This page is intentionally left blank

For permission requests, please contact:

International Journal of Emerging Perspectives in Education (IJEPED)

Kulliyah of Education

Islamic University of Maldives

King Fahd Building, Violet Magu

Male' 20037, Republic of Maldives

Official Correspondence Email: editorial.ijeped@ium.edu.mv

Website: ijeped.ium.edu.mv

Table of Contents

Chief Editor's Note

It is with great pleasure that we present *Volume 2, Issue 1 (2026)* of the *International Journal of Emerging Perspectives in Education (IJEPED)*. This issue brings together diverse and timely research that reflects the evolving challenges and opportunities in education and society.

The articles featured include AI in Education and Society: Teaching the machine, transforming the human, which examines the transformative role of artificial intelligence in pedagogy and human development; Challenges Faced by Student Teachers During their Teaching Practicum: A case study of a Higher Education Institution in the Maldives, offering valuable insights into teacher preparation; Consumption of Public Display of Affection (PDA) Content and Its Impact on Personal Happiness and Relationship Satisfaction, exploring media's influence on well-being; and The Negative Impact of Screen Time on Teenagers' School Absenteeism, addressing pressing concerns in youth education.

IJEPED continues to publish original, empirical research that contributes to advancing knowledge and practice in contemporary education. To ensure quality and relevance, our dedicated team of editors and reviewers rigorously assess submissions. The Editorial Board extends its sincere gratitude to the authors and researchers whose contributions enrich this issue, as well as to the advisory board, peer assessors, the Centre of Research and Publication, Kulliyyah of Education, and all supporting departments for their invaluable assistance in the publication process.

We remain committed to fostering innovative perspectives and anticipate constructive feedback that will further strengthen IJEPED. The Editorial Board warmly welcomes future contributions and appreciates the continued support of our readers and contributors.

Assistant Professor Dr. Mohamed Solih
Editor- in - Chief
Centre for Research and Publications
Islamic University of Maldives

Editorial Board

Editor-in-Chief

Assistant Professor Dr. Mohamed Solih

Associate Editors

Assistant Professor, Dr.Visal Moosa
Specialised in teaching and educational management and leadership
Deputy Vice Chancellor Research and Innovation
Islamic University of Maldives
visal.moosa@ium.edu.mv

Assistant Professor, Dr. Mariyam Shareefa
Specialized in education, teaching and learning, inclusive education
Centre of Research and Publication
Islamic University of Maldives
mariyam.shareefa@ium.edu.mv

Assistant Professor, Dr Aishath Reesha
Specialised in education, teaching and learning
Kulliyyah of Education
Islamic University of Maldives
aishath.reesha@ium.edu.mv

Senior Lecturer, Dr. Khaulath Saeed
Specialized in education, teaching and learning, assessment
Kulliyyah of Education
Islamic University of Maldives
khaulath.saeed@ium.edu.mv

Dr.Suneena Rasheed
Specialised in teaching and education, teacher education and practicum
Controller of examination
Islamic University of Maldives
suneena.rasheed@ium.edu.mv

Assistant Professor Dr. Aishath Shina
Specialised in teaching and education
Dean of Kulliyyah of Education
Islamic University of Maldives
aishath.shina@ium.edu.mv

Associate Professor Dr Ismail Hussein Amzat
Specialized social science, education, leadership and management
International islamic University Malaysia
Kulliyyah of Education
ihussein@iium.edu.my

Assistant Professor Dr Aishath Reesha
Specialised in education, teaching and learning
Kulliyyah of Education
Islamic University of Maldives
aishath.reesha@ium.edu.mv

Managing editor (Only One person)

Assistant Professor Dr. Zubair Hassan
Specialised in Management, organizational behavior and marketing

Centre of research and publication
Islamic University of Maldives
Zubair.hassan@ium.edu.mv

Language Editors:

Assistant Professor Dr. Dheeba Moosa
Specialised in education, teaching and learning
Centre of postgraduate studies
Islamic University of Maldives
dheeba.moosa@ium.edu.mv

Assistant Professor Dr. Aminath Shafiya
Specialised in teaching and education
Dean of Centre of Research and Publication
Islamic University of Maldives
aminath.shafiya@ium.edu.mv

Dean for Postgraduate Studies, Dr Fathimath Muna
Specialised in teaching and education
Dean of Centre for postgraduate studies
Islamic University of Maldives
fathimath.muna@ium.edu.mv

Others:

Dr. Aisha Mohamed Rashad
Specialised in usul al -din, comparative religion, humanities, religious studies, guidance and counselling
Kulliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Science
Islamic University of Maldives
aisha.mohamed@ium.edu.mv

Assistant Professor Dr. Aishath Waheeda
Specialised in teaching and education
Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs
Islamic University of Maldives
aishath.waheeda@ium.edu.mv

Assistant Professor Dr Fathimath Nishan
Specialized in education, teaching and learning, inclusive education
National Institute of Education
Ministry of Education
visitinglecturer4194@ium.edu.mv

Dr. Zakiyya Moosa
Specialised in Hospitality and Tourism
Maldives Polytechnic
mzakiyya@gmail.com

Dean for Postgraduate Studies, Dr Fathimath Muna
Specialised in teaching and education
Dean of Centre for postgraduate studies
Islamic University of Maldives
fathimath.muna@ium.edu.mv

Associate Professor Dr Ismail Hussein Amzat
Specialized social science, education, leadership and management
International Islamic University Malaysia
Kulliyyah of Education
ihussein@iium.edu.my

Assistant Professor Dr Jafar Paramboor
Specialized humanities, Religious studies, Islamic Studies and Islamic Education
International islamic University Malaysia
Kulliyyah of Education
pjafar@iium.edu.my

AI in Education and Society: Teaching the machine, transforming the human

Vimala Balakrishnan

Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Korea University, Seoul, Korea

vimala.balakrishna@um.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping education and society, presenting both unprecedented opportunities and complex challenges. It is transforming education in profound ways, offering exciting new possibilities while raising important questions. This paper explores how AI is changing the way teaching and learning happen in universities and beyond. "Teaching the machine" involves training AI systems to understand and respond to educational needs, which includes personalizing learning experiences, automating assessment, and supporting educators in managing diverse classrooms. At the same time, AI is changing how students learn, think, and interact, opening opportunities for deeper creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration ("transforms the human"). While AI can enhance efficiency, personalize learning, and provide valuable insights, qualities such as empathy, curiosity, creativity, and ethical decision-making remain central to fostering meaningful learning experiences. These human traits inspire critical thinking, support emotional well-being, and cultivate a sense of community that technology alone cannot replicate. This paper also addresses the social and ethical implications of integrating AI tools into classrooms, including concerns about privacy, fairness, bias, and the digital divide. It highlights the responsibility of educators and institutions to ensure that AI is implemented in ways that are transparent, equitable, and inclusive, so that all learners can benefit regardless of their backgrounds. Ultimately, the keynote advocates for a thoughtful approach to AI adoption, one that respects and uplifts human values while harnessing technological innovation to enrich education for everyone.

INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a subfield of computer science focused on understanding human cognitive processes and replicating their outcomes through information systems. Its primary objective is to develop intelligent systems such as computer programs and machines that can exhibit behaviors typically associated with human intelligence. These behaviors include learning, reasoning, problem-solving, perception, and creativity (Rainer et al., 2016). Common AI technologies include expert systems, neural networks (including machine learning and deep learning), fuzzy logic, genetic algorithms, and intelligent agents.

AI is increasingly transforming various aspects of modern life, particularly in the field of education. Education is especially well-suited to AI integration, as teaching and learning are inherently knowledge-intensive and cognitive in nature. AI applications, designed to enhance cognition and problem-solving through algorithmic processes and knowledge bases, can significantly support and augment the capabilities of both educators and learners (Bilquise & Shaalan, 2022). In

educational contexts, AI enables innovations such as personalized learning experiences, automated assessments, and streamlined administrative processes. For instance, AI-powered tools like Khanmigo provide personalized learning support and real-time feedback across a range of subjects, while platforms like Duolingo use AI to adapt language instruction to individual learning styles and progress (Bicknell et al., 2023).

Another notable example is ChatGPT, a generative Natural Language Processing (NLP) model capable of producing human-like responses to open-ended prompts. In higher education, ChatGPT can assist with academic content generation, answering student inquiries, and offering explanations or feedback on assignments. Chatbots powered by AI are also increasingly used in administrative and support roles. They can manage tasks such as scheduling, responding to queries about university policies, and guiding students through academic or career planning. These systems also enhance communication between students and educators by offering a platform for timely feedback and support (Pereira & Diaz, 2020).

However, the profound benefits of AI must be carefully balanced with inherently human qualities such as empathy, critical thinking, creativity, and ethical judgment. While AI excels in data processing and automation, it lacks emotional intelligence and moral reasoning, which are vital in education and decision-making (Holmes et al., 2019; Luckin, 2017). A human-centered approach is necessary to ensure that AI supports and not replaces the uniquely human elements of teaching and learning (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

This paper explores how AI can be thoughtfully integrated into higher education to enhance efficiency and access without compromising the human foundations of teaching and learning, emphasizing a responsible, values-oriented approach to innovation in the classroom and beyond.

BACKGROUND

Teaching the Machine – AI as education tool

AI is revolutionizing education by transforming how instruction is delivered and received through deeply personalized learning experiences, dynamic adaptability, and streamlined assessment systems. Examples are many including personalized teaching and learning tools. For instance, AI-powered tools can provide individualized learning pathways tailored to each student's strengths, weaknesses, learning pace, and preferences. A simple example is AI Buddy – a platform that curates a personalized study path, offering multimedia content and instant, actionable feedback via a comprehensive dashboard (Figure 1). Another example is Squirrel AI – an AI platform that uses adaptive learning system that assesses a student's strengths and weaknesses, then tailors the learning materials and tasks to their specific need.
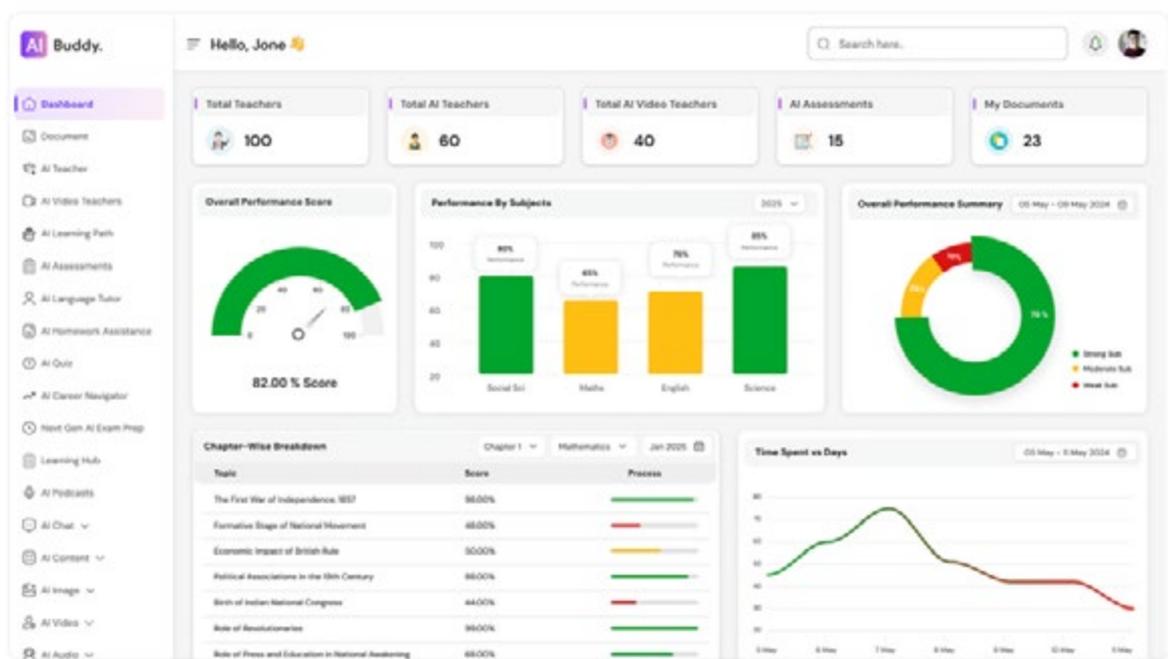
Figure 1. AI Buddy dashboard (https://aibuddyapps.com/)

Another possibility is the rise of Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) - a computer system that imitates human tutors and aims to provide immediate and customized instruction or feedback to learners, often without human intervention (Arnau-González et al., 2023). ITSs are revolutionizing education by providing personalized learning for diverse students. These systems utilize artificial intelligence to analyze a student's current knowledge, learning pace and preferred learning style. ITS typically comprises four key components: domain or expert model containing the knowledge and skills to be taught, serving as the foundation for the system's instructional content; student model that tracks the learner's progress, identifying strengths and areas for improvement; tutoring or pedagogic model that determines the most effective teaching strategies based on data from the domain and student models and the user interface model that facilitates interaction between the student and the system (Mosa et al., 2018). Previous studies have shown students utilizing ITSs to perform better academically that those who did not (Karaci et al., 2018).

Automation of assessment and feedback can be accomplished using AI as well, and this can dramatically reduce teacher workload while enhancing feedback quality. Real-time assessment engines can adapt question difficulty, reinforce challenging topics, and offer multimedia hints or explanations, thus creating a continuous feedback loop for the learner. These AI-driven tools promise to revolutionize the way educators evaluate student performance and provide feedback, enhancing the learning experience and outcomes. One example is Gradescope – a tool that provides grades coding, math, and math-adjacent assignments with high accuracy and efficiency. A common tool that also focuses on interactive and engaging teaching and learning is Kahoot! that uses AI to create interactive quizzes and simulations that respond to student input, keeping learners motivated and involved.

Transforming the Human

AI in education is more than a technological upgrade, as it transforms learning by personalizing instruction and supporting diverse student needs. It is changing how students learn, think,

and interact, opening opportunities for deeper creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, while also empowering teachers with intelligent tools to enhance instruction, streamline tasks, and focus more on meaningful student engagement. An example of a success story is Squirrel Ai's adaptive learning system. By combining teacher-designed curricula with advanced AI algorithms, Squirrel Ai has improved student question accuracy rates from 78% to 93%, serving over 24 million students and analyzing 10 billion data points on learning behavior. This integration of AI and human instruction allows for real-time, data-driven feedback while teachers focus on delivering engaging lessons and providing essential mentorship, highlighting how AI enhances both student outcomes and the role of educators.

AI is significantly transforming education by automating time-consuming administrative tasks like marking and feedback, which are often challenging for educators. This advancement improves fairness, accuracy, and efficiency in assessments, allowing teachers to dedicate more time to teaching and lesson planning. At the same time, students benefit from real-time feedback that accelerates learning. By reducing human bias and subjectivity in grading, AI helps create a more equitable education system where students are evaluated based on their true abilities and knowledge.

While AI excels at pattern recognition, data processing, and scaling instruction, it remains fundamentally limited in areas where humanity's depth matters most, particularly creativity, empathy, and critical thinking. These uniquely human traits not only define meaningful education but actively complement AI's functional strengths. AI should be observed as a supportive tool, and not a replacement. For instance, a study compared six Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) chatbots (alpa.ai, Copy.ai, ChatGPT (versions 3 and 4), Studio.ai, and YouChat) and found 9.4 percent of humans were more creative than the most creative GAI, GPT-4. (Haase & Hanel, 2023). In educational spaces, empathy is indispensable. Empathetic teacher-student relationships create safe, trusting environments where learning thrives. A meta-analysis of empathy in teaching found that compassionate and emotionally aware educators can reduce disciplinary issues by as much as 50%, improving overall academic outcomes and classroom climate (Aldrup et al., 2024). Technology can aid by flagging engagement trends, but only humans can interpret and respond with genuine care.

However, the rapid and pervasive proliferation of AI tools also raises critical concerns regarding cognitive offloading, whereby individuals outsource cognitive tasks to machines at the expense of original thinking. A simplest example would be the use of ChatGPT for tasks like writing or problem-solving, which can reduce the need for deep thinking, creativity, and independent learning. To address these concerns, a more effective use of AI in education is to treat it as a starting point rather than a source of final answers. Students can be encouraged to examine AI-generated responses, question their accuracy, and develop their own ideas in response. This approach promotes critical thinking, deeper engagement, and a sense of ownership over learning. By using AI as a tool for prompting reflection and analysis, rather than simply delivering information, students are more likely to develop independent thinking and stronger problem-solving skills.

Ethical and Social Implications

Finally, the integration of AI within education undeniably offers advancement and efficiency, yet it concurrently raises significant ethical and social concerns that must be addressed to uphold values of privacy, fairness, academic integrity, and digital equity. For instance, data privacy is important when using AI in education. AI-driven systems in education rely on extensive personal data ranging from academic performance and behavioral patterns to demographic and emotional indicators,

hence raising critical concerns about misuse, long-term storage, or unauthorized sharing. Therefore, compliance with data protection regulations, such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the EU or the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) in the US is important. Compliance with these regulations involves implementing stringent data protection measures to secure learner information. This includes encryption, anonymization, and secure storage of data to prevent unauthorized access and breaches. Apart from compliance, transparency is very important for protecting learners' data privacy. Educational institutions should clearly explain how they collect, store, and use student information. Learners need to know what data is collected, why it is used, and how long it will be kept. Providing clear and easy-to-understand privacy policies helps build trust and ensures students understand their rights and how their data is protected (Smith et al., 2022; Johnson & Lee, 2023).

The deployment of AI in education raises critical issues of fairness and bias. Because AI learns from existing data, it can unknowingly repeat and even worsen the biases already present, which can unfairly affect students from marginalized backgrounds. For example, AI systems that grade essays might be influenced by the preferences and biases of the people who created the training data. This means students with different writing styles or cultural experiences might be judged unfairly (Zhang et al., 2024). Academic integrity concerns are an increasingly significant issue for university leadership and faculty due to the widespread impact of AI tools. These technologies make it easier for students to complete assignments, write essays, or solve problems with little original effort, raising questions about the authenticity of their work. This widespread use of AI can blur the lines between honest collaboration and cheating, making it harder for educators to ensure that students are genuinely demonstrating their own knowledge and skills.

HYBRID INTELLIGENCE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As AI evolves, educators and researchers are exploring hybrid intelligence systems and the emerging prospects and challenges of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) or strong AI in the educational realm. Hybrid intelligence (HI) combines human intelligence with machine intelligence, with the goal of augmenting human capabilities as opposed to replacing them, while simultaneously harvesting the potential of smart machines (Akata et al., 2020). In other words, the AI supports tasks that benefit from scale and pattern recognition, while human instructors preserve oversight, interpretability, motivation, and emotional guidance.

CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence is at a pivotal moment in education, offering powerful tools for efficiency, personalization, and insight while also challenging the fundamental human values that make learning meaningful. This paper argues that as we teach AI systems to better understand learners, we must also ensure that AI supports and uplifts students by preserving empathy, creativity, integrity, and critical thinking. To achieve this, clear policies and research are needed, including standards for evaluating AI in education, professional development to improve AI literacy, investments in infrastructure to promote equity, and collaborations across disciplines to make sure AI strengthens rather than diminishes human dignity and learning. Ultimately, AI does not have to replace the human element in education. By adopting thoughtful and inclusive approaches centered on people, we can use AI's potential while staying true to the values that make education truly transformative.

REFERENCES

Aldrup, K., Carstensen, B. & Klusmann, U. Is Empathy the Key to Effective Teaching? A Systematic Review of Its Association with Teacher-Student Interactions and Student Outcomes. *Educ Psychol Rev* 34, 1177–1216 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-021-09649-y

Arnau-González, Pablo; Arevalillo-Herráez, Miguel; Luise, Romina Albornoz-De; Arnau, David (2023-06-01). "A methodological approach to enable natural language interaction in an Intelligent Tutoring System". *Computer Speech & Language.* 81:101516. doi:10.1016/j.csl.2023.101516. ISSN 0885-2308.

Bilquise, G. and K. Shaalan (2022) AI-based academic advising framework: A knowledge management perspective, *International Journal of Advanced Computer Science and Applications: IJACSA*, 13, https://doi.org10.14569/ijacsa.2022.0130823

Bicknell, J. (2023). The impact of audit committee oversight on investor rationality, price expectations, human capital, and research and development expense. *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, *16*(6), 321. https://doi.org/10.3390/jrfm16060321

Haase, Paul H. P. Hanel (2023) Artificial muses: Generative Artificial Intelligence Chatbots Have Risen to Human-Level Creativity, arXiv:2303.12003

Holmes, W., Bialik, M., & Fadel, C. (2019). Artificial Intelligence in Education: Promises and Implications for Teaching and Learning. Boston: Center for Curriculum Redesign.

Johnson, L., & Lee, R. (2023). Protecting learner data: The role of transparency in digital education environments. *International Journal of Educational Data Privacy*, 8(1), 12-27. https://doi.org/10.5678/ijedp.2023.0012

Karaci, A., Akyüz, H. I., Bilgici, G., & Arici, N. (2018). Effects of Web-Based Intelligent Tutoring Systems on Academic Achievement and Retention. *International Journal of Computer Applications,* Vol. 181, No. 16, pp. 35-41.

Luckin, R. (2017). Towards artificial intelligence-based assessment systems. *Nature Human Behaviour,* 1(3), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-017-0055

Mosa, M. J., Albatish, I., & Abu-Naser, S. S. Asp. net-tutor: Intelligent tutoring system for leaning asp. net. *International Journal of Academic Pedagogical Research*, Vol. 2, No.2, 2018.

Pereira, J. and Ó. Diaz (2022) Struggling to keep tabs on capstone projects: a chatbot to tackle student procrastination, *ACM Transactions on Computing Education,* vol. 22, pp. 1–22, https://doi.org10.1145/3469127

Rainer, R. K., Prince, B., & Watson, H. J. (2016). Management information systems: Moving business forward (4th ed.). Wiley.

Smith, A., Brown, J., & Garcia, M. (2022). Transparency and trust in educational data privacy: Building clear policies for student information. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society,* 25(3), 45-58. https://doi.org/10.1234/edtech.2022.0034

Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V. I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education – where are the educators? *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education,* 16(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-019-0171-0

Zhang, J., Zhu, L., Zhu, X., Cheng, Y., Zhu, Y., Zhu, X. (2024) Grading by ai makes me feel fairer? how different evaluators affect college students' perception of fairness. *Frontiers in Psychology* 15, 1221177 Bai, X., He, Y., & Kohlbacher, F. (2018). Older people's adoption of e-learning services:

Challenges Faced by Student Teachers During their Teaching Practicum: A case study of a Higher Education Institution in the Maldives

Visama Hassan, Khaulath Saeed, Aishath Shina

Islamic University Maldives

visama.hassan@ium.edu.mv, khaulath.saeed@ium.edu.mv, aishath.shina@ium.edu.mv

ABSTRACT

Teacher education institutions play a key role in producing a professionally trained, quality teacher workforce for the nation. In the teaching programmes, teaching practicum is a key component, which allows students to practice the knowledge and skills acquired from the program in the field. As such, every student teacher must pass through the practical teaching module, the teaching practicum, which is supervised by trained and skillful mentors. In the context of the Maldives, it appears that little is known about the process and practices of the teaching practicum. It is in this spirit that the current study aimed to examine the challenges faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum. This study adopted a qualitative approach by conducting semi-structured interviews with eight participants. The findings of this study revealed that challenges were related to schools, institutions, and student teachers. It was therefore recommended that the institution and the respective school in charge should have a close relationship and good communication with each other to provide a conducive learning experience for the student teachers.

Keyword (s): Teaching practicum, higher education institution, student teacher

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education institutes play a key role in producing a professionally trained teacher workforce for the nation. Other than the technical knowledge obtained through the programme curriculum, it is equally important to gain field experience as an opportunity to articulate the knowledge and skills acquired through the course. As such, every student teacher must pass through a practical teaching module called teaching practicum, which is supervised by trained and skilful mentors. Teaching Practice (TP) is a standard component of all teacher preparation programmes leading to a recognised teaching credential (Aldabbus, 2020). A teaching practicum is where the student-teacher applies the teaching strategies and methods taught in college (Aldabbus, 2020). It is obvious that teaching practice requires knowledge of more than what to teach and how to teach it and is intended to aid in developing a variety of skills, including interpersonal, pedagogical, intercultural, and psychological skills (Ebrahim et al., 2017).

In the context of the Maldives, the University of Maldives's teaching programme cannot be completed without completing a teaching practicum programme. All the undergraduate teaching programs should complete two programmes, while all the graduate teaching programs have to cover one teaching practicum program. However, it appears that little is known about the process and practice of the course and

practicum components of these programs. It is in this spirit that the current study aims to examine the problems and difficulties faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

For decades, the education faculties in teacher training institutions have been conducting student-teacher practice. Students spend four years studying numerous subjects in depth, with minimal or no emphasis at all on teaching practicum. According to observations, some students are reluctant to try teaching in actual classroom settings. Despite having taken courses in teaching methods, curriculum and pedagogy, and skills, some student teachers are unable to put those ideas into practice. Hence, the aim of this study is to identify the challenges that student teachers face in the classroom during the teaching practicum.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.

To examine the challenges faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the perception of student teachers on teaching practicum?

2. What are the challenges faced by student teachers during teaching practicum?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teaching practicum is fundamental to preservice teacher education programs, as through these components the student teachers get the opportunity to practice and make connections between theories they have learned and practice (Imsa-ard et al., 2021). Through this, they encounter numerous challenges. The current study is aimed at exploring the challenges faced by student teachers during the course of teaching practicum, the major challenges faced from the review of literature are discussed below.

Whether students go to public schools or private schools for teaching practicum they experience a lot of challenges. As student teachers are encouraged to participate in and watch a variety of teaching and nonteaching activities, so gaining an understanding of the complexity of teaching and the variety of roles performed was a major challenge (Foncha et al., 2015)

Moreover, Imsa-ard et al., (2021) and Prihatin et al., (2021) in their research discovered that student teachers found experimenting with the pedagogical and instructional practices and managing large classes difficult. For this, they highly depended on the instruction from the school management and their cooperating teacher. The support from the school management and cooperating teachers also plays a key role in the process of practicum. Literature shows that the support and cooperation gained from the school management and cooperating teachers were not sufficient to develop novice teachers and gain good field experience (Ertürk, 2022; Prihatin et al., 2021). Furthermore, the placement schools' management did not get much engaged to the practicum program and only the cooperating teachers performed their role as per their interest (Rasheed, 2017). In addition to this it was also found due to the lack of support and cooperation from school management and cooperating teachers, students missed many opportunities to fully participate in school activities (Saleem Yakoub Masadeh, 2017) Unavailability of necessary resources for the lessons was considered a challenge for the student teachers. Rasheed (2017) in her research found that students had the challenge of getting required resources for teaching during the practicum. Research on the topic recommends that for printing services of the teaching aids and to providing necessary stationaries to make teaching aids and for classroom instructions, students should be provided with pocket money

Another key challenge found in the literature was ineffective meetings and feedback. A study conducted in Zimbabwe for teacher students regarding practicum shows that they had meetings with the cooperating teachers weekly and the discussed issues were specific, clear, and feedback was given (Mukeredzi & Manwa, 2019). However, (Rasheed, 2017) found in her study that feedback was delayed, and as a result, its effectiveness decreased. In addition to this, the study also found that constructive feedback was not given to students. Moreover, students' teachers find that teachers at hosting schools do not consider them as a part of their team and sometimes are not cooperative (Annan-Brew & Arhin, 2022).

Apart from these challenges which were related to the institution and schools, research shows that students also had issues and challenges related to their personality and personal life. In this regard, student's low confidence was found as a major issue. In dealing with the issues faced at the field, students find it challenging and stressful to address them due to their low confidence (Paula, 2020). Making a good impression of themselves among the hosing school teachers and trying to do things in the right way has put the students in stressful situations, moreover, managing their studies, personal lives, and teaching practicum at the same time were quite challenging and stressful for student (Goh & Matthews, 2011). Literature shows that with all these duties time management has been a quite significant issue during the practicum period. Rebecca (2016), in her study, found that managing all the personal and professional chores at the same time was stressful for student teachers and they encountered major issues in managing time.

Hence, it can be concluded through the light of literature that teaching practicum, despite its effectiveness in developing and preparing student teachers for the teaching field, consists of numerous issues and challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The approach used to answer the researched question was a qualitative case study in which student teachers, coordinating teachers, and the coordinator of the program were interviewed. This approach was used to get rich and in-depth information on the issue being investigated (Creswell, 2015).

SETTING AND PARTICIPANTS

The participants of the study were the final semester students enrolled in Bachelor of Teaching Quran in one of the higher education institutions in the Maldives. The total number of participants was 5 student teachers, 2 coordinating teachers, and the coordinator of the teaching practicum in that respective institution. The participants were selected purposefully to address the research question. The student participants selected were among those who have completed the 2 rounds of school teaching practicum.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data were collected via face-to-face semi-structured interviews using a self-developed questionnaire guide. The collected data were transcribed and sent to the participants for their approval and then sent to the research team members for member checking. This was done to increase the validity and reliability of the data collected. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke, 2006. The findings were classified into 3 main themes; challenges related to school, challenges related to the institution, and challenges related to student teachers. These themes are discussed below.

RESULTS

Challenges related to the respective schools

The teaching practicum is carried out in various schools in the Maldives. In this regard, the student teachers are distributed according to the available

slots. The teachers have a lot of expectations from the school management as they believe that this experience is a learning experience for them. However, the participants complained that they were being left out, they felt that they did not belong to the team. One participant ST2 commented, "*We were asked not to come to the school in the evening as they were going to celebrate teachers' day*". A similar sentiment was added by ST4 , " *I was very much looking forward to being part of the sports festival organised by the school, but unfortunately I was not invited*".

Another challenge identified was the support from the leading teacher and the coordinating teacher. The student teachers expect these personnel to guide and instruct them in the right path. However, at times they felt that they were a burden to them. As such, ST1 replied," *When requested to comment on an activity that I planned to teach additionally, the teacher responded by saying that she will comment after she observes my lesson*". ST5 stated that it was just one day that she requested the leading teacher if it is possible to shift her period and make some adjustments as she was having a family function that day. The response that she got was, "*Your working hours are from 1250 to 5.50 so you should be in school during this time*".

This does not stop from here; another issue was the fact that the materials and resources were not easily accessible. ST2 complained that it was very difficult for them to get worksheets printed on time. There were 2 incidents where she had to go to the class without the printouts which forced her to change the whole lesson plan. Another participant, ST 3 added that booking the Audio-Visual room for them was another difficulty, priority was given to the permanent teachers, and that hindered making their lessons interesting for the students.

Finally, coordination meetings were the most important platform that the student teachers were looking forward to. Unfortunately, the participants reported that as the meetings are held after the session, the teachers are in a hurry to rush home and that the meetings were not so effective as the lessons are not discussed clearly in detail. One participant remarked; "*most of them are in a rush and will say, " I will share the lesson plan with all of you! no constructive discussion at all*".

The above-mentioned challenges raised by the student teachers were in line with the comments received from the coordinator and also the cooperating teachers. As such, the coordinator mentioned that the students have raised the issues related to lack of support from the school management and also the cooperating teacher and that she did discuss those concerns with them. Similarly, both the cooperating teachers said that very often the student teachers tend to request suggestions from them for the activities that they plan to conduct in their lessons, and it is very difficult at times to give suggestions for each and every lesson.

Challenges related to the institution

Among the challenges related to the institution include having weekly classes during the teaching practicum, efficient work, and lack of feedback and support from the supervisors. The majority of the participants complained that having normal classes along with the teaching practice makes them stressed out. As such, ST3 reported," *It is very difficult when the classes are also going on at the same time, I have to rush home soon after the class to reach school on time*". Another participant said that they are unable to concentrate on the classwork and they sometimes fail to meet the assignment deadlines. He stated, "*Assignments should not be given during our practicum period, I am not able to give my best*".

Apart from the above-mentioned challenges, ST4 and ST1 complained that their supervisors were not so supportive, and they hardly got any feedback from them. They further added that they are the ones who should help and provide constructive feedback so that they could perform better in the future. They also stated that unless they get the full support from both the cooperating

teachers and the supervisors their teaching experience will not be effective or pleasant.

Adding on to these sentiments of the participants the coordinator agreed that if this behavior continues the teaching practicum experience will not be meaningful and the outcome will not be achieved successfully. " *We need to look into this matter seriously*".

Challenges related to personal life

A striking finding was that the Teaching practicum left some of the participants' lives so miserable that some described the experience as " *I hardly get time to sleep well, talk to my husband and children, I am always worried about my class and busy getting prepared for my lesson*". In agreement with this statement ST 5 stated that due to the time that she spent on the lesson preparation, there are instances where the kids and husband are blamed for the mistakes that she makes. As such she stated, "*If I am not able to complete my lesson plans, I sometimes blame my family, I tell them it is because of the house chores that I have to do*".

Another finding was that the participants complained that they faced problems managing time. ST1 said, "*Preparing lesson plans and teaching aids, completing the assignments, and at the same time looking after the family was hard, I was not able to do all these tasks as expected*". On the same note, ST2 also added, "*I was not able to manage time as too many tasks were there to handle simultaneously*". All 5 participants in this study raised the concern of having difficulty in managing their time.

DISCUSSION

The study expanded understanding of the problems and difficulties faced by student teachers during the teaching practicum. Several significant obstacles to the practicum's efficiency have been uncovered through in-depth interviews with practicum participants. The findings of this study revealed challenges related to schools, institutes, and student teachers.

Among the challenges related to the schools, they highlighted being left out and not belonging to the team of the school. However, the research conducted by (Anjum, 2020) showed that internship students' experiences were different in how they helped them feel like they belonged (Anjum, 2020). These events were rated on a scale from positive to negative, and they had both conflicting and harmonious parts. Moreover, the student teachers expected leading teachers to guide and instruct them in the right path. Nevertheless, they highlighted they were not being guided inside the school or being welcomed by the staff of the school. These findings support the existing literature, which indicates that the support and cooperation gained from the school management and cooperating teachers were not sufficient to develop and train novice teachers and gain good field experience (Ertürk, 2022; Prihatin et al., 2021). In addition, students emphasized instances where both leading teachers and cooperating teachers exhibited discourteous behaviour towards student teachers. These findings provide support for Mutlu (2014), study on Challenges in Practicum: Pre-Service and Cooperating Teachers' Voices, which emphasized the occurrence of discourteous behaviour exhibited by cooperating teachers towards student teachers.

In addition, interviews with student teachers revealed that they were dissatisfied with the institute's implementation of teaching practices. According to the students, the challenges they face at the institute are having weekly classes during the teaching practicum, a dearth of supervisor feedback and assistance, and the absence of supervisor support. This is in line with what has been found by Aldabbus (2020), that some supervisors do not have time to sit down with student teachers and discuss their observations and comments. The other complaint from the student teachers is the combination of regular classes and teaching practice, which causes them tension.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, the challenges encountered by the students in this study align with those reported in the existing literature. Conferring to the findings, there were three kinds of challenges. They are challenges related to the respective schools, challenges related to the institution, and challenges related to the student teachers. To begin with, there are challenges related to schools, where students are distributed to different schools throughout the Maldives and students feel left out and unsupported by the leading teachers, and even the coordination meeting they had to attend was not very fruitful, as teachers are often in a rush to get home, as the meetings are held after the session and student teachers do not learn much from the coordination meeting. Second, when discussing the institution's concerns, students noted a number of difficulties they face. One of the issues is that attending regular classes in addition to teaching practice stresses them out, and supervisors are not always supportive. Not receiving feedback from supervisors is another major challenge that student teachers have identified. Third, student teachers have raised concerns about challenges related to themselves. For example, the data suggest that the teaching practicum has made some of the participants' lives so unhappy that they want to quit. They also have highlighted the difficulties faced in managing their personal life during the period of practicum.

Based on these findings, persons in charge of teaching practicum should look into the roles of leading teachers, supervisors, and cooperative teachers. Furthermore, the university and schools should communicate and coordinate more efficiently, and the value of teaching practice should be highlighted for the country's future generations.

REFERENCES

Aldabbus, S. (2020). Challenges Encountered By Student Teachers in Practicing Teaching. *British Journal of Education*, *8*(7), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.37745/bje/vol8.no6.p1-8.2020

Anjum, S. (2020). Impact of internship programs on professional and personal development of business students: A case study from Pakistan. *Future Business Journal*, *6*(1), 2. https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-019-0007-3

Annan-Brew, Dr. R., & Arhin, D. (2022). Perceived Challenges Faced By Student-Teachers (Prospective Teachers) From Universities and Colleges in Ghana during Off-Campus Teaching Practice. *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy*, *6*(9), 498–505. https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2022.v06i09.008

Creswell, J. W. (2015). A concise introduction to mixed methods research. *SAGE*.

Ebrahim, A., Eyadat, W., & Alshammari, F. (2017). Challenges in Teaching Practice at the College of Education based on the Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers: The Case for Kuwait University. *The New Educational Review*, *49*(1), 250–260. https://czasopisma.marszalek.com.pl/en/10-15804/tner/1754-tner2017320

Ertürk, R. (2022). The Relationship between School Administrators' Supportive Behaviors and Teachers' Job Satisfaction and Subjective Well-Being. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, *8*(4), 184–195. https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.956667

Foncha, J. W., Abongdia, J.-F. A., & Adu, E. O. (2015). Challenges Encountered by Student Teachers in Teaching English Language during Teaching Practice in East London, South Africa. *International Journal Of Educational Sciences*, *09*(02). https://doi.org/10.31901/24566322.2015/09.02.04

Goh, P., & Matthews, B. (2011). Listening To the Concerns of Student Teachers In Malaysia During Teaching Practice. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *36*(3). https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2011v36n3.2

Imsa-ard, P., Wichamuk, P., & Chuanchom, C. (2021). Muffled Voices from Thai Pre-Service Teachers: Challenges and Difficulties during Teaching Practicum. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, *9*(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v9i3.3989

Mukeredzi, T., & Manwa, L. (2019). Inside Mentor-Mentee Meetings in Pre-Service Teacher School-based Teaching Practice in Zimbabwe. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *44*, 31–52. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44n7.3

Mutlu, G. (2014). Challenges in Practicum: Pre-Service and Cooperating Teachers' Voices. *Journal of Education and Practice*.

Paula, P. (2020). *Difficulties Experienced by Student-Teachers in Teaching Practicum*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352543676_Practicum_in_Early_Childhood_Education_Student_Teachers'_Perspective

Prihatin, Y., Ekawati, Y. N., Rosdiana, I., & Sakinatulhaq, A. (2021). Challenges In Teaching English To Young Learners In Southern Thailand (A Case Study of Indonesian Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives). *Psychology and Education Journal*, *58*(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.17762/pae.v58i2.3087

Rasheed, S. (2017). The Practicum in Teacher Education in the Maldives: Current Practices, Issues and Future Directions.

Rebecca, O. (2016). *Strategies for Enhancement of Time Management by Students in Home Management Practicum: Case Study of College of Agriculture, Lafia*. *2*.

Saleem Yakoub Masadeh, T. (2017). Opportunities and Barriers of Practicum from the Perspectives of English Language Student Teachers. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *5*(6), 1059–1071. https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2017.050620

Consumption of Public Display of Affection (PDA) Content and Its Impact on Personal Happiness and Relationship Satisfaction

Nurul Rashidah Mohamed Roseli, Nik Irdina Iszam Iszam Rozmohan[2], Rachel Mei Ming Wong[3], Mimi Fitriana Zaini[1]

Taylor's College, Universiti Malaya-Wales, HELP University Malaysia

rashidahroseli@gmail.com, rachelwong.mm@help.edu.my

ABSTRACT

While abundant research focuses on the perspective of people who create or post Public Display of Affection (PDA) content, little attention is given to the impact of PDA on other social media users who are consuming these contents. According to the social comparison theory, these types of content shown in social media may induce feelings of envy and dissatisfaction in one's romantic relationship. Therefore, this study focused on determining the impact of PDA consumption on personal happiness and relationship satisfaction. A quantitative research design was used where 73 participants were recruited. Of the 73, 34 of them are in a relationship while the remaining 39 are single. The inclusion criteria are: (1) Malaysian, (2) aged 19 to 39 and (3) has at least one social media account. Frequency analysis revealed that a vast majority of social media users have moderate to high level of consumption of PDA content. However, a deeper crosstab analysis showed that most single people tend to have high levels of PDA consumption while most people who are in a relationship tend to have moderate levels of PDA consumption. Simple linear regression revealed no significant impact of PDA consumption on both personal happiness and relationship satisfaction. This study shows there is a high consumption of PDA content in social media yet no impact on personal happiness and relationship satisfaction is proven. This could indicate that social media users are having healthier emotional regulations while strolling through the contents available on social media.

Keywords: personal happiness, public display of affection, relationship satisfaction, social media, young adult

INTRODUCTION

Public Display of Affection (PDA): PDAs are physical acts of intimacy that are made in front of others. Holding hands or hugging are relatively moderate shows of intimacy, while more passionate gestures include touching, such as kissing and groping (Miller, 2013). In this era, without a doubt, social media has become a huge part of our lives, and people are showing PDA not just in real life but also in social media. It is important to take a step back and understand that social media also has its own negative aspects that could affect us in a certain way. In this case, many individuals nowadays feel unhappy and at times ungrateful for their lives due to the things they often see online. Some individuals could evoke feelings of envy and jealousy from watching other people enjoying their lives in the way that they wanted.

Bayer et al. (2020) claimed that numerous studies suggest a connection between social media use and social comparison processes. Tukachinsky and Dorros (2018) found that

exposure to romanticized media representations is linked to lower relationship satisfaction, a weaker commitment to marriage and increased relational conflict. Making an upward social comparison to a friend's relationship that is perceived as superior might lead some individuals to develop negative interpretations of their own relationship, which may then lead them to feel less satisfied with their relationship as a result (Holte, 2022). In this context, people in relationships would compare their own relationship to those romantic photos in social media. For people who are single, they would compare those lives full of affection to their own lives without a romantic relationship which would affect their levels of happiness.

Hence, this research focuses on answering the following research questions:

1. What is the level of PDA consumption among social media users who are single and in a relationship?

2. What is the impact of PDA consumption on personal happiness and relationship satisfaction

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Li and Wang (2022), people often display and stage out their daily lives on social media to create a seemingly perfect romantic relationship. The public and individuals may associate these idealized depictions with real-life intimacy. Social networking sites (SNS) users often publicly showcase their affection for their loved ones on their accounts and a study from Utz and Beukeboom (2011) found that couples particularly enjoy displays of affection like this. Tandon et al. (2021) suggested that sharing one's relationship status on social media may be seen as a public display of affection and a declaration of the couple's exclusivity to their social group, whilst proven to be connected with relationship satisfaction.

However, Li and Wang (2022) further explained that the public display of affection may also cause feelings of jealousy among other couples, as social media offers users information that makes it possible them to stay in touch with their friends, it also creates a strong foundation for jealousy and peer comparison, which is the effect and adjustment people make when they perceive social media as a stressful environment. In a study from Li and Wang (2022) found out that mainly college students are more likely to develop negative self-evaluations and low self-esteem when exposed to this stressful environment for an extended period of time, which ultimately results in life dissatisfaction.

Han (2022) explained that according to the social comparison theory by Festinger (1954), people usually look for benchmarks to compare themselves in order to evaluate their progress and place in life. The social comparison theory consists of two different elements, upward comparison and downward comparison. In this study, we will focus more on upward comparison, whereby people would compare themselves to those who are better off than they are. Van de Ven and Zeelenberg (2018) further explained that envy has an upward perspective and concentrates on both what the other person has and what one lacks. Zeelenberg (2018) also added that social comparison for which one person lacks a desirable quality that the other person possesses is the basis of envy, which concludes that envy is driven by upward social comparison. Warrender and Milne (2020) claimed that individuals who engage in upward social comparison are more prevalent on social media and prone to have lower self-esteem.

Based on the research of Verduyn et al. (2020) social comparison serves as a vulnerability element whereby people who tend to compare themselves to others (as opposed to people who do not) by viewing other users' profiles or browsing Facebook's newsfeed, experience stronger drops

in self-esteem and higher levels of depression, in fact, the study by Verduyn et al. (2020) found out that individuals experiences higher feelings of loneliness and stronger drops in positive emotions often occur after using Instagram.

According to Satici et al. (2021) individuals who are psychologically troubled because of too much social media consumption are unlikely to listen to their partner's emotional requirements since they are preoccupied with resolving their own issues, which could decrease relationship satisfaction. Fincham et al. (2018) claimed that individuals who are sensitive to negative effects of romantic relationships and who can stop these feelings as soon as possible often feel satisfied with their relationships

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social comparison theory by Leon Festinger (1954) is described as the natural tendency to use other people as indicators of how we are doing in comparison to them or of how we ought to act, think, and feel. The choice of the comparison target includes upward, the superior other whereas downward, the inferior other and the comparison's outcome are crucial to the social comparison process (assimilation versus contrast). When a comparison is made upward or downward, assimilation specifically refers to how the comparer's self-evaluation shifts towards the comparison target, becoming more positive. Contrast, on the other hand, describes how the comparer's assessment of themselves shifts away from the comparison target, turning more negative after an upward comparison and more positive after a downward comparison. When the comparison dimension is significant to oneself and the comparison target is comparable to oneself, social comparisons are often more likely to occur (Verduyn et al. (2020).

In relating this theory to the current study, individuals that spend their time watching content and news feeds of others that are considered desirable may create positive or negative effects of

an upward comparison. By nature, we often idolize others for something they have that we might not have, an example would be seeing other couples on social media writing an appreciation post about their partners. This could create a negative effect comparison as to why their respective partners never engage in this type of display of affection that would elevate into dissatisfaction in the relationship.

Materials and methods

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research method and descriptive design of a survey study are used in this study to investigate the relationship between public display of affection in social media and relationship satisfaction among young adults.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

Convenience sampling methods was used due to time and resource accessibility. The inclusion criteria are: (1) Malaysian, (2) aged 19 to 39 and (3) has at least one social media account. A number of 73 young adults are participating in this study, consisting of 34 participants in a relationship and 39 single participants. Participants are requested to mark their eligibility checklist on the front page of the digital form distributed prior to signing the informed consent. Participants who are not eligible would be discarded from data analysis. However, no response is discarded as all participants meet the three criteria set.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) by Hendrick (1988) are used in this study. The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) comprises general relationship satisfaction, especially in romantic relationships, consisting of 7 items and is designed with a Likert Scale, with '1' being 'low' and '5' being 'high'. The reliability of this questionnaire claims to have moderate to high correlations with measures of marital satisfaction, good test-retest reliability, and

consistent measurement properties across samples of ethnically diverse and age-diverse couples. The Relationship Assessment Scale also claims to have a solid criterion-based validity and the Cronbach alpha for the Relationship Assessment Scale was 0.93.

DATA COLLECTION

Table 1 Reliability index for variables (N = 73).

	Items	N	M	SD	α
Public Displays of Affection	8	73	14.77	5.09	0.898
Happiness	7	73	30.39	3.18	0.667
Satisfaction*	7	34	30.39	3.18	0.667

Participants were given an online survey, which includes an adopted questionnaire by Hendrick (1988) called 'the 'Relationship Assessment Scale'. The online survey link was distributed through emails as well as the 'WhatsApp' platform. As the participants agreed to participate in our online survey, they were given a link that directs them to the Google Form website that has been prepared. Upon receiving the survey, participants should be able to access Section A of the survey, which was the introduction page whereby the purpose of the study was mentioned, followed by an informed consent form.

If participants agree to proceed, participants were required to tick the 'I agree and I understand' tick box that is provided as it is crucial for the participants to understand that it is within their free will to participate in this study and shall withdraw at any time if they want to. After ticking the box, participants should be directed to the Section B of the survey that contains the demographic questions such as gender, age and institution to maintain the objectives of our study, which is to compare between the two genders, male and female. After completing the demographic section, the survey was redirected to Section C, which was the crucial part of the study as it contains the Relationship

Assessment Scale (RAS) by Hendrick (1988). The final part of the survey was the debrief sheet to provide participants with the conclusion for participating in this study along with a little note to express gratitude for participating in this study and a contact number of the person in charge of the study in case of further information or any mistakes that occurred in answering the survey given.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study used Pearson's correlation coefficient for the first objective to see if there was a relationship between public display of affection in social media and relationship satisfaction, whereas the independent sample t-test was used for the second objective in order to find the gender differences in relationship satisfaction.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

An informed consent was provided upon receiving the questionnaire to this study where it states the purpose and potential benefits and risks of the study. Voluntary participation was mentioned whereby the participant should tick 'I Agree and I Understand' in the provided box if they agree to participate in this study, however, participants are able to withdraw from the study at any given point.

Confidentiality was maintained as it is important to acknowledge that researchers have no right to breach and share the personal data receive upon this study and anonymity was also maintained by only collecting data information that researchers are not able to identify the participants such as age, gender and institution.

FINDINGS

Table 2 Participant demographics.

		Total (N = 73)		In a relationship (N = 34)		Single (N = 39)	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Male	24	32.9	8	23.5	16	41
	Female	49	67.1	26	76.5	23	59
Employment status	Yes	48	65.8	24	70.6	24	61.5
	No	25	34.2	10	55.9	15	38.5
Student	Yes	35	47.9	16	47.1	19	48.7
	No	37	50.7	18	52.9	19	48.7
	Missing	1	1.4			1	2.6
Education	Post-graduate	17	23.3	10	29.4	7	17.9
	Under-graduate	46	63	22	64.7	24	61.5
	Pre-University	10	13.7	2	5.9	8	20.5
No. of children	None	63	86.3	24	70.6	39	100
	1	8	11	8	23.5	0	0
	2	2	2.7	2	5.9	0	0
Social Media Used	Facebook	50	68.5	25	73.5	25	64.1
	Instagram	66	90.4	37	91.2	85	89.7
	TikTok	54	74	23	67.6	31	79.5
	Thread	20	27.4	8	23.5	15	30.8
	X	41	56.2	19	55.9	22	56.4

Table 3 Frequencies of Public Display of Affections (PDA) categories.

		Total		In a relationship		Single	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
PDA	Low	14	19.2	6	17.6	8	20.5
	Moderate	30	41.1	15	44.1	15	38.5
	High	29	39.7	13	38.2	16	41.0

Table 4 Regression Analysis Summary for Public Displays of Affection Predicting Happiness (N = 73).

	B	95% CI	β	t	p
(Constant)	18.4	[15.67, 22.01]		11.85	<.001
Public Displays of Affection	0.1	[-.10, .30]	0.12	0.97	0.334

Table F Regression Analysis Summary for Public Displays of Affection Predicting Happiness (N = 34).

	B	95% CI	β	t	p
(Constant)	30.35	[17.27, 23.75]		18.12	0.000
Public Displays of Affection	0.00	[-0.10, 0.31]	0.01	0.03	0.977

Table G Regression Analysis Summary for Public Displays of Affection Predicting Satisfaction (N = 34).

	B	95% CI	β	t	p
(Constant)	30.35	[26.93, 33.76]		18.12	< 0.001
Public Displays of Affection	0.00	[-.21, .22]	0.01	0.03	0.997

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to determine the impact of PDA consumption on personal happiness and relationship satisfaction. The total participants of this study are 73 young adults with 34 males and 39 females. This study entails convenience sampling method, a non-probability sampling with three different analyses used in this study, which were frequency analysis, crosstab analysis and simple linear regress

H01: There is a significant impact of PDA consumption on relationship satisfaction among young adults.

The results show that there is no significant impact on PDA relationship satisfaction among young adults (r = -0.37, p = .98). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

H02: There is a significant impact of PDA consumption on personal happiness among young adults.

The results show that there is no significant impact on PDA relationship satisfaction among young adults (r = -0.37, p = .98). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Research found that consuming social media content may cause social comparison. Due to the availability of information online, social media offers a favorable environment for social comparisons to occur. Furthermore, due to the fact that social media users are more frequently exposed to their online contacts' accomplishments rather than their imperfections, notably upward social comparisons are likely to occur as social media makes it easy to present a positive view of one's life (Verduyne et al., 2020). Similarly, portraying one's 'happily ever after' relationship on social media may cause an individual to compare their relationship to the ones they see online which later may produce relationship dissatisfaction in one's relationship. The findings of the current study are proven to be true, where PDA content of social media exposure significantly relates to one's relationship satisfaction.

However, the number of literatures on the negative effects of consuming specific social media content i.e., public display of affection content on relationship satisfaction remains scarce. The insights of this study could provide a better understanding of how to handle this issue

and seek help with the right channel. Therefore, individuals are able to identify the cause of conflict in the relationship and make preventive measures in order to improve one's relationship satisfaction.

An in-depth solution and findings can also be made in order to help individuals that are currently struggling with this issue. Marriage therapy, counselling and other types of therapy can be introduced for those affected and evidence-based solutions can be made to assist on this issue. Several research found that couples counselling effectively lowers relationship conflicts and boosts relationship satisfaction (Kysely et al., 2022). Further research can provide deeper insights and contribute to evidence-based interventions.

Finally, this research helps people to be more aware of the consequences of using social media and overall promote the psychology field by promoting couples therapy in Malaysia. The community in Malaysia demands family counselling to deal with a variety of problems and obstacles in a family. Family-focused services, including family counselling, are greatly needed and should be made available to as many people as possible. Furthermore, family counselling may be a primary necessity for Malaysian society, particularly in addressing a range of social concerns and mental health, since the Malaysian community is now open to the approach of counselling in handling social problems (Noor, 2014).

REFERENCES

Acun, I. (2020). The Relationship among University Students' Trust, Self-Esteem, Satisfaction with Life and Social Media Use. *International Journal of Instruction*, *13*(1), 35–52. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2020.1313a

Bayer, J. B., Triệu, P., & Ellison, N. B. (2020). Social Media Elements, Ecologies, and Effects. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *71*(1), 471–497. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych- 010419-050944

De Andrade, A. L., Wachelke, J. F. R., & Howat-Rodrigues, A. B. C. (2015). Relationship Satisfaction in Young Adults: Gender and Love Dimensions. *Interpersona: An International Journal on Personal Relationships*, *9*(1), 19–31. https://doi.org/10.5964/ijpr.v9i1.157

Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2019). Gendered Visibility on Social Media: Navigating Instagram's Authenticity Bind. In *mediastudies.press eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.32376/3f8575cb.3f03db0e

Ekoh, P. C., Agha, A. A., & Ejimkaraonye, C. (2019). Unhealthy romantic relationships among young persons: Implication for social work practice in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Psychological Research*, *15*, 33–37. https://commons.und.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5265&context=theses

Festinger, L. (1954). A Theory of Social Comparison Processes. *Human Relations*, *7*(2), 117– 140. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872675400700202

Fincham, F. D., Rogge, R., & Beach, S. R. H. (2018). Relationship satisfaction. In A. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships (pp. 579–594). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606632.032Gerlach,

T. M., Driebe, J. C., & Reinhard, S. K. (2018). Personality and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences,* 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_718-1

Gerlach, T. M., Driebe, J. C., & Reinhard, S. K. (2018b). Personality and Romantic Relationship Satisfaction. *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences,* 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_718-1

Han, Q. (2022). Social Comparison and Well-being under Social Media Influence. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research,* 664, 633–636. https://www.atlantis- press.com/proceedings/ichssr-22/125974543

Hendrick, S. S., Dicke, A., & Hendrick, C. (1998). The Relationship Assessment Scale. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships,* 15(1), 137–142. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407598151009

Holte, A. J. (2022). *The influence of attachment security priming on relationship social comparison interpretations* (Publication No. 4264) [Doctoral dissertation, University of North Dakota]. UND Scholarly Commons. https://commons.und.edu/theses/4264

Javadivala, Z., Allahverdipour, H., Jafarabadi, M. A., Azimi, S., Gilani, N., & Chattu, V. K. (2021). Improved couple satisfaction and communication with marriage and relationship programs: are there gender differences?—a systematic review and meta-analysis.

Systematic Reviews, 10(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13643-021-01719-

Kysely, A., Bishop, B., Kane, R. L., McDevitt, M., De Palma, M., & Rooney, R. (2022). Couples Therapy Delivered Through Videoconferencing: Effects on Relationship Outcomes, Mental Health and the Therapeutic Alliance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.773030

Lueken, M. A. (2006). The prediction of relationship satisfaction: An analysis of partner- and self-perceptions. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, 67*(1-B), 600.

Li, Y., & Wang, C. (2022). The Relationship between Bystander's Life Satisfaction and Passively Acceptance of "Public Display of Affection": Self-Esteem as a Mediator— Mainly among College Students. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research,* 666, 75–81. https://www.atlantis-press.com/proceedings/stehf-22/125975593

Miller, R. L. (2013). Public Displays of Affection. *The Encyclopedia of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1063–1065. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118339893.wbeccp443

Noor, N. M. (2014). Family Counseling in Malaysia: Current Issues and Practices. *International Education Studies*, *7*(13). https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n13p33

Ramya Reddy, S., Pratap, K. V. N. R., Madhavi Padma, T., Shiva Kalyan, V., & Srikanth, P. (2019). Public Display of Affection – Views of Students in Khammam, Telangana.

International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management, *2*(10), 263. https://www.ijresm.com/Vol.2_2019/Vol2_Iss10_October19/IJRESM_V2_I10_72.pdf

Satici, B., Kayis, A. R., & Griffiths, M. D. (2021). Exploring the Association Between Social Media Addiction and Relationship Satisfaction: Psychological Distress as a Mediator. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469- 021-00658-0

Tandon, A., Dhir, A., & Mäntymäki, M. (2021). Jealousy due to social media? A systematic literature review and framework of social media-induced jealousy. *Internet Research*, *31*(5), 1541–1582. https://doi.org/10.1108/intr-02-2020-0103

Tukachinsky, R., & Dorros, S. M. (2018). Parasocial romantic relationships, romantic beliefs, and relationship outcomes in USA adolescents: rehearsing love or setting oneself up to fail? *Journal of Children and Media*, *12*(3), 329–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2018.1463917

Ubando, M. (2016). Gender Differences in Intimacy, Emotional Expressivity, and Relationship Satisfaction. *Pepperdine Journal of Communication Research* 4(13). https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/pjcr/vol4/iss1/13

Utz, S., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2011). The Role of Social Network Sites in Romantic Relationships: Effects on Jealousy and Relationship Happiness. *Journal of Computer- Mediated Communication,* 16(4), 511–527. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2011.01552.x

Van de Ven, N., & Zeelenberg, M. (2018). Envy and Social Comparison. *Social Comparison, Judgment and Behavior.* https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/d2cq9

Verduyn, P., Gugushvili, N., Massar, K., Täht, K., & Kross, E. (2020). *Social comparison on social networking sites. Current Opinion in Psychology,* 36, 32–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.04.002

Warrender, D., & Milne, R. (2020). How use of social media and social comparison affect mental health. *Nursing Times [Online]*, 116(3), 56–59. https://cdn.ps.emap.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/02/200226-How-use-of-social-media-and-social-comparison-affect-mental-health.pdf

Whitton, S. W., & Kuryluk, A. D. (2012). Relationship satisfaction and depressive symptoms in emerging adults: Cross-sectional associations and moderating effects of relationship characteristics. *Journal of Family Psychology,* 26(2), 226–235. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027267

The Negative Impact of Screen Time on Teenagers' School Absenteeism

Aminath Shafiya Adam, Mohamed Solih, Aishath Inan Rasheed

Islamic University of Maldives, Children's Ombudsperson's Office of the Maldives

aminath.shafiya@ium.edu.mv, mohamed.solih@ium.edu.mv, inan.rasheed@oco.mv

ABSTRACT

Literature extensively discusses screen time as a significant factor contributing to students' absenteeism. This paper explores the impact of screen time on school absenteeism among Maldivian teenagers. Using a qualitative approach, this study gathered data from 131 participants across focus group discussions organised in 15 sessions involving three cohorts separately, students, parents, and teachers. Participants were selected from five schools, including three in the Greater Malé region and two from the atolls. The findings reveal that excessive screen time significantly disrupts students' sleep, leading to tiredness and sleepiness in the mornings, which in turn contributes to teenagers' school absenteeism. Additionally, the study highlights the limited control that parents and teachers have over students' screen time and underlines the academic challenges associated with sleep deprivation. These findings suggest that school management should focus on raising awareness about the importance of balancing screen use with adequate sleep to improve attendance, academic performance, and overall well-being, ultimately benefiting students' long-term future.

Keywords: School absenteeism, Teenage, Screen Time, Maldives

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, the Children's Ombudsperson's Office (COO) has placed significant emphasis on understanding factors that contribute to children becoming vulnerable or at-risk. As such, it has been noted through the works of the COO that when children disengage from education, it is usually one of the earliest warning signs that a child may be facing increased vulnerability. Thus, the COO and the Islamic University of Maldives (IUM) are dedicated to addressing the factors that contribute to children's vulnerability, aiming to reduce the likelihood of children becoming vulnerable or at-risk. As such, a recent trend that has come up in the local context is the issue of screen time and the excessive use of digital devices among teenagers. As screen time increases, particularly among adolescents, there are rising worries about its negative effects on sleep, mental health and school attendance. With the widespread use of digital devices and social media, teenagers are spending more hours online, often late at night. This overuse of screens disrupts their sleep patterns, leading to sleep deprivation, which becomes a key factor in the evolution of multiple mental health problems, also resulting in frequent school absenteeism.

In the Maldives, the pervasive use of smartphones has raised concerns about its impact on sleep, consequently mental health and school attendance, especially among students. As of January 2024, there were 363.3 thousand active social media users in the Maldives, representing 69.9% of the total population (DataReportal,

2024). This high level of digital engagement is believed to contribute to sleep disruptions and increasing absenteeism, particularly in secondary schools. While specific data on screen time and absenteeism as well as screen time and its implications on mental well-being in Maldivian schools is limited, global studies suggest a clear correlation between increased screen usage and reduced academic engagement as well as mental well-being. A study published in Global Health Research and Policy highlights that excessive screen time can negatively affect children's learning and development, leading to decreased school participation (Qi, Yan, & Yin, 2023). Additionally, the widespread use of technology at night disrupts sleep patterns, as it suppresses melatonin production and interferes with natural circadian rhythms (Uccella et al., 2023). Consequently, this sleep disturbance is linked to increased risk of mental health issues, including depression and anxiety in adolescents (Twenge & Campbell, 2018). These findings underscore the significant impact of screen time on school absenteeism and the potential consequences for adolescent well-being.

As of June 2022, the Ministry of Education reported that the Maldives had 212 schools, with 36,341 students in the Malé region and 57,851 students across the remaining atolls. However, school dropout rates have become a growing concern. An unpublished report from the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) indicated that 44 percent of children referred to the unit had stopped attending school, and only 33 percent completed secondary education. Despite these alarming figures, school dropout issues in the Maldives remain insufficiently explored, leaving many contextual factors unexamined. International literature clearly indicates that dropout and frequent absenteeism are complex phenomena influenced by a variety of factors within both school and home environments. In the Maldivian school system, the term "irregular students" is often used to refer to those who are frequently absent, and some of these students may be classified as school dropouts due to their consistent absenteeism.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES/AIMS

This paper investigates the impact of students' screen time and sleep patterns on their mental health and school attendance. It addresses the following key objectives:

1. To identify the effect of screen time and sleep patterns on students' absenteeism.

2. To explore how screen time and sleep patterns impact students' academic performance and well-being.

3. To gather parents' and teachers' perspectives on how screen time influences students' absenteeism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature indicates that addressing school dropouts or frequent absenteeism is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach. Research consistently shows that excessive screen time, particularly before bed, negatively impacts both sleep quality and duration. Hale and Guan (2015) found that prolonged screen exposure in the evening delays sleep onset and reduces overall sleep time. The blue light emitted from screens suppresses melatonin production, leading to delayed bedtimes and poor sleep quality. This disruption in sleep results in fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and a higher likelihood of school absenteeism (Levenson et al., 2017).

While many studies highlight the effects of screen time on sleep, the direct relationship between screen use, sleep deprivation, and absenteeism is often implied rather than explicitly examined. Pérez-Chada et al. (2023) emphasise that excessive screen use reduces sleep duration, which is crucial for adolescent brain development and academic success. Inadequate sleep contributes to daytime fatigue, which may indirectly result in absenteeism (Perrault et al., 2018). Several studies explore the impact of different types of screen use on sleep quality (Chen et al., 2024), but the connection to school attendance is less frequently explored. Nonetheless, the link between sleep

deprivation and absenteeism is well-documented, with sleep-deprived students struggling to wake up on time, stay focused in class, and maintain regular attendance (Royant-Parola, & Legris, 2018).

Sleep deprivation is not only detrimental to academic performance but also significantly affects mental health of children, both of which are linked to increased absenteeism (Toprak & Karan, 2022). For adolescents, studies indicate a strong connection between excessive screen time and sleep disturbances, which can indirectly influence school attendance (de Jesus et al., 2022). These findings underscore the role of poor sleep in exacerbating well-being issues, leading to higher absenteeism rates (Hale et al., 2019). The compounded effects of sleep disturbances on mental health, including conditions like schizophrenia, depression, further highlight the need for targeted interventions, particularly for professionals in high-stress fields like teaching and social work (Alsaif et al., 2019). Addressing sleep disorders could serve as a critical avenue for improving mental health and reducing stress-related symptoms, particularly among educators (Howarth & Miller, 2024). This body of literature collectively emphasises the pervasive impact of sleep issues on mental health, reinforcing the need for systemic solutions to improve well-being across various populations.

Further research reinforces the relationship between screen time, sleep disruption, and absenteeism. Twenge et al. (2017) found that adolescents who spent more than two hours daily on screens experienced higher levels of sleep disruption and absenteeism. Similarly, Scott et al. (2019) reported that teenagers who exceeded three hours of screen time per day were at a higher risk of insomnia, leading to poor academic performance and increased absenteeism. Dewald et al. (2010) demonstrated a strong association between poor sleep quality, lower academic achievement, and higher absenteeism. Sleep-deprived students often struggle to stay alert in class, leading to chronic absenteeism. Woods and Scott (2016) also found

that excessive screen use contributes to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, which further exacerbate absenteeism as teenagers contend with both psychological and sleep-related challenges.

In the Maldives, where screen time among teenagers is increasing, there is a pressing need to investigate its impact on sleep, school attendance, and mental well-being. While international studies confirm the negative effects of excessive screen time on sleep, absenteeism and mental well-being, there is a notable lack of region-specific research in the Maldivian context. As digital access and social media use continue to rise among Maldivian teenagers, understanding how these factors contribute to sleep problems, absenteeism and mental well-being is crucial for developing effective interventions.

Without localised studies, policymakers and educators face challenges in addressing the specific needs of Maldivian adolescents. Research on the impact of screen time on sleep, absenteeism and mental well-being in Maldivian schools would help craft targeted strategies to promote healthy screen habits, improve sleep hygiene, reduce absenteeism and nurture mental well-being. It is essential for the Maldives to recognise and respond to these challenges, as failing to do so could exacerbate academic and health issues among adolescents. Ultimately, localised studies are necessary to inform evidence-based policies and interventions that support adolescent well-being.

While existing research highlights a clear connection between screen time, poor sleep, and absenteeism, the indirect nature of this relationship calls for more targeted research. Many studies focus on either sleep disruption or absenteeism but seldom explore how these factors interact within specific social or cultural contexts. Moreover, interventions addressing screen time and sleep hygiene must consider broader factors such as mental health and socio-economic influences to be truly effective. Ignoring these dimensions may result in incomplete strategies that fail to address

the root causes of absenteeism. Future research should adopt a more holistic approach, incorporate localised data and consider a broader range of variables to develop comprehensive solutions that meet the needs of diverse adolescent populations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper focuses on qualitative data gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) with students, teachers, and parents. Participant students were selected from grades 8-10, representing both regular and irregular attendees. Parents and teachers of the same age group were also included in the discussions. The three groups of participants were gender-diverse, although all parents involved in the FGDs were female.

Figure 1 outlines that FGDs were conducted across five schools, with a total of 131 participants from two schools in the atolls and three schools in the Greater Malé region. A total of 15 sessions were held, involving three distinct cohorts: 63 students, 36 teachers, and 32 parents. Data were analysed using a thematic approach, applying open coding, axial coding, and constant comparison to cross-check and triangulate the data within and across the three cohorts.

Prior to the research, ethics approval was obtained from the Islamic University of Maldives, Ethics Committee and the Ministry of Education's Research Division, ensuring that the study adhered to ethical guidelines and minimised potential risks (Skowronski, 2024). Research involving children

Figure 1. Research methods

requires a careful ethical approach to ensure their protection and well-being. The study aimed to address a relevant research question, with the goal of improving students' well-being or contributing to a better understanding of the issues affecting them. An information sheet and consent form were provided to all participants, clearly stating that participation was voluntary. Additionally, parents' consent for their children's participation was gained via assent forms. The findings of the study are presented and discussed below.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the significant impact of excessive screen time on students' sleep and, consequently, their school attendance. Data derived from focus group discussions with students, parents, and teachers reveal three main themes: students' feeling of tiredness and sleepiness in the mornings, the limited control that parents and teachers have over students' screen time and academic and mental health implications due to lack of sleep.

LATE NIGHT SCREEN TIME AND ITS

IMPACT ON SLEEP

The most common reason for student absenteeism identified across all three groups was sleepiness and fatigue due to late-night screen use. Students reported staying up late, particularly using social media platforms like TikTok, which disrupts their sleep schedules and leads to difficulty waking up in the mornings. As one student described:

"Every day, my mom wakes me up, but I always feel too sleepy and end up going back to sleep. Some days, I actually get up, but it feels like I don't have the energy to stand up and go to school. I wish the school had more flexible hours." - Student from a school in the Greater Malé region-

Confirming the same sleeping problem, another student described, "I'm always a late-night sleeper, and it's really hard to wake up early," indicating how sleep deprivation affects their ability to attend school. This aligns with findings by Hale and Guan (2015), who emphasised that the use of screens before bedtime, especially due to the blue light emitted, suppresses melatonin production, leading to delayed sleep onset and poor sleep quality. This disruption results in daytime fatigue, which significantly contributes to absenteeism (Levenson et al., 2017; Royant-Parola & Legris, 2018).

Moreover, the issue of screen time exacerbating sleep problems is not just a concern for students but also for their parents. Several parents reported feeling helpless in controlling their children's screen time, even when they recognise that it is the root cause of their sleep deprivation and resulting absenteeism. For example, a parent shared, "I know my son spends too much time on his smartphone, but there's not much I can do… I can only remind him not to stay up too late." This sentiment is echoed in the literature, where Pérez-Chada et al. (2023) note that excessive screen use among adolescents reduces sleep duration, impairing their cognitive functions and leading to challenges in academic performance and attendance.

LIMITED CONTROL OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

The second theme highlights the limited influence that parents and teachers have over students' screen use. Both groups expressed frustration at their inability to curtail students' screen time, which is recognised as a significant contributor to absenteeism. A teacher from an atoll school stated, "When my students are absent, I contact their parents. They usually say their children were too tired or sleepy… the real reason is that they were up late and couldn't wake up." Similarly, parents expressed feelings of powerlessness, acknowledging that their children's

screen time often results in late-night use that leads to excessive sleep and school absenteeism. In line with the same idea, a teacher mentioned:

"The most common reason students give for being absent is that they couldn't wake up. Often, this is because they stay up late, spending too much time on social media or chatting with friends online. In fact, parents have very little control over their children these days. It seems that parents are too worried about controlling their kids. It is very different from our time" Teacher from a school in the Greater Malé region

This finding mirrors the research by Twenge et al. (2017), who found that adolescents who spent more than two hours daily on screens experienced higher levels of sleep disruption, which contributed to absenteeism. Furthermore, as noted by Perrault et al. (2018), the inability of parents and teachers to regulate screen use exacerbates the issue, particularly in an age where digital access is increasingly normalised, and adolescents feel entitled to unrestricted screen time.

SCREEN TIME AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

The relationship between screen time, sleep patterns, and students' academic performance and mental health is well-documented in the literature. Sleep deprivation not only affects school attendance but also has broader implications for students' overall well-being. According to Toprak and Karan (2022), inadequate sleep combined with the mental strain caused by excessive screen use leads to fatigue, poor concentration, and diminished academic engagement, often contributing to a cycle of school absenteeism. This pattern is reflected in students' testimonies. One student shared:

"I usually end up sleeping in class… I get very tired during school because I don't get enough sleep. It also feels like I'm totally sick of everything."

Similarly, parents have highlighted the emotional toll of poor sleep and excessive screen time. One parent remarked:

"My daughter often complains about feeling sleepy and having stomach issues. Some days, it even gets worse, and she vomits. Some days she acts like she is always worried and anxious… she does not want to talk about school at all. I know it's because she doesn't get enough sleep and spends too much time on her phone. I try to disconnect from the internet sometimes, but I feel helpless. I don't want to upset her, especially with the mental health issues she's dealing with" (Parent from a school in the Greater Malé region).

These personal accounts align with findings by Woods and Scott (2016), who reported that sleep deprivation and excessive screen use are strongly linked to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Such conditions not only reduce students' ability to attend school consistently but also hinder their academic performance. Research by de Jesus et al. (2022) further supports this, highlighting how frequent absenteeism correlates with higher screen use, which disrupts sleep patterns and exacerbates mental health problems, creating a vicious cycle of disengagement and poor academic outcomes. Another parent shared a similar experience:

"My son doesn't want to go to school because he feels discriminated against due to his academic performance. He's not doing well in his studies and gets very little support from his teachers. He's also dealing with mental health issues after being bullied at his previous school, and despite changing schools, he still struggles. I can't do much except let him stay home. His school attendance is very irregular" (Parent of a student with mental health issues).

The compounded effects of disrupted sleep on mental health manifesting in conditions such as anxiety, depression, and even severe illnesses like schizophrenia underline the importance of targeted interventions. Alsaif et al. (2019) emphasise

that addressing sleep disorders can significantly improve mental health outcomes, particularly in high-stress environments like schools. Howarth and Miller (2024) add that improving sleep health could also alleviate stress-related symptoms among educators, enabling them to better support students.

These findings highlight the urgent need to address the interconnected impacts of screen time and sleep patterns on students' academic and mental health. Implementing strategies to regulate screen use and improve sleep patterns could significantly enhance both student well-being and school engagement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

The findings emphasise the importance of developing self-regulation and digital responsibility among adolescents. Students at this stage should be empowered to understand the consequences of excessive screen time on sleep, mental health, and school attendance, and to actively participate in managing their own digital habits. Digital literacy programmes that foreground wellbeing, not just online skills, can foster informed decision-making and long-term resilience, supporting both academic success and personal development.

Implications for policymakers and education authorities

The findings identify the urgent need for evidence-based national and school-level policies addressing adolescent screen use in the Maldives. Policymakers should consider integrating screen time management, sleep health, and mental wellbeing into education and youth policies, recognising their direct links to absenteeism and learning outcomes. National guidelines on age-appropriate screen use, aligned with cultural and socio-economic realities, would support consistent implementation across schools and communities. Additionally, investment in digital literacy education, not merely technical skills but responsible, balanced, and healthy technology use,

can equip adolescents with lifelong self-regulation skills.

Implications for school leaders

School leadership plays a critical role in translating policy into practice. The findings suggest that schools should strengthen whole-school approaches to managing screen use, including clear and realistic school policies on digital device use during school hours. Awareness programmes highlighting the relationship between screen time, sleep deprivation, attendance, and academic performance should be systematically embedded into school activities. School management should also support teachers through guidance and professional development, enabling them to address screen-related challenges without placing unrealistic responsibility solely on classroom practice.

Implications for teachers

Teachers are positioned to act as frontline observers and educators, but the study highlights that their influence over students' screen habits is limited. Therefore, teachers should be supported to integrate digital wellbeing and sleep awareness into existing curricula rather than treating them as add-on topics. Classroom discussions, reflective activities, and guidance sessions can help students critically examine their own screen behaviours and their impact on learning and wellbeing. Importantly, teachers require institutional backing so that responsibility for managing screen-related issues does not fall disproportionately on them.

Implications for parents and caregivers

The findings highlight the need for parental guidance and support, recognising that many parents struggle to regulate screen use in an increasingly digital environment. Parents would benefit from structured guidance on setting realistic screen time boundaries, establishing consistent sleep routines, and modelling healthy digital behaviours. School-parent partnerships are essential, as coordinated messaging between home and school can reinforce expectations and reduce conflict around screen use. Community-based awareness initiatives may further help parents navigate the long-term mental health risks associated with excessive screen exposure.

CONCLUSION AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reinforce the substantial body of literature linking excessive screen time with sleep deprivation, absenteeism and mental health problems among adolescents. The data from this study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions that address screen time management, promote healthy sleep habits, and support both students and parents in managing the long-term challenges that result from excessive screen time such as mental health problems. Given the limited control that both parents and teachers have over students' screen habits, it is essential to explore broader strategies, including the incorporation of digital literacy programs, improved school policies on screen use, and parental guidance on screen time limits.

In the context of the Maldives, where screen time is rapidly increasing among adolescents, localised research is crucial for crafting evidence-based policies that can effectively address these issues. Future research should consider a more holistic approach, incorporating the cultural and socio-economic factors that influence screen use and absenteeism, to ensure that interventions are both effective and contextually relevant. By taking these factors into account, policymakers can develop strategies that improve adolescent mental well-being, academic performance, and school attendance. These findings suggest that school management should focus on raising awareness about the importance of balancing screen use with adequate sleep to improve attendance, academic performance, and overall well-being, ultimately benefiting students' long-term future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF AI AND SOFTWARE TOOLS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Alsaif, A. A., Alamri, G. M., Alsaif, H. S., Almahboub, M. S., Alluhaydan, J. A., Alsuliman, R. M., ... & Alhazami, A. E. Sleep Disorders and Their Impact on the Mental Health of Public Health Professionals: Main Role of Social Workers. *International journal of health sciences*, *3*(S1), 16-31.

Chen, Y., Li, Y., Li, S., He, M., Chen, Q., Ru, T., & Zhou, G. (2024). When and what: A longitudinal study on the role of screen time and activities in adolescent sleep. *Sleep Medicine*, *117*, 33-39.

DataReportal. (2024, February 23). *Digital 2024: The Maldives*. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-maldives

de Jesus, G. M., de Oliveira Araujo, R. H., Dias, L. A., Barros, A. K. C., dos Santos Araujo, L. D. M., & de Assis, M. A. A. (2022). Missing class increases the daily frequency of screen use among schoolchildren. *Revista Brasileira de Atividade Física & Saúde*, *27*, 1-8.

Dewald, J. F., Meijer, A. M., Oort, F. J., Kerkhof, G. A., & Bögels, S. M. (2010). The influence of sleep quality, sleep duration and sleepiness on school performance in children and adolescents: A meta-analytic review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews, 14*(3), 179-189.

Hale, L., Li, X., Hartstein, L. E., & LeBourgeois, M. K. (2019). Media use and sleep in teenagers: what do we know?. *Current Sleep Medicine Reports*, *5*, 128-134.

Hale, L., & Guan, S. (2015). Screen time and sleep among school-aged children and adolescents: A systematic literature review. *Sleep Medicine Reviews, 21*, 50-58.

Levenson, J. C., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., Colditz, J. B., & Primack, B. A. (2017). The association between social media use and sleep disturbance among young adults. *Preventive Medicine, 85*, 36-41.

Howarth, N. E., & Miller, M. A. (2024). Sleep, Sleep Disorders, and Mental Health: A Narrative Review. *Heart and Mind*, *8*(3), 146-158.

Pérez-Chada, D., Bioch, S. A., Schönfeld, D., Gozal, D., Perez-Lloret, S., & Sleep in Adolescents Collaborative Study Group. (2023). Screen use, sleep duration, daytime somnolence, and academic failure in school-aged adolescents. *Plos one*, *18*(2), e0281379.

Perrault, A. A., Bayer, L., Peuvrier, M., Afyouni, A., Ghisletta, P., Brockmann, C., ... & Sterpenich, V. (2018). Imposing a curfew on the use of screen electronic devices improves sleep and daytime vigilance in adolescents. *bioRxiv*, 259309.

Qi, J., Yan, Y. & Yin, H. (2023). Screen time among school-aged children of aged 6–14: a systematic review. *Glob Health Research Policy 8*, 12. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41256-023-00297-z

Royant-Parola, S., & Legris, S. (2018). Complex relationships between adolescents and their sleep (sleep patterns, use of new media, and impact on next day's activity). *Journal of Dentofacial Anomalies and Orthodontics*, *21*(1), 102.

Scott, H., Biello, S. M., & Woods, H. C. (2019). Social media use and adolescent sleep patterns: Cross-sectional findings from the UK millennium cohort study. *BMJ Open, 9*(9), e031161.

Skowronski, F. (2024). Immigrant children in the child welfare system. In Y. R. Harris & G. J. O. Carpenter (Eds.), *Children of color in the child welfare system: Psychological research and best practices* (pp. 165–186). American Psychological Association. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2wk720x.12.

Twenge, J. M., Krizan, Z., & Hisler, G. (2017). Decreases in self-reported sleep duration among US adolescents 2009–2015 and association with new media screen time. *Sleep Medicine, 39*, 47-53.

Twenge, J. M., & Campbell, W. K. (2018). Associations between Screen Time and Lower Psychological Well-being among Children and Adolescents: Evidence from a Population-based Study. *Preventive Medicine Reports, 12*. 271-283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2018.10.003.

Toprak, T., & Karan, M. (2022). Effects of Sleep Deprivation and Early School Start Times on Adolescent Health. *Journal of Student Research*, *11*(3).

Woods, H. C., & Scott, H. (2016). #Sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. *Journal of Adolescence, 51*, 41-49.

Uccella, S., Cordani, R., Salfi, F., Gorgoni, M., Scarpelli, S., Gemignani, A., Geoffroy, P. A., Gennaro, L. D., Palagini, L., Ferrera, M., & Nobili (2023). Sleep Deprivation and Insomnia in Adolescence: Implications for Mental Health. *Brain Sciences, 13*(4). https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci13040569

This page is intentionally left blank

This page is intentionally left blank

جامعة المالديف الإسلامية
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF MALDIVES