiders of change. A further category identified is CTs as abiders of change. CTs abide by the many uncovered and unacknowledged dimensions of their practice while working with STs. For example, working with STs is an interruption to their classroom routines and their normal life in the school but they typically accept this interruption silently. Wilhem (2007) has identified many other drawbacks of being a CT. Those include, substitution of CT from the class, overloading the responsibilities of guiding a ST, invasion of privacy by breaking the 'isolation of the teacher', and disruption of classroom management techniques. Other downsides of being a CT include, difficulty of handing over one's own class to a stranger; disappointment and embarrassment caused due to the under-performance of STs, and the lingering effect of unpleasant, unsuccessful past STs that may influence their work with current STs. In simple terms, there are a number of issues which are challenging for a CT in their work with STs. However, CTs often conceal the emotional labor associated with being a cooperating teacher. Other dimensions of these challenges include controlling what they say and do, always having to always have a positive attitude, and withholding feedback that they feel is too sensitive. Further, CTs' identity is also affected by having a ST: they are no longer 'the classroom teacher' which potentially creates underlying feelings of displacement.

Teachers of children. Beyond and above all the duties and responsibilities of being a CT, the teachers who supervise student teacher on practicum are teachers of children, which was identified as the last category of their participation in teacher education. CTs feel that having a ST is an add-on to their principal work as teachers of children. However, some CTs enjoy the opportunity to observe their own students' being taught by STs and see it as an aid to better understanding their individual needs. Nonetheless, the primary duty of any CT is to teach their own pupils and taking care of their wellbeing at school. Dealing with STs is always a distant second. These changes in priorities and the possession of dual roles of being a classroom teacher and CT conflict with their loyalty to children. Even so, this tension is not usually discussed or considered when assigning STs to classroom for the practicum.

The foregoing discussion indicates a range of pivotal roles that the CTs paly during the practicum. Apart from enacting these essential roles as a professional mentor for the STs, they are fulltime teachers of the pupils, thus, they have to act on these two, equally demanding, professional roles simultaneously (Thorsen, 2016). Their influence on ST is found to be more than the influence of supervising lecturer and the college courses (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Nquyen, 2009). Despite the essential roles that they play in preparing STs, all the CTs are not equally competent, effective or successful. Consequently, in some cases, STs end up being exposed to ineffective teaching methods and out-dated pedagogical practices which ultimately impede the application of new innovative methods learned at the university. Therefore, to make the practicum worthwhile to the STs, CTs need to be well prepared and fully supported to enact their roles effectively and efficiently. However,

the literature indicates that there exist a lack of support, collaboration, and training to assist CTs (Petrarca, 2013). This is in accordance with what Clarke, Triggs and Neilsen (2014) concluded from their meta-analysis of literature related to CTs. They indicated that CTs are, in general not professionally prepared to undertake their role. Similarly, a study by (McClure, 2008) found that though the training of CTs has proven to have significant impact on STs, only few universities offer training for CTs.

METHODOLOGY

The original study employed mixed-method triangulation design; however, this paper specifically focuses on only quantitative data collected through a survey questionnaire (CTQ) designed for the CTs. A sample of 205CTs were selected on voluntary basis from 21 placement schools across four geographical zones: Male' city, North Central, South Central and Southern. This includes 16 schools from Male' city, two schools from South Central, two schools from Southern and one schools from North Central.

All 16 placement schools in Male' city were targeted to obtain a large number of participants from different Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) as many of the TEIs prefer to send their STs to Male schools due the cost of travelling to other geographically dispersed zones. The purpose of selecting schools from widely dispersed geographical zones was not to generalize the findings to the population but to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of key plyers in various school contexts across the country.

A self-administered questionnaire-based survey (CTQ) was used to collect the data from CTs. Since the study is aimed to gather information from the entire population of CTs at the time of data collection, questionnaire based survey was deemed the most suitable. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) stated that the primary purpose of a survey

is to elicit detailed information from an entire population as defined by the study. In addition, the multifaceted nature of the practicum and the time constraints necessitated a method that could collect data from multiple sites within a limited timeframe.

Prior to the actual data collection, CTQ was pilot tested with 40 teachers to test its reliability and validity. Reliability of CTQ was determined by calculating Cronbach alpha. The Cronbach's alpha value for CTQ in the pilot sample of 40 teachers was found to be 0.702. Content validity of the CTQ was established through a review by six supervisors: three local supervisors who were familiar with the practicum, and three overseas experts from the field of teacher education. These experts critically examined the content of the questionnaires. After the pilot test, no major revisions were made to the items.

The final CTQs were distributed to the participants, along with the consent form, during the last week of the practicum, through the liaison contacts from the selected schools. Participants were then expected to return the completed CTQs on the final day of the practicum. Once the CTQs were collected, they were then coded and data were analyzed using SPSS, V.12 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). Only descriptive statistics were computed, and the findings are presented as charts and tables.

FINDINGS

CTs perceptions about their various roles. Perceptions about the importance of various roles that CTs play during the practicum was investigated by giving them a series of statements that described ten roles to which they had to respond on a five point Likert-scale in the CTQ: Very important (1) Important (2) Neither important nor unimportant (3) Unimportant (4) and Very unimportant (5). The responses were first analyzed by disaggregating them to the levels (ECE, primary and secondary). The result shows that there wasn't a significant

difference between the responses from these three levels. A further analysis was carried out by disaggregating the data by their educational qualification level (certificate, diploma and degree). The result of this analysis also shows that irrespective of the educational qualification, their perceptions remain the same. Therefore, the result presented in Figure 2. is from the cohort of 205 CTs. Figure 3. shows CTs perceptions about various roles they played.
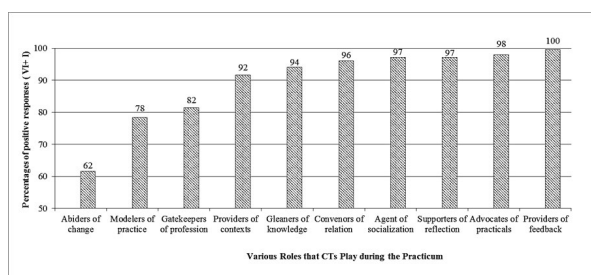

Figure 3 CTs' Perceptions About the Importance of Various Roles They Play in Guiding STs.

Figure 3. shows that, from the ten roles given, 62% of CTs identified their role as abiders of change is important, whereas, an overwhelmingly high percentage (above 70%) of CTs perceived that the remaining nine roles given are important, and all the participants agreed that their role as providers of feedback is important.

A similar question consisted of a series of 14 statements that described the way practicum is conducted at the school level was given in CTQ, to which, CTs had to respond on a five point Likert-scale: strongly disagree (1) disagree (2) neither agree nor disagree (3) agree (4) and strongly agree (5). These statements were phrased such that they described the main 10 roles that CTs took part during the practicum. These 14 statements were grouped under ten roles as presented in Table 1. The intend of asking this question is (a) to understand the degree of CTs involvement in guiding STs, and (b) to identify the match between what they perceived as important and what was being practiced.

Table 1. Various Roles of CTs and their Attribution

CTs roles	Items provided in the CTQ
Providers of feedback	I prefer to give oral feedback.
	In the feedback I provide, the emphasis is on particular and technical issues excluding theoretical and pedagogical matters.
	My feedback varies depending on whether the practicum is the student teacher's first practicum or second.
Advocates of practical	I advise the ST on what is practical in the classroom environment.
Supporters of reflection	I urge the ST to reflect on their own teaching by framing and reframing the teaching in light of past experience or new knowledge.
Agents of socialization	I help the ST to socialize into the culture of the school and the classroom.
Conveners of relation	I help the ST to develop professional relationships with other teachers and myself.
Gleaners of knowledge	I gain knowledge of new methods and materials of teaching from the ST.
	I need more knowledge to conduct the summative/final evaluation of the ST on a pass/fail basis
Providers of contexts	I advise the ST with the context of the school, and manage the context to provide a suitable practicum for the ST.
Gatekeepers of profession	I expect the SL to mentor (advise and guide) ST.
Modelers of practice	I expect my STs to emulate (copy) my style of teaching.
Abiders of change	Supervision is an add-on to my usual workload.
	Supervision is an interruption to my own teaching.

Positive responses (SA+A) to these statements in each of the roles were analyzed. The result was then compared with CTs' perceptions of their roles (see Figure 3) and presented in Figure 4.
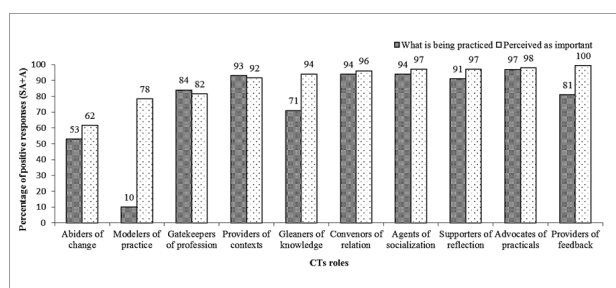

Figure 4. Comparison of CTs Perception about the Importance of Their Roles and What was being Practiced during the Practicum.

Figure 4 shows that there is not much significant difference (less than 8%) between CTs perceptions about most of the roles (six of ten) they play and the roles as they have been practiced during the practicum. The roles that showed the most difference include providers of feedback, gleaners of knowledge, modelers of practice and abiders of change. Among these four roles, the highest difference is apparent in modelers of practice (68%) and least is abiders of change (9%).

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The findings clearly indicate that all the CTs who participated in the study recognized the importance of their role as feedback providers. Similarly, a significantly high percentage of the CTs viewed their roles as advocates for practical application, supporters of reflection, agents of socialization, conveners of relationships, gleaners of knowledge, gatekeepers of the profession, and models of practice as equally important.

The meta-analysis of literature on CTs identified that the role of the CTs is a common theme in teacher education literature (Clarke et al, 2014). From their review of last six or more decades of research on CTs, Clarke and his colleagues were able to cite only one study in which the CT was not a part of the practicum. That shows the significance of the CTs' role in training future teachers. In other words, it shows the criticality and centrality of their role in the preparation of STs. Among the many essential roles that CTs play during the practicum, the review of the literature indicated that, their role as providers of feedback is more important than any other roles. Interestingly, it should be noted that all the CTs participated in the current study affirmed that their role as a providers of feedback was very important.

At the same time an overwhelmingly large proportion of the participants perceived that a multitude of roles such as advocates of practical, supporters of reflection, agents of socialization, conveners of relation, gleaners of knowledge, gatekeepers of profession, and modelers of practice are also very important. This implies that they perceived themselves as significant contributors to the training of future teachers.

However, though CTs believed that play a multitude of roles in training STs during the practicum, the analysis of their responses to the question about the alignment between what they perceived as important and what was actually practiced revealed a different picture. There was a significant gap between what they perceived as important and what they practiced, particularly in the roles of modelers of practice, gleaners of knowledge, and providers of feedback. Among these three roles, the most notable discrepancy was in their role as modelers of practice (68%). In contrast, the differences in the roles of gleaners of knowledge and providers of feedback were 23% and 19%, respectively. This suggests that although they recognized these roles as important, they struggled to apply or emphasize them in practice. Therefore, this area warrants further exploration to understand the factors preventing them from performing the roles they deemed essential.

In conclusion, the findings of this study emphasize the crucial role that cooperating teachers (CTs) play in the preparation of STs during their practicum experiences. The CTs not only recognize the importance of their feedback and guidance but also acknowledge the significance of their various roles, such as supporting reflection, advocating for practical application, fostering relationships, and modeling professional practice. However, the study also reveals a notable discrepancy between what CTs perceive as essential roles and the reality of their practice. This gap highlights the challenges they face in fully implementing these roles, particularly in their role as modelers of practice. The results suggest a need for further investigation into the barriers that prevent CTs from aligning their perceptions with their practices, in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of teacher education programs. Addressing these challenges could ultimately lead to more consistent and impactful contributions from CTs in shaping the next generation of teachers.

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