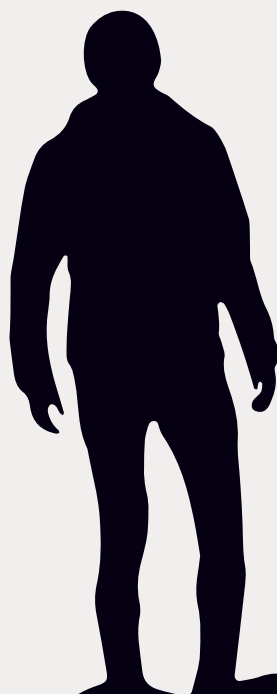


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#GJSD. Sharing today. Shaping tomorrow.

SUBMIT

Dear Reader,

It is a real pleasure to welcome you to this GJSD, which focuses on the themes of skills development, employability, and workforce transitions. I feel particularly connected to this issue because it addresses questions that affect us all: how can individuals successfully prepare for, enter, and adapt within the workforce in a world shaped by rapid technological change, shifting demographics, and uncertain labour markets?

The contributions gathered here come from a wide range of cultural and economic contexts - from Sub-Saharan Africa and Bangladesh to Canada, the UK, and beyond. What strikes me most is how they reflect both the challenges and the creativity of those working to bridge the gap between education and employment. For example, we see how Canadian universities are taking steps to support neuroinclusive transitions into work, and how the UK's agri-food sector is grappling with the complex realities of employee development.

Youth and employability are also central to this issue. One article sheds light on the employment challenges facing young people in Bangladesh, another explores the paradoxical role of competition in youth development, while yet another traces the career journeys of English graduates as they carve out their own professional paths.

I also found myself reflecting on the growing importance of resilience and adaptability in careers. Research included here shows how resilience training for educational managers can make a real difference, how Generation Z is shifting towards horizontal career paths, and how mentoring networks among women scholars are creating spaces of empowerment and transformation. Importantly, values-based education is not left behind: we are reminded that fostering prosocial behaviour through physical education at the primary school level can plant seeds that last a lifetime.

Taken together, these studies remind me that preparing for the workforce requires a broad, human approach - one that values mentorship, inclusion, creativity, equity, and lifelong learning.

I invite you to explore the rich and varied insights in this issue. My hope is that, like me, you will come away not only informed but also inspired to rethink what skills development and career preparation can mean in the years ahead.

Happy reading!

Warm regards,

Dr habil. Judit Beke

Dr habil. Judit Beke is the Editor-in-Chief at GJSD



GILE Journal of Skills Development

The Importance of Skills Development for Youth in the Current Context of Bangladesh: A Comparative Study and Path Forward

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Abstract

Bangladesh is positioned to harness the demographic dividend by leveraging the potential of its substantial influx of young workers joining the labour market annually. In the context of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), modern labour markets globally have become increasingly competitive. This is particularly true in numerous least developed countries (LDCs), including Bangladesh. The quality of Bangladesh's workforce is facing diminished acceptance in both domestic and global labour markets. The jobless rate for graduates is threefold more than that of non-graduates, highlighting a contradiction in which education seemingly complicates work opportunities. This paper explores the causes of unemployment in contemporary Bangladesh and emphasizes the necessity for skills development to mitigate this issue. Annually, almost 2.2 million individuals, predominantly youth, enter the labour market in Bangladesh. This demographic advantage may be squandered if the expanding skills gap is not rectified, particularly given the disruptive influences of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), which necessitates a workforce equipped with both advanced technical and soft skills to maintain competitiveness in the global market. The study also reveals that a substantial proportion of these youths have undergone traditional schooling and obtained numerous certificates, although they lack the requisite technical skills, leading to a disparity between the competencies of graduates and the expectations of employers. As a result, young individuals face challenges in obtaining their preferred employment, resulting in a decline in national output. The report also proposes some areas that must be emphasized to promote skills development for young people in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, employment, national skills development policy, training, unemployment

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is experiencing a demographic dividend, characterized by a larger proportion of the working-age population (ages 15 to 64) compared to the non-working age group, which presents significant opportunities for developing a skilled workforce. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2023a), more than 65% of the population presently belongs to this vital demographic sector. The demographic dividend is significant, with 34% of the population aged 15 and younger and only five percent aged 65 and older. The population is anticipated to attain 223.5 million by 2041 and 230-240 million by 2050, offering a distinct opportunity for the achievement of a demographic dividend. The anticipated demographic dividend, projected to endure for 30 to 35 years, presents an opportunity from 2045 to 2060 (Nurunnabi, 2024). The world is currently dealing with a polycrisis, which is a group of interconnected global crises that are affecting economies, businesses, and labour markets at the same time (World Economic Forum, 2023c). Climate change, geopolitical tensions, technology upheavals, and economic instability are transforming the employment landscape, particularly for the youth. Despite elevated youth unemployment, employers globally face challenges in filling essential positions, underscoring a notable skills gap (Ploeg & Ho, 2024).

Unemployment is presently the most discussed issue globally (Rana, 2024), particularly in developing nations such as Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) Labour Force Survey 2022 reveals that the overall unemployment rate in Bangladesh is approximately 4%, which is comparatively low (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2023b). According to the World Bank (2024), the proportion of unemployed youth with tertiary education among the total unemployed population in Bangladesh rose to 27.8% in 2022, up from 9.7% in 2013. This indicates a discrepancy between skills and qualifications, resulting in unemployment.

In 2023, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics reported that the total number of unemployed tertiary graduates, encompassing university, college, and madrasa graduates, reached 906,000, an increase from 799,000 the previous year (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2023c). This is an alarming unemployment figure, which evidently exhibits a trend of continuous growth (Jami, 2025). A Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) survey, presented at the Annual BIDS Conference in December 2024, found that 28.24% of graduates from National University-affiliated colleges remained unemployed (Ahmed et al., 2024). At a recent conference arranged by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in February 2025 regarding 'Recommendations by the Task Force on Re-Strategizing the Economy,' it was announced that the National University, the largest public university in the world with approximately 2,500 associated colleges, confers degrees on nearly 10,000 graduates annually. Approximately 62% of the highly educated unemployed individuals in the nation are graduates of National Universities, whereas 63% of all graduates possess degrees in non-technical disciplines such as history, sociology, and Islamic philosophy, which exhibit restricted demand in the current labour market (Mashroor, 2025). This study investigates the causes of graduate unemployment in Bangladesh and evaluates how targeted skills development could mitigate this issue. Utilizing secondary data from national and international sources, the paper proposes a conceptual framework tailored for Bangladesh. The research also examines global best practices and recommends strategic interventions. Findings suggest that integrating vocational training within formal education, aligning curricula with industry demands, and fostering public-private partnerships are essential to building a robust skills ecosystem.

Bangladesh stands at a pivotal demographic juncture. With over 65% of its population in the working-age group and approximately 2.2 million youth entering the labour market each year, the country faces both a powerful opportunity and a looming crisis. This "youth bulge" could fuel unprecedented economic growth—if matched with appropriate skills (Khatun & Saadat, 2020). However, the widening "skills gap" threatens to undermine this potential. A significant portion of graduates possess academic credentials but lack the technical and soft skills demanded by today's labour market. This disconnect is especially alarming in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), where automation, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation are rapidly reshaping the world of work (Khatun et al., 2022). Jobs are evolving faster than traditional education systems can adapt, leading to a paradox: high graduate unemployment amid employer complaints of talent shortages. If Bangladesh fails to equip its youth with future-ready competencies, the demographic dividend may transform into a demographic burden. This paper also argues that the intersection of the youth bulge, the persistent skills mismatch, and the disruptive forces of 4IR must be addressed urgently through a coordinated, inclusive, and future-focused skills development strategy.

2. Conceptual Framework and Context of Different Countries for Skills Development

This paper proposes a conceptual framework based on five interrelated pillars: economy, education, employability, equality, and ecosystem. The framework emphasizes alignment between education and labour market demands, integration of technical and vocational education and active engagement of government, industry, and civil society. According to the International Labour Organization (2024b), worldwide youth unemployment reached 13% in 2023, with many young adults facing limited prospects for stable and dignified employment. The World Economic Forum's (WEF) Future of Jobs Report 2023 indicated that enterprises had difficulties in finding candidates with the necessary qualifications to occupy future roles (The World Economic Forum, 2023b). This growing imbalance between the supply of young job seekers and the demand for competent professionals, which, if unaddressed, will exacerbate both unemployment and talent shortages (Ploeg & Ho, 2024). To resolve this issue, global experts advocate for a comprehensive, systems-oriented strategy that highlights five interconnected components: economy, education, employability, equality, and ecosystem (Ploeg & Ho, 2024).

Economic growth is a vital catalyst for job creation; nevertheless, the quality and inclusivity of such growth are significant factors. In numerous regions globally, jobless growth has emerged as a significant issue, with economies expanding without creating sufficient formal employment opportunities for youth (Ploeg & Ho, 2024). Youth unemployment persists in increasing, even in countries experiencing good GDP development, signifying a deficiency in inclusive economic policy and investment in critical areas (ILO, 2024).

Educational systems must adapt to the evolving requirements of the labour market. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underscores the necessity of integrating skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values into educational frameworks to equip youth for lifelong learning. The collaboration between academia and industry can stimulate growth in the continuing education sector. A primary obstacle to mitigating youth unemployment is the skills mismatch — the disparity between the education young individuals get and the requirements of employers. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report

2023 forecasts that 6 in ten workers will require reskilling by 2027 (The World Economic Forum 2023a, p.7) as a result of swift technological progress. However, conventional education systems frequently fail to correspond with industry requirements, resulting in numerous young people lacking the necessary skills for high-growth areas (Ploeg & Ho, 2024). In the swiftly evolving work market, concerns are emerging over whether educational institutions are equipping youth with the skills to keep pace with technological advancements.

Governments and enterprises must cooperate to guarantee that training programs are directly aligned with market need. Public-private partnerships, including apprenticeship programs and industry-driven training efforts, can be essential in bridging the skills gap. In Switzerland, where education and training are closely aligned with the labour market, youth unemployment ranks among the lowest globally (Ploeg & Ho, 2024). Establishing a framework that consistently adjusts to evolving workforce requirements is crucial for enhancing youth employability (Ploeg & Ho, 2024).

Strategies aimed at reducing youth unemployment should prioritize equality, ensuring that opportunities are accessible to all young individuals, irrespective of their background, gender, or geographic location. Despite educational advancements, women and marginalized communities persistently encounter obstacles to entry in high-growth sectors, especially within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) disciplines. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, published in May 2025, reveals that women represent merely 35% of STEM graduates, highlighting the persistent gender inequality in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

A successful job market necessitates not only a robust economy and adequately trained workers but also an integrated ecosystem in which governments, businesses, educational institutions, and civil society collaborate effectively. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes the necessity of synergy throughout the value chain, ensuring alignment among all stakeholders in the pursuit of reducing unemployment and promoting decent work (OECD, 2021). Effective models of ecosystem collaboration, exemplified by Singapore, provide important insights for other countries. In these countries, the government is pivotal in facilitating collaboration between educational institutions and industries to ensure that youth are trained in anticipated growth sectors. These synergies create an environment that facilitates the smooth transition of young individuals from education to employment, while enabling employers to readily access the necessary talent (Ploeg & Ho, 2024). Bangladesh is evolving into a knowledge-driven economy. A strong and inclusive skills development ecosystem is therefore essential. This conceptual framework illustrates how Bangladesh can transform its large youth population into a productive workforce by aligning education, training, and employment systems. Annually, approximately 2.2 million young individuals enter the job market, resulting in an increasing disparity between academic credentials and labour market demands (International Labour Organization, 2024a).

Despite substantial enrolment in higher education, numerous graduates are deficient in the technical and interpersonal skills demanded by employers (Khatun et al., 2022). The disjointed governance of skills development, distributed over 36 ministries, exacerbates the challenges of successful implementation. The social stigma associated with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and a pronounced preference for white-collar government employment hinder timely entry into the labour market. This paradigm highlights five

interrelated components: demographic opportunity, quality education and training, employer engagement, inclusive policy, and cultural mindset transformation. Successful national efforts such as the National Skills Portal and Skills Training Providers (STPs) under the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) exemplify successful representations.

The incorporation of skills certification in institutions via NSDA collaboration represents a significant advancement. An integrated and inclusive strategy—endorsed by Industry Skills Councils (ISCs), public-private collaborations, and the Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF)—is crucial for bridging the skills gap and empowering youth to succeed in a swiftly changing labour market.

A significant achievement in Bangladesh's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector is the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP), executed by the Ministry of Finance with assistance from the Asian Development Bank. SEIP has delivered competency-based training to over 500,000 individuals, with over 70% of graduates obtaining jobs in industries such as garment manufacturing, construction, and computer technology (Asian Development Bank, 2022). Its organized collaborations with the private sectors and focus on quality assurance, gender inclusivity, and post-training employment placement have established it as a paradigm for scalable skills development programs.

To comprehend the challenges and opportunities facing Bangladesh in skills development, it is crucial to contextualize its experience within a wider global framework. Analysing foreign practices offers a comparative perspective for identifying effective models, institutional frameworks, and policy procedures. This perspective provides vital insights into the structural reforms that have effectively tackled young unemployment and skills mismatches in different contexts. This article seeks to enhance Bangladesh's strategic approach by examining case studies from nations that have successfully aligned their education and training systems with labour market requirements. Consequently, it utilizes global experiences to emphasize optimal methods pertinent to Bangladesh's skills development strategy.

TABLE 1. COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT MODELS

Country	Key Features of Skills Development System	Relevance for Bangladesh
Ethiopia	TVET with labour market integration and standards-based curriculum	Demand-based training and assessment
South Korea	Strategic TVET reform phases (GIFTS), industry linkages	Long-term strategic planning
Philippines	TESDA as central coordinating agency, strong private-public training model	Institutional consolidation and certification
India	NSDC under PPP model, sector-specific skill councils	Structured sectoral governance, industry inputs
Switzerland	Dual vocational training, low youth unemployment	Work-study balance and strong apprenticeship base

Source: Adapted from Ploeg & Ho (2024), TESDA (n.d.), NSDC (2024), and Woldehanna & Jones (2019).

A set of countries with a range of skills formation models is briefly reviewed here, from which Bangladesh can extract relevant lessons to build its own comprehensive model. Comparatively, Ethiopia—a fellow LDC—has demonstrated strong progress through its national TVET strategy, which integrates occupational standards with competency-based training curricula (Woldehanna & Jones, 2019). By aligning training programs with labour market demand and building industry-led

councils, Ethiopia has increased employment outcomes for its youth and improved the relevance of its education system (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2018). Both cases highlight the importance of employer engagement, robust certification systems, and public-private collaboration in building a successful skills ecosystem. Bangladesh can draw on these models to strengthen its own efforts, particularly by institutionalizing industry linkages and enhancing monitoring mechanisms to ensure training outcomes translate into meaningful employment.

South Korea, once the poorest and least developed nation in the early 1960s, has undergone a remarkable transformation into one of the leading industrial countries over the past six decades (Kim & Kim, 2014). The Korean TVET System has undergone a remarkable evolution, characterized by the strategic phases of GIFTS: Growth, Innovation, Finance System, Training System, and Systematic Management. Similarly, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in the Philippines has achieved notable progress in skill development. It is mandated to integrate, coordinate, and monitor skills development programs of the country (Budhrani et al., 2018). The National Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC) of the Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE), the Bureau of Technical and Vocational Education (BTVE) of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS), and the Apprenticeship Program of the Bureau of Local Employment (BLE) of the DOLE were merged to establish TESDA in 1994 (TESDA, n.d.). Finally, the National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC) serves as the primary architect of India's talent ecosystem, having been established on July 31, 2008. This is a distinctive Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Government of India (NSDC, 2024). The NSDC has been authorized and has effectively executed various attempts to reform India's skill development structure (NSDC, 2024).

Vocational education and training (VET) enhances national income by augmenting individual capabilities and earning potential, resulting in elevated productivity and economic growth (Soproni, 2023). Vocational Education and Training (VET) has been central to the national income reform strategies in countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia for several years (Chhetri et al., 2014). The World Economic Forum (WEF) highlights the significance of prioritizing skills over traditional qualifications, such as degrees, work experience, or job titles (Soproni, 2023). This strategy suggests excluding higher educational institutions, but the WEF estimates that it could facilitate the recruitment of 100 million individuals in economies facing labour shortages worldwide (World Economic Forum, 2023a).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, relying primarily on secondary data to explore the causes of youth unemployment in Bangladesh and the role of skills development in addressing this challenge. The aim of this research is to critically examine existing national and international strategies, frameworks, and institutional practices, and to provide actionable insights relevant to the Bangladeshi context. The paper focuses on conceptual and policy analysis, synthesizing existing knowledge to offer a review of the current frameworks rather than empirical research.

3.1 Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and exploratory design, focusing on identifying trends, patterns, and relationships through qualitative content analysis. The study does not involve primary data collection due to the scope and nature of the research; instead, it synthesizes and analyses available information from reputable sources to address the research objectives. As such, this paper is positioned as a conceptual/policy review article, emphasizing theoretical frameworks and policy discussions in lieu of empirical data.

3.2 Sources of Data

This study's data were gathered from a diverse array of reliable secondary sources, including:

- The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and other national statistical institutions
- Reports and policy papers from groups including the World Bank, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the OECD, and the WEF
- Research articles published in scholarly publications, encompassing previous editions of the GILE Journal of Skills Development
- Government publications, think-tank reports (e.g., CPD, BIDS), and prominent national newspapers (e.g., The Daily Star, The Financial Express) released from 2020 to 2025.

3.3 Analysing the Data

Qualitative content analysis was used to look at the data that had been gathered and find important themes on adolescent unemployment, skills mismatch, and institutional responses. We employed comparative analysis to look at Bangladesh's current position and compare it to the best practices in other nations, like Ethiopia, South Korea, India, the Philippines, and Switzerland.

3.4 Limitations

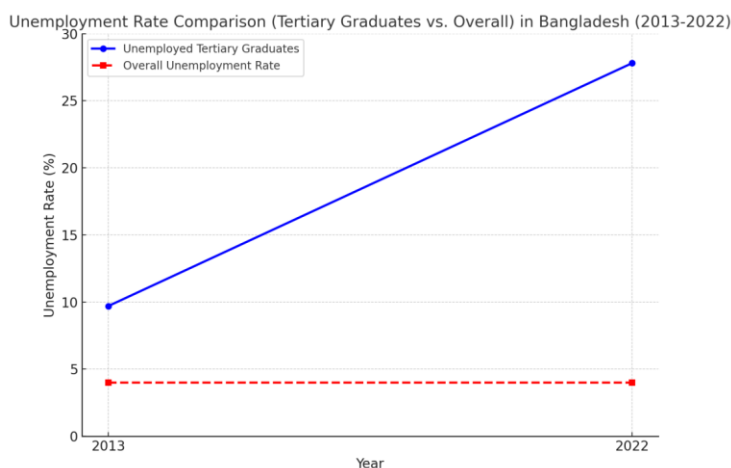
This study is constrained by its dependence on secondary data only. Although it provides a comprehensive and policy-relevant summary, subsequent study might be enhanced by the inclusion of primary data obtained through interviews, focus groups, or surveys to achieve a more profound understanding of the perspectives of students, employers, and policymakers.

4. Unemployment Reasons in Bangladesh

In developing nations, the unemployment rate for graduate and postgraduate students is the highest, indicating that the labour market adversely affects the retention of educated young adults (Bisht & Pattanaik, 2020). A survey by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Bangladesh revealed that approximately 46.8% of unemployed youths had been seeking employment for over a year (General Economics Division [GED], 2019). According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2023), the overall unemployment rate in Bangladesh is approximately 4%. However, the proportion of unemployed youth with tertiary education among the total unemployed population has risen significantly over the years from 9.7% in 2013 to 27.8% in 2022. In contrast, the overall unemployment rate remained relatively stable

at around 4% in 2022, emphasizing the growing skills mismatch in the labour market. (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. UNEMPLOYMENT RATE COMPARISON (TERTIARY VS. OVERALL) IN BANGLADESH (2013-2022)



Source: Adapted from Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2023).

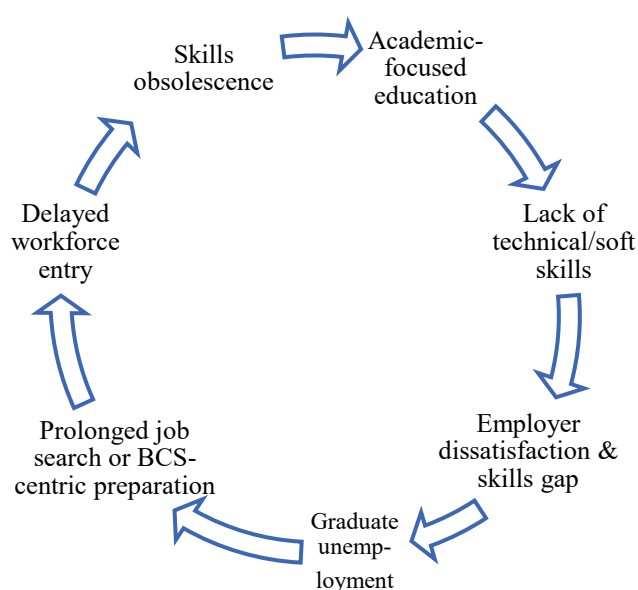
This is primarily due to three causes. Firstly, during the past 10 to 15 years, Bangladesh has generated a surplus of graduates exceeding the capacity of the employment market to accommodate them. The BBS Survey indicates that graduate involvement in the labour force increased from 3.6% in 2002 to 3.8% in 2012, a small rise consistent with the nation's economic progress. By 2022, this figure had tripled, indicating a significant and abrupt increase in the number of graduates during the past decade (Mashroor, 2025). Considering that our economy is predominantly dependent on agriculture and ready-made garments, the demand for graduates is limited. The fundamental problem of unemployment arises from an education system that is misaligned with market demands.

Secondly, a considerable proportion of recent graduates in Bangladesh aspire to secure government employment, specifically within the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS). They undergo preparation for an extended duration of 3 to 4 years even post-graduation and deliberately remain unemployed for a specified interval. The BCS phenomenon compels individuals to await the opportunity to obtain a stable and esteemed position in the public sector, rather than engaging in any form of employment. Only a small number succeed in obtaining the job, while the majority recognize that they have erred by concentrating solely on Bangla, English, general knowledge, and current affairs for their preparation, neglecting the acquisition of essential skills. This results in their inadequate preparation for the evolving workforce, characterized by insufficient technical skills and practical experience. Consequently, they find themselves in a frustrating cycle, lacking both the ability to secure skills-related employment and the mindset to pursue opportunities beyond white-collar jobs.

Thirdly, many organizations are reluctant to employ fresh graduates, as a significant number depart within five to six months following initial training, which is a prevalent tendency. Furthermore, our apprenticeship strategy lacks sufficient strength to mandate industries to employ a minimum percentage of recent graduates. According to BDjobs, 60-70% of graduates encounter difficulties in obtaining employment within one to two years post-graduation

(Mashroor, 2025). Furthermore, a common practice in Bangladesh is for companies to hire skilled labour from foreign countries such as India, Sri Lanka, and China. This activity is driven by multiple variables, notably a shortfall in skills among local graduates, who frequently lack the specialized expertise and experience necessary for particular positions. Foreign professionals are seen to exhibit elevated professionalism and a robust work ethic. Moreover, employers need candidates who can provide rapid contributions without requiring considerable training (Islam, 2024). The cyclical relationship between education and employment reveals that this mismatch is not just a matter of inadequate skill development but is intricately linked to structural deficiencies within the education system itself (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. SKILLS MISMATCH AND GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT CYCLE IN BANGLADESH



Note: This cycle illustrates how academic-focused curricula, lacking integration with practical and market-oriented skills, fail to equip graduates for immediate employability. As a result, repeated patterns of underemployment, delayed career starts, and skill erosion persist. Without systemic reform in education policy and stronger industry-academia linkages, this cycle is likely to continue, deepening the graduate employment crisis in Bangladesh.

5. Challenges and Opportunities of Youth Employment in Bangladesh

In nations with scarce natural resources, such as Bangladesh, skilled individuals constitute the most valuable asset. In 2025, success in business and occupations will rely not only on knowledge but on the capacity to adeptly utilize abilities that promote innovation and value generation (Marr, 2024). A nation's human resources can augment its economic development via three processes (Jahan, 2024).

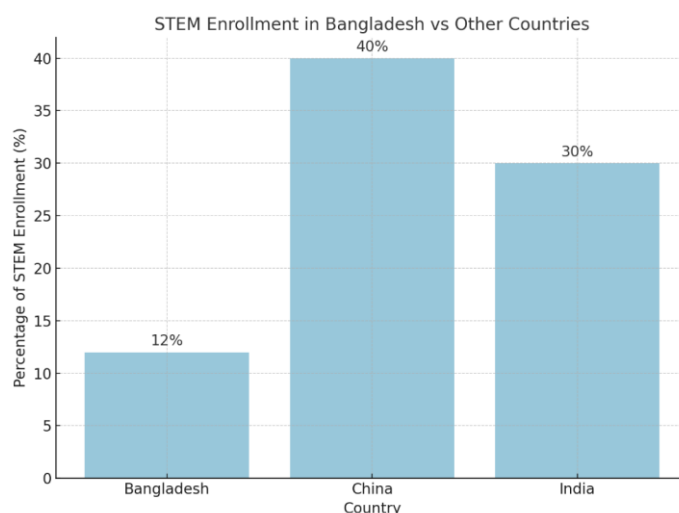
Firstly, it can proficiently and effectively employ human resources and other materials in the production process. In the absence of human resources, land, machinery, and other industrial materials possess negligible value.

Secondly, the influence and contribution of technology in the developmental process are substantial. Effective deployment of that technology necessitates suitable human resources. Modern success will be attained by persons who effectively integrate technology proficiency with distinctive human abilities (Marr, 2024). The ability to consistently obtain and assimilate new knowledge will be essential for steering enterprises through the tumultuous seas of digital transformation.

Thirdly, human ingenuity, creativity, and imagination substantially enhance the progression of civilization. By 2025, the rapid advancement of innovation will be such that any brief interruption in learning may lead to the obsolescence of one's skills (Marr, 2024). When a nation's workforce acquires these characteristics, it is transformed into relevant human resources. As a result, individuals equipped with the requisite resources and expertise to leverage modern technology are progressing rapidly inside the contemporary information and digital economy. In 2022, 130 million new high-skilled positions were established worldwide. In the same timeframe, 70 million jobs have been eliminated due to automation and developing technology (Jahan, 2024).

The deceleration of employment growth in Bangladesh may ultimately lead to social instability and a spike in criminal activity (Rahman et al., 2021). The shortage of skilled workers in Bangladesh may be contributing to the country's rising youth unemployment rate. Even though there has been significant growth in tertiary education at universities, the number of unemployed youth continues to rise rapidly. Employers in Bangladesh are increasingly hiring foreign talent, leading to an outflow of approximately USD 10 billion annually, leaving local youth without job opportunities. Research has shown a positive link between economic growth and investments in education (Khatun et al., 2022). Therefore, it is crucial for Bangladesh to implement an effective policy for education and human resource development (Rahman et al., 2021). The demand for high-skilled positions is increasing, with occupations like data scientists, e-commerce specialists, social media experts, training and development managers, and artificial intelligence professionals at the forefront. A new category of human resources will undoubtedly be required in the future workforce. Consequently, numerous nations are reforming their educational frameworks. They are enhancing educational programs, curricula, and pedagogical approaches. There is a focus on education rooted in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This is referred to as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) in English. In China, 40% of university graduates with a credential are in STEM fields. In India, the figure is 30% (Jahan, 2024). In Bangladesh, only about 12 % of public university students are enrolled in STEM disciplines (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2024) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. STEM vs. Non-STEM Enrolment in Bangladesh vs. Other Countries



Source: Adapted from (Jahan, 2024) and (University Grants Commission [UGC], 2024).

The World Economic Forum (2025) outlines ten key skills necessary for future job prospects, including analytical thinking, adaptability, leadership, creativity, self-motivation, technological proficiency, empathy, curiosity, customer orientation, and talent management. As a result, it is essential for our education system to focus on nurturing these competencies to better equip students for the workforce (Jami, 2025). Fostering a diverse set of transferable skills during university is vital for students' continuous learning and preparedness for future career success (Scheuring & Thompson, 2024). Transferable skills, often referred to as soft skills or employability skills (Scott & Willison, 2021), are a range of essential competencies that can be utilized in diverse settings and various contexts (Olesen et al., 2021). These skills encompass competencies like teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and cultural sensitivity (Jackson, 2025). Such skills are critical not just for academic achievement but also for professional success, significantly improving students' chances of obtaining and thriving in jobs, as employers increasingly demand these capabilities (Wahab et al., 2025).

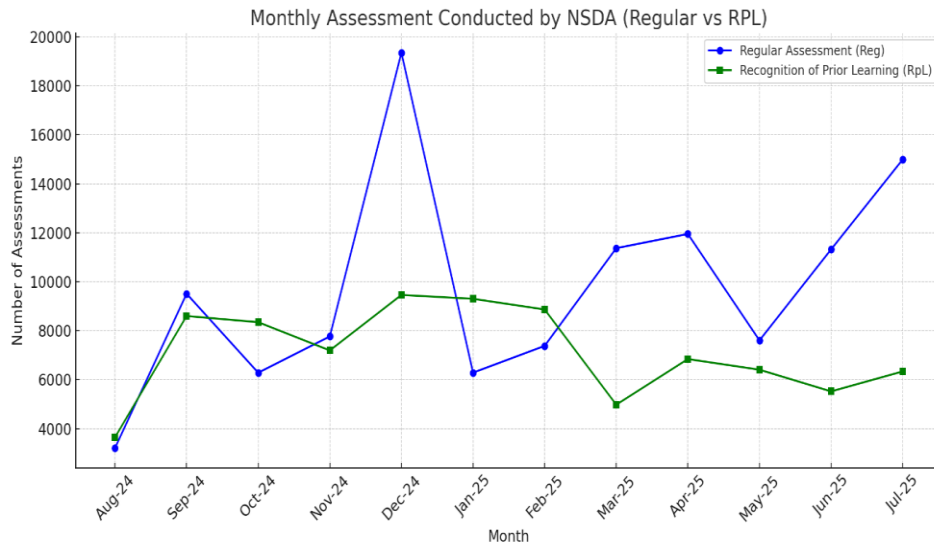
6. Skills Development Initiatives in Bangladesh and Path Forward

In Bangladesh, building a competent workforce is fundamental to achieving inclusive economic progress. Over recent years, the government has undertaken several important steps to reform the national skills landscape, including the adoption of the Bangladesh National Qualification Framework (BNQF) in 2021, the enactment of the National Skills Development Act in 2018, the establishment of the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) in 2019, and the formulation of the National Skills Development Policy in 2022. These reforms have laid the groundwork for standardizing skills development, certification, and assessment across the country.

The NSDA, as the primary coordinating entity, is tasked with accrediting Skilled Training Providers (STPs), assessing training programs, and certifying learners via qualified assessors. The NSDA's initiative to formalize the nationwide skill development evaluation process is commendable. The NSDA ensures that evaluations are conducted fairly, efficiently, and consistently by establishing a nationwide pool of certified assessors, streamlining assessment requests through the National Skills Portal (NSP), and maintaining quality assurance protocols that adhere to both national and international standards. These initiatives have significantly enhanced the legitimacy and accessibility of skills certification for trainees.

The chart highlights the positive results of these activities by showing a noticeable rise in the number of assessments conducted during the months in both Regular and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) modes. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) denotes the process of acknowledging and certifying an individual's skills, knowledge, and competencies acquired through work experience, informal learning, or non-formal schooling. It allows employees, particularly those lacking formal degrees, to get credentials through exams that acknowledge their current competencies. The consistent rise in the statistics indicates that learners and training providers are gaining greater confidence in NSDA's robust assessment system. A distinct increasing trend is evident in both modes, particularly for Regular evaluations, which reached their zenith in December 2024 and July 2025. RPL assessments exhibited relative stability, peaking in December 2024. December 2024 exhibits a notable increase in Regular assessments, attributable to year-end events and the completion of training programs.

FIGURE 4. ASSESSMENT CONDUCTED BY NSDA IN BOTH REGULAR AND RPL MODES BETWEEN AUGUST 2024 AND JULY 2025



Source: Adapted from skillsportal.gov.bd and National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), 2025.

Although over 1,300 STPs have been registered under NSDA, the institution is still in its formative stage and faces various challenges, including fragmented governance, limited resources, and overlapping mandates among 36 ministries involved in technical and vocational training. Despite the notable policy reforms, Bangladesh continues to lag behind due to the challenges of adapting foreign models to the local context, including cultural differences, resource constraints, and institutional inefficiencies, which hinder the effective implementation of these reforms. To address these issues, it is crucial to enhance the institutional capacity of the NSDA with adequate financial, technical, and human resources so it can effectively perform its regulatory, evaluative, and promotional roles. The 16 Industry Skills Councils (ISCs), created to bridge the gap between industry and training providers, require further empowerment through increased funding and structured industry engagement to develop Competency Standards (CS), Course Accreditation Documents (CAD), curricula, and research tailored to high-demand sectors. Moreover, a more centralized and coordinated governance model is needed to resolve policy fragmentation and streamline efforts across ministries. NSDA's initiative to collaborate with universities to offer skill certification programs to students is a positive step and should be scaled up. Through targeted Memorandums of Understanding, universities can integrate practical, demand-driven training alongside academic degrees, helping to bridge the theory-practice divide.

Bangladesh must also consider increasing its public investment in education. World Bank (2024) reports that Bangladesh's public education spending was only 1.78 % of GDP in 2023-substantially below global norms. Countries like India and Vietnam invest substantially more, enabling them to shift from low-skilled to high-skilled labour markets (Jahan, 2025). Raising Bangladesh's education budget to 4–6% of GDP is vital for human capital development. At the same time, societal attitudes toward skills-based learning must be transformed. The traditional preference for general academic degrees and white-collar jobs has marginalized technical and vocational pathways. To address this, awareness campaigns and national dialogues should promote skill-based education as a respectable and viable career option, encouraging youth and guardians to embrace diverse opportunities such as caregiving, hotel management, freelancing, and entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, the presence of nearly one million foreign workers in Bangladesh, contributing to an annual outflow of roughly USD 10 billion, underlines the urgent need to create meaningful employment for the domestic workforce. Industry leaders must revise their hiring strategies and invest in building local talent pipelines through apprenticeship programs, vocational internships, and public-private partnerships. The involvement of the Bangladeshi diaspora also presents an untapped opportunity. Many skilled professionals have returned to Bangladesh and can play a strategic role in mentoring youth, advising institutions, and contributing to skills innovation. A robust system to track, engage, and integrate these returnees into the national development agenda would strengthen the overall skills ecosystem. A skills ecosystem refers to the dynamic interaction between education systems, industry, government, and community that collectively supports the development, acquisition, and application of skills. In Bangladesh, developing this ecosystem requires strong collaboration among key stakeholders to align training with market demand. Simultaneously, reforms in the general curriculum must focus on skill integration, ensuring that students graduate not only with theoretical knowledge but with practical skills aligned to labour market needs. The creation of a data-driven monitoring and evaluation framework to assess training quality, placement success, and feedback from employers would help refine and sustain this ecosystem over time.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is fundamentally reshaping the nature of work in Bangladesh, accelerating automation, digitalization, and the adoption of advanced technologies across sectors. Traditional low-skilled jobs—particularly in garments, manufacturing, and even services—are increasingly vulnerable to displacement. Simultaneously, new roles are emerging that demand advanced digital, cognitive, and soft skills such as data literacy, problem-solving, adaptability, and technological fluency. However, Bangladesh’s current education system remains heavily theory-oriented, with limited integration of digital skills or innovation-driven curricula. The mismatch between what graduates learn and what employers require is widening as 4IR progresses. Without urgent reforms to embed emerging technology training (e.g., AI, cloud computing, robotics) into formal and vocational education systems, Bangladesh risks producing a workforce that is underprepared for the future. Aligning skills development strategies with 4IR demands is no longer optional—it is critical for national competitiveness and youth employability.

Bridging the skills gap in Bangladesh requires a coordinated and shared responsibility across multiple stakeholders. The government must lead by creating an enabling policy environment, ensuring funding, setting national standards, and streamlining governance through bodies like the NSDA. The private sector plays a critical role in identifying skill needs, offering apprenticeships, and co-designing curricula that reflect real-world demands. Meanwhile, NGOs and development partners can act as catalysts by piloting innovative training models, supporting marginalized groups, and facilitating community-based skill initiatives. Educational institutions must also adapt their programs in line with evolving industry expectations. Ultimately, a holistic and collaborative approach—anchored in public-private partnerships—is essential to build a sustainable and inclusive skills ecosystem that equips Bangladeshi youth for the opportunities and challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In sum, to bridge the skills gap and harness the full potential of Bangladesh’s youth, three key actions are essential. First, mainstream industry-integrated skill certification within all public universities through formal partnerships with the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), ensuring graduates are both academically qualified and job-ready. Second, scale up

public-private apprenticeship and internship programs, especially in high-demand sectors such as ICT, renewable energy, and healthcare, to offer real-world experience and improve youth employability. Third, launch a nationwide "Skills First" awareness campaign to shift societal attitudes, reduce the stigma around TVET, and encourage youth and guardians to embrace alternative career pathways beyond traditional white-collar jobs. These initiatives, if strategically implemented, can create a more agile, inclusive, and responsive skills development ecosystem aligned with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

7. Conclusion

The evolving global and national employment landscape presents both challenges and opportunities for Bangladesh. As demographic pressures increase and the demand for adaptable, future-ready talent grows, the country must shift from traditional education paradigms toward a more holistic approach that integrates skills, innovation, and inclusivity. Developing a robust skills ecosystem is not merely a policy option—it is a strategic necessity. It requires a change in mindset across all levels of society, from policymakers to educators, employers, and families. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is rapidly transforming the nature of work, making digital literacy, technical expertise, and lifelong learning indispensable. Bangladesh must embrace these shifts to stay globally competitive and avoid leaving its youth behind. Skills development must be recognized not just as a response to unemployment, but as a proactive engine for social mobility, productivity, and national competitiveness.

This study highlights the urgency of investing in human capital and aligning education systems with the realities of the labour market. Bangladesh's young population is a powerful asset—but only if equipped with the right competencies and opportunities. The nation's journey toward economic resilience and inclusive growth depends on how effectively it nurtures its workforce. Looking ahead, a coordinated and visionary approach—built on trust, collaboration, and shared accountability—will be key to transforming Bangladesh's skills development landscape. By doing so, the country can harness the full potential of its people and move confidently toward a more prosperous and equitable future.

The practical implications of this research extend beyond academia into policy and industry. The findings underline the importance of integrating skills training with formal education to ensure youth are prepared for the rapidly changing labour market. For policymakers, the study advocates for increased investment in skills development infrastructure, including vocational education, to equip the youth with not only technical but also essential soft skills required in today's workforce. Through public-private partnerships, government policies should focus on creating opportunities that bridge the skills gap, particularly in emerging sectors like ICT, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence.

For practitioners, particularly employers and industries, the study suggests the need to adapt hiring practices by focusing on competencies rather than traditional qualifications. Companies should engage in more apprenticeship and internship programs to ensure young employees gain relevant work experience and practical skills. Furthermore, the findings suggest that policymakers and industry leaders should collaborate to create a skills development ecosystem that is agile and responsive to the demands of 4IR. This will not only benefit businesses by providing them with skilled workers but will also contribute to national economic growth by reducing unemployment and enhancing productivity.

Moreover, the study encourages reflexivity on the part of researchers, acknowledging that personal biases, assumptions, and backgrounds may influence research outcomes. By recognizing this, researchers can adopt more transparent and inclusive approaches, ensuring that their work has practical and broad societal relevance. This is particularly important in understanding how skills development strategies can help marginalized and underrepresented groups access better job opportunities and contribute to the country's inclusive growth.

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Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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Supporting Transition to the Workforce for Neurodivergent Learners: Insights from a Canadian Study on the Neuroinclusivity of Post-Secondary Education

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Abstract

This article offers evidence-based recommendations to enhance the neuroinclusivity of post-secondary career education and practices for career educators and student support professionals. The authors share insights from an applied research study that employed a mixed method design that included a national survey of neurodivergent post-secondary students and recent graduates (n=400) and 78 in-depth interviews with neurodivergent students and recent graduates (n=45) and staff and leaders working in accessibility services (n=33). Findings revealed that neurodivergent post-secondary students encountered significant barriers to post-secondary education, which impact graduation rates and successful workforce transitions. Reduction of stigma, improved access to tailored supports, and neuroaffirming approaches to supporting students with potential transition challenges such as employment searching, disclosure, and accommodations were identified as enablers for success. This article presents recommendations from the most comprehensive national data set on neuroinclusivity in Canadian post-secondary education. This article offers actionable recommendations for career educators to use strength-based approaches and reduce employment barriers for neurodivergent individuals.

Keywords: neurodiversity, higher education, career development, career transition, transition to workforce

1. Setting the Scene

Post-secondary education has long been associated with increased employability, yet many graduates experience both real and perceived barriers to their transition to the labour force (Donald et al, 2018). For equity seeking students, such as those who are neurodivergent and/or

have disabilities, additional obstacles to employment, such as stigma and a lack of accessible and inclusive supports and pathways, increase barriers (Noel et al., 2017). Neurodivergent individuals face additional challenges to employment and workforce entry in comparison to their neurotypical and non-disabled peers, yet employment outcomes still differ by neurodivergent identity/diagnosis (Chen et al., 2015). National data sets across multiple OECD countries demonstrate that autistic individuals experienced of the lowest rates of any employment group of people with disabilities (Web et al., 2024).

Globally, we have seen post-secondary institutions recognizing the need to make higher education more inclusive for neurodivergent individuals (Winberg et al., 2019). However, as neurodiversity has been largely ignored within diversity, equity, and inclusion movements, this work has been impeded by a lack of comprehensive data on the ‘how to’ of enhancing accessibility and inclusion (Dwyer et al., 2023). Better understanding of the experiences of equity seeking student groups supports institutions in addressing obstacles to inclusion and access. Additionally, professionals who work within and adjacent to the post-secondary education, such as career educators, also benefit from increased understandings of the barriers and enablers to success experienced by neurodivergent students in their educational and career transitions to inform their work.

To address this gap, the authors present findings from the most comprehensive national data set on neuroinclusivity in Canadian post-secondary education. Data includes the first national survey of neurodivergent post-secondary students and recent graduates (n=400) and 78 in-depth interviews with neurodivergent students and recent graduates (n=45) and staff and leaders working in accessibility services (n=33) (Fane, 2024, 2025).

This article synthesizes key insights from the national data set to provide actionable recommendations to career educators. Supporting them to leverage strength-based approaches and reduce barriers to employment and career sustainability for neurodivergent individuals.

2. Profiles of Neurodivergent Learners

Understanding the learner profile of neurodivergent students within post-secondary education is crucial for creating inclusive environments that support learning and transition to the workforce. By recognizing the characteristics and challenges of this population, institutions can better tailor their supports and services, ensuring that neurodivergent students can thrive academically and better leverage their education and skill development into the workforce.

Demographic information from survey respondents provides a snapshot into the experiences of post-secondary students and their neurodivergent identities or diagnoses. The most reported neurodivergent identity/diagnoses were ADHD (59 %), mental health disorders (46 %), autism (24 %) and learning disabilities (15 %). While these identities/diagnoses may have implications for students’ academic and support needs, these students are largely invisible to their post-secondary institutions, with less than half (43 %) choosing to disclose their diagnosis. A barrier to disclosure and registration with accessibility services is the requirement for students to have a formal diagnosis and documentation. Only a third (33 %) of students surveyed reported having a formal diagnosis, and 73 % of students who did not disclose reported at least one barrier to disclosure, highlighting the interconnected challenges between diagnosis, disclosure, and receiving support and accommodations.

Additionally, many neurodivergent students are managing complex learning profiles including 38 % of students who reported multiple neurodivergent identities/diagnoses and 62 % who reported intersectional identities such as being disabled/having a disability or being a member of another equity seeking group.

The learning and professional development needs of neurodivergent learners are different than those of neurotypical students, and with some neurodivergent students having more complex and distinct academic and learning needs to other diverse student groups. Yet, due to the relative invisibility of the population in post-secondary education, little has been known about neurodivergent student experiences.

The following section provides a rationale and evidenced-based recommendations for career educators in higher education and workforce transition programs from analysis of both quantitative and qualitative study data.

3. Strength-Based Approaches to Understanding Employability for Neurodivergent Individuals

Neurodivergent individuals are frequently viewed as less employable than their neurotypical peers due to stigma about the ways in which neurodivergent individuals learn and prefer to communicate and socialize (Davies et al., 2023). All individuals bring various forms of capital (skills, competencies, and lived experiences) to their employability and career sustainability (Donald et al., 2018). For neurodivergent individuals, however, their capital is often overlooked, or overshadowed by their learning, social, or communication preferences that can be negatively perceived.

Increasingly, there is a body of research that shows that neurodiverse teams benefit businesses and organizations, both in terms of skills and competencies, but also in improved company culture, increased retention, and more diverse talent (Hutchison, 2023). Yet, there remains a disconnect between the real value neurodivergent individuals' skills and talents can bring to their work, and neurodivergent individual's experiences in transitioning to and within the workforce (Fellows, 2025). For career educators, this results in both an opportunity and a challenge.

Neurodivergent individuals benefit from working with career educators to identify their skills, talents, and areas where supports or accommodations can address functional challenges impacting workplace success (Coffey & Lovegrove, 2023). Supporting a neurodivergent learner to better understand their employability profile is a strength-based approach that is both neuroaffirming and works to dismantle internalized stigma and real barriers to workplace success.

Recommendation 1: Identifying Strengths and Support Needs

Stigma around learning, social, and communication differences results in neurodivergent individuals experiencing negative educational and social situations, with heightened awareness of their deficits compared to their neurotypical peers (Chapman & Botha, 2023). An increased awareness of deficits impacts neurodivergent individual's self-esteem, which can hinder both the student's ability to accurately identify strengths, and to separate a real or perceived deficit from a support need.

When working with a student or client, they may need repeated or individualized support to identify their support needs in relation to deficits (real or perceived). For example, a student

whose reported deficit is poor working memory, may require all information (such as instructions or assignments) in writing, versus given verbally.

For many neurodivergent individuals, the increased awareness of deficits can lead to internalized shame. Having access to the lived experiences of other neurodivergent people, such as through storytelling, mentorship (both formal and informal) and support groups can be a neuroaffirming approach to exploring and identifying strengths, support needs, and tailored supports (Chapman & Botha, 2023; Zografou & McDermott, 2022). Support needs and what types of supports a neurodivergent individual may benefit from is often in relation to executive functioning.

Recommendation 2: Executive Function Supports

Executive functions are the higher order skills needed to plan, focus, remember, and self-manage. Executive function demands are a substantial barrier for neurodivergent individuals in post-secondary education, the workplace, and daily life (Dwyer et al., 2023). Neurodivergent post-secondary students and recent graduates reported barriers related to executive function (organization, planning, motivation, working memory, attention) two to three times higher than any other barrier such as financial, social/communication challenges, or discrimination.

AI and assistive technologies offer promising solutions for neurodivergent individuals, helping them overcome functional challenges and communication barriers through personalized technological support (Iannone & Giansanti, 2023). Engaging neurodivergent students in learning about and using assistive technology and AI applications to meet support needs can help overcome both real and perceived barriers to employability (Desideri et al., 2020).

As part of the semi-structured interview questions, research participants (students, graduates, staff, and leaders) were asked to give examples of supports, tools and strategies they found to be beneficial for themselves and/or the neurodivergent learners they support. Participants responses were coded thematically and arranged in broad categories around support needs that impact academic success and employability.

TABLE 1. ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE APPLICATIONS
BASED ON AREAS OF FUNCTIONAL CHALLENGE

Area of Challenge	Assistive Technology Applications	Artificial Intelligence Applications
Reading and written output challenges	- Screen readers - Text-to-speech software - Word prediction, grammar, and spelling software - Scanning pens	- Summarizing key points from notes/course material - Using AI as a tutor to answer questions, offering explanations, check for understanding, and even generating interactive learning experiences - Identify required skills from job postings relevant to desired position/role to highlight employment suitability and develop application materials
Communication challenges	Speech-to-text software	- Transcription tools - Note taking apps

Organization and task management challenges	• Graphic organizers and mind mapping tools and apps • Reminder management systems and apps • Time management apps • Calendars and to-do list apps	• Note taking apps
Sensory and auditory processing challenges	• Noise-cancelling headphones • Fidget devices • Visual search engines • Alternate lighting sources • Self-management and self-regulation support apps	

Source: own compilation

Neurodivergent students report positive learning experiences when using assistive technology, yet these tools were found to be under-utilized in interventions and instructional strategies in post-secondary education for this population (McDowall & Kiseleva, 2024). Assistive technologies and AI are not a one size fits all approach and requires buy in from the individual for the tools to be successful.

Recommendation 3: Approaches to Disclosure and Requesting Accommodations

Research into the neuroinclusivity of Canadian workplaces and Canadian post-secondary institutions revealed that less than half of employees and post-secondary students disclose their neurodivergent identity or diagnosis (Hutchinson, 2023; Fane, 2024, 2025). Disclosure rates are impacted by stigma, barriers to documentation/clinical diagnosis, and internalized ableism. Yet we know that executive function challenges disproportionately impact neurodivergent individuals. This results in a significant proportion of the neurodivergent population potentially benefitting from disclosure, but who may be resistant or unfamiliar with the disclosure process.

For students or clients unsure about the disclosure process and if it would benefit them, supporting the individual to create a list of advantages and potential disadvantages to disclosing, can support them to feel more confident in their decision and build self-advocacy skills. Additional key considerations to engage neurodivergent students and employment seekers include:

1. If choosing to disclose, when would be the optimal time to disclose, such as on the application, during an interview, upon offer, or once starting the position? This decision will be impacted by the level of support need for the individual, the type of work, and many other factors.
2. Does the support need require a formal disclosure and accommodation request, or can it likely be accommodated without a formal process in the workplace? For example, in some workplaces integrating or using assistive technology (such as AI tools) does not require specific permissions or a formal accommodation, where others might. This exercise may also fuel the development of some questions the candidate may want to ask a potential employer.
3. Neurodivergent individuals may be more sensitive to rejection than their neurotypical peers and are likely to experience more social and employment rejection. Helping students to understand and normalize challenging experience can be a supportive way to lessen the individual's internalizing of the rejection (Chapman & Botha, 2023). Peer mentorship or support networks where neurodivergent individuals can share their

experiences and seek guidance from others who have had similar challenges can be a powerful vehicle to navigating rejection in seeking employment (Gelbar et al., 2014).

4. Neurodivergent students, job seekers, and workers need to understand their rights to protection from discrimination and reasonable accommodation, and where to seek support if they are unsure if their rights are being upheld.

Recommendation 4: Neuroaffirming Supports and Neuroinclusive Programming

The terms neuroaffirming and neuroinclusive refer to approaches to engaging with, educating, supporting, and developing programs, supports, or resources for neurodivergent individuals that value differences and focus on strengths rather than deficits (real or perceived). While many post-secondary institutions in Canada are working towards creating more inclusive and coordinated services and supports using neuroinclusive and neuroaffirming approaches, the experiences of participants across institutions is highly disparate in terms of access and uptake.

Only 35 % of neurodivergent students and recent graduates surveyed had accessed supports or services tailored to the needs of neurodivergent students at their institution. This means that they may not have had the opportunity to work with educators, support staff, career educators, and advisors who use neuroaffirming approaches. As such, the learning and social opportunities offered to students, may not have been inclusive or accessible for them.

In the study, the desired supports and programs differed based on individual's reported diagnosis or neurodivergent identity. Survey respondents were asked to indicate 'yes', 'no', or 'unsure' to nine different types of programs or supports including: 1) transition to the workforce program; 2) experiential learning preparation; 3) peer mentorship; 4) sensory refuge areas; 5) social clubs or activities; 6) academic drop-in; 7) counselling services; 8) specialized tutoring; 9) transition to post-secondary program. The highest rated desired supports based on reported neurodivergent diagnosis/identity included:

TABLE 2. HIGHEST RATED DESIRED SUPPORTS BASED ON REPORTED NEURODIVERGENT DIAGNOSIS/IDENTITY

Diagnosis/Identity	Top 3 Desired Supports
Autism	1. Transition to the workforce supports (50 %) 2. Counselling services (50 %) 3. Social clubs or activities (45 %)
ADHD	1. Academic drop-in services (46 %) 2. Transition to workforce program (41 %) 3. Counselling services (43 %)
Mental health disorder	1. Counselling services (70 %) 2. Transition to workforce program (55 %) 3. Social clubs or activities (54 percent)
Single 'other' diagnosis (not including autism, ADHD, or a mental health disorder)	1. Counselling services (71 %) 2. Experiential learning preparation (50 %) 3. Transition to workforce (44 %)
Multiple diagnoses	1. Counselling services (68 %) 2. Sensory refuge areas (62 %) 3. Transition to workforce (51 %)

Source: own compilation

Transition to workforce or experiential learning preparation were highly rated supports for all students, regardless of neurodivergent identity or diagnosis, indicating they are a promising avenue for exploration in the creation of neuroaffirming and neuroinclusive employment supports.

4. Ethical and Other Important Considerations

Developing neuroinclusive and neuroaffirming programming, supports, resources, and initiatives should be guided by the lived experiences of neurodivergent individuals themselves (Dwyer et al., 2023). Opportunities for neurodivergent students, career educators, employees, and managers to provide input and guidance is an essential step in creating responsive and supportive programs.

5. Concluding Remarks

Findings from this study of the neuroinclusivity of Canadian post-secondary education can provide insight into the barriers and enablers to success for neurodivergent learners transitioning from post-secondary education to the workforce. This article was written for career educators, however we hope the insights from the data and recommendations will be useful to other professionals working with neurodivergent students and clients in the areas of adult education, supported employment, and counselling services.

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Declaration Statements

Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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Supplementary Information

The Conference Board reports referenced in this study are available upon reasonable request. Interested readers may obtain access by contacting the corresponding author via email.

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Supporting English Graduates Transition to Work: A Sustainable Careers Ecosystem Approach

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Abstract

In an era of accelerating automation, human-centered skills such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability - hallmarks of an English degree - are becoming increasingly vital in the workplace. And yet English degree enrolment numbers, and value perception in a capitalist society, are both decreasing. This study examines experiences of English graduates, as they transition from a higher education non-specialised degree to the workplace. It uses the Sustainable Careers Ecosystem Theory (SCET) to highlight challenges faced, relevance of acquired skills, and support needed during this transitional period. Employing a constructivist grounded theory approach, the research uses qualitative semi-structured interviews with 21 English graduates. Data was thematically analysed and three core themes constructed: (1) who is responsible for English graduate employability, highlighting key stakeholders including universities, careers services, future employers, and individual students; (2) the importance of identifying a next step and embracing flexibility rather than pursuing a narrow predefined career goal; and (3) the retrospective appreciation of skills acquired through studying English.

This research addresses a gap in the literature by examining the experiences of non-specialist course alumni, focusing on the sustainability of English studies and the relevance of academic skills to the current labour market. It expands the use of the SCET to non-specialist subjects, highlighting its application in diverse sectors.

Findings highlight the need for enhanced collaboration between universities, careers services, and employers to support English graduates' transition into the workplace, addressing options available and articulation of skillset. This research contributes to ongoing discourse on non-specialist degree value in contemporary job markets, influencing educational policy and career guidance practices, highlighting the importance of the SCET.

Keywords: non-specialist careers, English graduates, graduate transitions, sustainable careers, sustainable careers ecosystem theory

1. Introduction

As the global job market becomes increasingly dynamic and competitive, university graduates face significant challenges in transitioning from academia to professional environments (Blokker et al., 2023). The ability of higher education institutions (HEIs) to prepare students effectively for employment has come under scrutiny, particularly for graduates of non-specialist disciplines such as English (Belfiore, 2015). While English degrees develop critical thinking, communication, and research skills, these competencies are often undervalued or misunderstood in the labour market (Williams et al., 2003; Belfiore, 2015; Robiul & Happy, 2023).

Although research has examined graduate transitions in vocational fields such as business (Jackson, 2014), engineering (Baytiyeh & Naja, 2011; Hawse & Wood, 2019), education (Wehbe, 2023) and medical disciplines (See et al., 2023; Smith & Pilling, 2008), studies focusing on generalist disciplines remain limited. Some research has explored career transitions in the arts (Christie, 2017) and creative industries (Haukka, 2011), yet there remains a gap understanding the specific transition experiences of English graduates. Addressing this gap is crucial - English graduates enter diverse professional roles, navigating shifting labour market expectations while leveraging their transferable skills. Despite this diversity, enrolments in English Studies at undergraduate level fell by 20% between 2012 and 2019 (Hopkins et al., 2023). A similar decline occurred at secondary education, with A-Level English enrolments decreasing overall from 2017 to 2024 (English Association, 2025). Although 2024 figures indicate a slight increase, sustained growth is essential to ensure the subject's long-term viability, and that skills gained from English degrees enter the workplace.

This study uses constructivist grounded theory and the Sustainable Career Ecosystem Theory (SCET) to examine English graduates' career transitions. SCET offers a holistic lens on the interaction between individual agency, meso-level influences (e.g. HEIs and employers), and macro-level labour market forces. Unlike traditional employability models, it integrates structural, personal, and time factors, making it well-suited to non-vocational pathways.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 21 English graduates, the research explores transition challenges, perceptions of skill relevance, and retrospective views on support. By applying SCET to a non-specialist field, the study enhances understanding of employability in disciplines with less defined career routes.

Findings offer insights for HEIs, career services, and policymakers aiming to support sustainable transitions. Meso-level actors, particularly universities and employers, play a key role in shaping outcomes. The study contributes to wider employability debates and aligns with SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth). It recommends aligning curricula with labour market needs, helping employers value transferable skills, and enhancing career development initiatives for English graduates.

2. Literature review

Career decision-making and transitions are shaped by complex interactions of personal, contextual, and temporal factors (Duffy & Dik, 2009; Patton & McMahon, 2015). These influences don't operate in isolation but evolve dynamically over time - especially pertinent for non-specialist subjects like English, whose graduate career trajectories are less linear and predictable than other vocational professionals (Bridgstock, 2011).

This review explores previous studies relating to post-university career transitions for non-specialised subjects and introduces the Sustainable Career Ecosystem Theory (SCET) as a theoretical framework. By situating SCET in the context of English graduates, critical gaps in research and practice are identified, with implications for both theoretical advancements in career development, and practical applications in HEI's and workforce integration.

2.1. University-to-work transitions

Moving from university to the workplace is a significant transition for new graduates. Previous literature reviews on this subject highlight the fragmented nature of current research, with variables including development of student identity, student engagement, fit between higher education and labour market, student motivation, student emotions, and learning approaches (Izzo et al., 2022). Existing key themes emphasise the difficulty of changing learning environments which make new graduates feel unprepared and uncertain (Tham & Lynch, 2017), unrealistic views of the labour market (Lopes de Melo & de Oliveria Borges, 2007) and a lack of planning for transition (Teixeira, 2002).

Research into the transition experiences of non-specialised courses is also fragmented. Findings from available studies highlight additional transition difficulties, including applying degree skills to new sectors (Christie, 2017; Bridgstock, 2011) and embracing flexible and protean careers (Shreeve & Smith, 2011; Bridgstock, 2006). These studies accentuate extra challenges which a student from a specialist subject may not encounter.

Several interventions are suggested, with key initiatives including university career services supporting recruitment processes (McIlveen & Pensiero, 2008), HEI's and employers supplying relevant industry work experience throughout a degree (Davis et al., 2009), and effective employer induction programmes (Hawse, 2019). The use of the alumni experience to provide example career paths is missing from the discourse, which could support successful and sustainable transitions.

2.2. Alumni conversations as career transition interventions

The significance of alumni feedback is reinforced by the structured collection of graduate outcome data in the UK. Since 1994, surveys have captured employment trends among university leavers, beginning with the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey and later transitioning to the Graduate Outcomes survey in 2016 (HESA, 2021). These insights inform university decision-making and contribute to institutional sustainability by demonstrating graduate success. However, these standardised metrics often fail to capture the complexity of individual transitions, particularly for graduates from non-specialist disciplines (Fryer, 2022).

Qualitative research examining the alumni experience of post-university transitions has focused on narrative-based studies, highlighting the personal, contextual, and structural factors shaping graduate career trajectories. Fleischman and English (2019) identified three key themes in successful alumni career transition experiences: the importance of work experience, the centrality of resilience, and the need for lifelong learning to integrate into the workplace. These findings align with broader research emphasising proactive career strategies - studies highlight the value of networking (Warren et al., 2016), the versatility of degrees in non-specialist disciplines (Kailanto et al., 2012), and the application of theoretical knowledge in professional contexts (Zhuang & Tao, 2022).

Existing alumni research has predominantly focused on STEM and business graduates (Warren et al., 2016; Zhuang & Tao, 2022; Larsson et al., 2022) or examined career transitions without considering subject-specific contexts (Fleischman & English, 2019; English et al., 2021). Aligning with proactive career strategies, informational interviews have been used with non-specialist STEM students (Lexis, 2021), supporting students to confirm career aspirations. While English degrees develop multiple skills, they do not map directly onto specific job titles or sectors, creating greater uncertainty in career transitions (Williams et al., 2003). Engaging English graduates through similar alumni interviews aims to enable current students to see concrete career pathways, enhancing confidence, preparedness, and decision-making.

Addressing this gap is critical, as insights from English alumni have wider relevance for graduates of other non-specialist disciplines. These students often struggle to identify career options, making alumni a valuable resource in shaping career education, employer engagement, and transition support. This study contributes to a broader understanding of sustainable career pathways, with alumni experiences serving as real-time indicators of how universities contribute to long-term employability.

2.3. Sustainable Career Ecosystem Theory

With multiple factors impacting the career transitions of non-specialised graduates, the Sustainable Career Ecosystem Theory (SCET) provides a comprehensive framework, highlighting the interconnectedness of multiple actors, and conditions necessary for sustainable career outcomes (Donald, 2023; Donald & Jackson, 2023). Donald (2023) defines SCET as interdependent actors across higher education and workplaces, where individuals' lives and careers develop over time, emphasising sustainable outcomes for individuals, organisations, and society (p. xxvii).

This study focuses on university alumni as key actors operating at the intersection of university and workplace contexts, exploring their contributions to the sustainability of individual careers, university courses and professional sectors.

Importantly, SCET acknowledges the interplay between individual agency, institutional structures, and labour market fluctuations, making it pertinent for understanding how English graduates sustain their careers in diverse and evolving employment landscapes. This perspective is significant in creative industries, where career sustainability often depends on freelance work, short-term contracts, and adaptability (Bridges, 2018; Trier & Treffers, 2021).

This study extends the theory's applicability to non-vocational, humanities-based disciplines, demonstrating how SCET can be used to understand career development in fields where career paths are less defined, extending its relevance beyond traditional vocational areas. The critical role of HEI's within the career ecosystem expands the focus on educational actors, demonstrating how universities can actively contribute to sustainable career transitions and development.

By engaging with course alumni, this project illuminates how career-related resources and capital are accumulated and transferred within the ecosystem, particularly focusing on the role of social and cultural capital in non-specialised careers. This aligns with the theory's emphasis on resource conservation and generation (De Vos, et al., 2020). This application in a specific context could provide insights that help further integrate sustainable career theory (De Vos et al., 2020) with career ecosystem theory (Baruch & Rousseau, 2019), contributing to the ongoing theoretical development in this area.

While other career theories provide holistic views of career influences (Patton & McMahon, 2015; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), they do not sufficiently account for the structural and institutional factors that shape long-term career sustainability. Given the challenges faced by non-specialist graduates, the SCET offers a relevant framework, focusing on the interplay between networks, allowing for a nuanced exploration of how career support mechanisms, workplace expectations, and personal career agency collectively influence successful post-university transitions.

2.4. Alumni as key actors in the Sustainable Career Ecosystem

University alumni play a crucial role within the SCET by bridging the transition between higher education and the workplace. Their experiences provide valuable insights into how graduates navigate career transitions and sustain long-term employability. Research highlights the importance of the alumni voice in supporting student transitions (Donald et al., 2018), helping them connect their perceived employability with tangible employability (Thijssen, et al., 2008).

The SCET framework provides a holistic lens to capture experiences, accounting for the meso- and macro-level influences which are missed in large scale quantitative surveys. Additionally, the time lag between graduation and data collection/publication restricts the applicability of survey findings for current students, highlighting the need for more immediate, nuanced feedback mechanisms to inform support strategies.

By engaging alumni in reflective discussions, HEI's can gain actionable insights that enhance career education, improve programme alignment with labour market needs, and better support students in navigating complex transitions. The SCET underscores the importance of timely, context-specific feedback, positioning alumni as central actors in the broader career ecosystem.

2.5. Research questions

This study seeks to address the identified research gap by exploring three key questions:

1. How do English alumni construct and navigate their early career transitions post graduation?
2. In what ways do English alumni interpret the relevance and application of their academic training within evolving career trajectories?
3. What resources or interventions do alumni retrospectively identify as critical in supporting sustainable transitions to the next stage of their career journey?

By answering these questions, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of graduate employability, offering insights into the interplay between individual agency, university structures, and labour market demands.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

To effectively explore the transition experiences of undergraduate English alumni as they navigated post-university transitions, qualitative methods were chosen to allow for in-depth examination of participants' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews balanced consistency in data collection with flexibility, allowing the investigation of anticipated themes and unexpected insights crucial to understanding nuanced experiences. The interviews,

structured around key career dimensions, align with the SCET framework by exploring how individual decisions, meso-level support, and macro-level labour market conditions interact to shape career sustainability. These dimensions are reflected in the interview areas: career paths (macro), influences and advice (meso), and skills and reflections (individual).

3.2 Participants/Sample

To participate, alumni needed an undergraduate English degree from the target university (single honours or joint/major/minor). The alumni office identified 799 eligible graduates, inviting them via email, with additional recruitment through LinkedIn. Of 38 interested alumni, 21 completed consent paperwork. This sample size was deemed sufficient as it allows for in-depth qualitative analysis while ensuring engagement across career stages. Seventeen participants graduated 2–11 years ago, and four over 20 years ago, offering diverse career perspectives. This range provided insights into how sustainable career ecosystems evolve, highlighting interactions between individual agency, institutional support, and external conditions.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

Data collection focused on five key areas - career path and choices, influences and decisions, skills and application, advice for graduates, and personal reflections. Participants were paired with current English students as interviewers, leveraging shared educational backgrounds to foster rapport and encourage honest discussions. Student interviewers underwent a structured training process conducted by the lead researcher to ensure familiarity with the question set and standardisation across interviews. Pilot interviews were discussed to refine questions and ensure clarity.

Interviews were conducted online over two months, maximising participation by reducing barriers related to geographical distance and accessibility. This flexible approach reflects SCET's emphasis on adaptability within sustainable career ecosystems. Student interviewers forwarded interview transcriptions to the lead researcher for analysis.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework guided qualitative analysis. This process included familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcriptions, generating initial codes, identifying and reviewing themes, and defining them for a comprehensive final report. This was not a linear process, and transcripts were re-read several times to identify and construct key themes. Codes and themes were initially generated by the lead researcher and reviewed with interviewers to enhance inter-coder reliability and reduce individual interpretative bias (Carter et al., 2014).

3.4. Ethical considerations and limitations

Full ethical approval was obtained through the university ethics board with participants providing written informed consent. All details were anonymised, including locations and places of work, and participants allocated a random three-digit number identifier. All participants were offered follow-up conversations with the lead researcher if the conversation identified any areas of concern or further signposting.

Acknowledging the potential for biases in student-led interviews, such as shared educational backgrounds shaping responses, the study implemented standardised training for interviewers to enhance professionalism and consistency. This approach ensured data collection remained robust. Any potential bias from interviewees was reduced through detailed introduction emails and participant information forms, highlighting the need for honest reflections. The lead researcher also considered their own positionality – as an English graduate with a non-linear career trajectory. Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework was strictly adhered to, and student interviewer feedback confirmed individual bias did not impact the research process.

This study acknowledges the limitation of its relatively small sample size compared to the overall population of English graduates from this established course. However, the diverse and motivated participant group provided rich, nuanced data representing varied experiences across sectors and age groups. Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged in the later interviews, confirming the adequacy of the sample size (Guest et al., 2006).

4. Findings

Findings are presented within three main areas relating to the research questions: challenges associated with transition, perceived relevance of acquired skill sets in current positions, and retrospective reflections on desired support during post-study transition.

4.1. Challenges in Transition (RQ1)

4.1.1. Employment Readiness and Perceived Unpreparedness

When asked about workplace readiness upon graduation, 15 of the 21 respondents expressed feeling unprepared. Reasons included a focus on degree completion (individual-level barrier), lack of innate career direction (individual-level challenge) and an absence of clear progression routes for English graduates (macro-level barrier). Through the lens of the SCET, this illustrates tensions between individual agency (career planning) and macro-level labour market structures (unclear pathways for arts graduates).

Six of the unprepared alumni referenced feeling anxiety or stress when considering entering the workplace with comments including ‘very nerve-wracking leaving university’ (902), ‘I was just so stressed about getting an actual job’ (254) and feeling ‘very lost and unconfident and incapable after graduating’ (115).

Of the six alumni who felt prepared, three pursued further study and three transitioned directly into employment, either needing further sector specific qualifications, or securing a job pre-graduation. Their preparedness reflects a strong sense of individual agency, with clear career objectives and proactive engagement with meso-level resources, including career guidance. This alignment underscores how robust institutional support empowers individuals navigating sustainable career transitions.

Clarity regarding next steps mitigated experiences of anxiety. One participant articulated how the careers service had ‘given me confidence and put me in the right mindset, matching me up with the right kind of opportunity’ and ‘I do remember feeling extremely empowered, qualified and confident to start this new role’ (699).

Of the 15 reporting feeling unprepared, eight pursued further study and seven entered employment. The proportion of graduates opting for further study versus immediate employment was comparable between the prepared and unprepared groups. No discernible correlation was observed between graduation preparedness and the decision to continue studying.

The alumni highlighted different reasons for feeling unprepared. Two stated their primary focus was degree completion, deferring consideration of post-graduation plans - one admitted the university ‘had the resources there, I just didn’t use them, I was too busy’ (492). Four alumni highlighted a perceived lack of innate career direction, stating ‘there's no set job’ (254) and ‘I just kind of felt like I had no clear path’ (888). Participant 608 articulated challenges with the absence of career progression assessment, saying ‘you're going into a career that you know doesn't have a direct next step, that there was some kind of check-in going’ (608). There was a perceived lack of individual agency and confidence against a backdrop of unfamiliar macro labour markets.

4.1.2. Institutional Support and Meso-Level Gaps

Only five alumni in this unprepared group used the careers service, less than one-third of the cohort. Three had engaged with the service at the end of final year or post-graduation. Only two had proactively, rather than reactively, accessed the available support.

Nine of the 15 unprepared alumni reported inadequate preparation from their academic school. Statements concerning the school’s attitude towards careers support included ‘they didn't see that as part of their role to prepare you for the rest. (It was) their job to get you through the degree and that was kind of it’ (812), ‘I think a very limited amount (of careers support) was actually coming out of that English course’ (171) and ‘No criticism of the school, but I just kind of felt like I had no clear path’ (888). Six participants emphasised the need for guidance on individual responsibility for employability, illustrating a disconnect between meso-level institutional messaging and the macro-level expectations of labour market readiness. Comments included it was ‘up to you as an individual to research the world of work’ (160) and ‘it felt much more like me going to look for those resources’ (171). A sense of isolation in seeking careers support was evident, as one participant highlighted ‘but I was the only one that I knew of in my course that was doing that, and I had to find out that information myself’ (533).

There was a perceived institutional misalignment, with alumni highlighting support focus on linear career paths (e.g., business, STEM) over non-traditional trajectories. This highlights meso-level gaps where career services and universities do not adequately accommodate non-specialised graduates' diverse career routes. The theme of responsibility for employability will be explored in more detail in the discussion section.

4.1.3. Labour Market Barriers and Employer Perceptions

Respondents viewed employers as favouring specialist degrees over non-specialist subjects, highlighting a perceived macro-level bias, creating graduate uncertainty about market expectations. Seven participants strongly highlighted a lack of meso-level institutional support for English, sensing systemic undervaluation of non-specialist degrees in career development initiatives. This highlights structural barriers within the career ecosystem that may impede equitable access to tailored support for non-specialist graduates. Participant 160 observed that there was ‘not a lot of help for non-linear career paths that follow the likes of an English degree. The careers fair was very corporate and geared towards science and business students’.

Notably, participant 907 focused on employer's perceptions of English graduates, advocating work experience 'for companies to get used to having graduates from backgrounds other than the usual pathways such as business or engineering' (907), creating a sustainable, mutually beneficial pipeline between the levels of the SCET. These gaps in institutional support contribute to alumni perceptions of how well (or poorly) their academic training aligns with their careers, which we now explore.

4.2. Perceived Relevance of Academic Training (RQ2)

English alumni identified 22 distinct competencies cultivated through their academic experiences, which they actively apply in their professional roles. These competencies illustrate the interaction of meso-level institutional learning frameworks, individual agency, and macro-level labour market demands within the SCET. They have been categorised into five domains:

4.2.1 Writing proficiency

Twelve participants discussed writing abilities, the most frequently mentioned skill and highly valued in their current roles. Related competencies included editing written work and speech writing. One participant remarked 'my English degree developed my critical and analytical reading, which I now use in editorial work'. (363).

4.2.2. Interpersonal communication

Nine interviewees emphasised their ability to adapt communication styles to diverse audiences, cultivated through meso-level flexible learning structures, and essential for navigating the macro-level demands of increasingly diverse and globalised workplaces. Additionally, alumni highlighted skills in active listening, diplomacy, and delivering presentations. One interviewee reflected 'the English degree really teaches you how to communicate properly, how to evaluate things. With the role that I'm doing at the minute, communication's really key for everything' (492).

4.2.3 Self-efficacy

Interviewees discussed enhanced confidence and independence, noting that studying English facilitated the development of self-motivation and discipline. They felt confident making decisions, taking initiative, and responding constructively to feedback. Participant 171 highlighted how the limited contact teaching hours characteristic of non-specialist courses fostered independence and self-discipline, stating

When I reflect on friends on specialist courses, they've struggled when working isn't disciplined, whole-diary-is-filled, someone else is teaching you. So I think that's a real skill set that the non-specialist students don't emphasise enough, it's valuable and valued in the workplace (171).

Meso-level pedagogical structures in English can equip graduates with the self-efficacy required to thrive in uncertain professional environments, contributing to their sustainable career trajectories.

4.2.4. Cognitive and Creative Competencies

This encompassed critical thinking and evaluating and analysing information, competencies addressing labour market demands for adaptable and innovative problem-solvers. English graduates contribute to a sustainable career ecosystem by navigating complex professional

environments with agility. Four participants asserted that studying English enhanced their capacity to view situations from diverse perspectives, adapting to new concepts in professional roles. Participant 812 reflected

all those thinking skills and analytical skills are really important, being able to look at something or a situation and be able to quickly analyse and get to the root of whatever somebody needs. It's having vision and leadership and drive and determination.

This sentiment was echoed by Participant 151, who noted 'reading beneath the surface and understanding different perspectives and cultural experiences during the degree helped me to deal with people and problems during my job' (151).

4.2.5 Research proficiency

Ten interviewees highlighted transferable skills in research and planning, for example 'it's not just writing, you become a really good researcher. I think with an English degree, that gives you the tools to do that' (254).

The alumni exhibited reflective capacities to analyse academic experiences, articulate transferable skills they acquired, and critically assess the applicability of these competencies in professional contexts. Participant 750 encapsulated this skills awareness, stating 'I definitely wouldn't be in my current job if it wasn't for the refinement of my skills that I learnt throughout the English degree' (750). The SCET allowed the interviewees to frame skills as part of individual agency, leveraging their degree learning in contrast to macro-level constraints within the labour market and the full recognition of their abilities.

4.3 Resources and Interventions Identified for Sustainable Transitions (RQ3)

Alumni identified three key areas for enhancing support during the transition from academia to employment: purposeful work experience, assistance with recruitment processes, and access to comprehensive labour market information. These recommendations underscore the need for coordinated approaches at the individual, meso-institutional, and macro-systemic levels, as proposed by the SCET.

4.3.1. Work Experience as a Catalyst

A majority of participants ($n = 13$) emphasised the transformative potential of purposeful work experience in bridging the gap between academic study and professional practice. Participant 812 advocated 'the practical element of understanding the work environment,' while Participant 907 reflected on initial challenges, stating, 'I had no idea what was in store with the learning curve of 9–5 work.' Providing work-integrated learning opportunities aligns with SCET's focus on meso-level interventions, enabling students to develop sector-specific competencies and reduce macro level uncertainty. As Participant 254 noted, 'You don't actually know what you want to do until you start doing the job,' highlighting the importance of experiential learning in fostering career adaptability.

4.3.2. Recruitment Process Support

Six participants identified gaps in institutional support when navigating the recruitment process. Participant 812 highlighted the absence of practical guidance, stating, 'understanding how to interview, write a CV, complete an application form weren't things people spent much time on.'

Similarly, Participant 115 described application processes as ‘daunting,’ reflecting a broader meso-institutional failure to embed employability-focused learning within non-specialist degrees.

4.3.3. Labour Market Information and Networking

Both prepared and unprepared graduates reported lacking accessible and actionable labour market information, underscoring its critical role in career navigation. Eleven participants highlighted the need for industry-specific guidance, while six would prioritise professional networking. Participant 695 proposed mentorship as a vital resource, explaining, ‘having somebody I could shadow or seek advice from would have been immensely helpful.’ SCET’s macro-level perspective emphasises the necessity of systemic partnerships between universities and employers to provide students with timely, relevant, and sector-specific insights. Participant 533 reinforced this, advocating for ‘more career sessions and businesses coming into classes to speak to students.’

These findings illuminate a pressing need for HEI’s to adopt holistic and interconnected approaches, fostering sustainable career ecosystems through enhanced collaboration between academic schools, career services, and industry stakeholders. These implications will be explored further in the discussion section.

5. Discussion

By employing thematic analysis methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to the research questions in this study, three principal themes have been constructed, showcasing the reflections of the participants. Recommendations for best practice are proposed, emphasising the alumni voice as an essential actor within the SCET.

5.1. Responsibility for employability: stakeholder roles

The alumni raised significant questions regarding responsibility for developing employability skills among English graduates. A subset of participants expected their academic department to assume a leadership role in embedding employability within the curriculum. They expressed disappointment and a sense of unpreparedness for workforce transitions when such initiatives failed to materialise. Some alumni compared their department’s employability provisions unfavourably to those of other disciplines, with perceived disparities eliciting frustration.

However, another group of alumni demonstrated greater agency, independently engaging with career opportunities. Notably, no discernible pattern emerged explaining why some students were proactive while others were not. Within the SCET, this could highlight limitations on personal agency within structural constraints, for example access to resources, awareness of career services, or socioeconomic factors.

From a SCET perspective, effective employability development requires alignment among stakeholders, including academic departments, career services, and students themselves (De Vos et al., 2020). This study underscores the importance of transparent communication addressing roles and expectations of each stakeholder in fostering employability. Alumni consistently emphasised their desire for subject-specific resources and parity with disciplines providing career support at every level. Such alignment would empower students towards proactivity, experiencing self-efficacy while benefiting from structured institutional support. Embedding employability initiatives into curricula reflects SCET’s framework’s principle of

interconnected stakeholder responsibilities, addressing the alumni call for greater institutional accountability. Furthermore, subject-specific employability efforts would support the SCET premise that ‘lives and careers evolve over time,’ (Donald, 2023, p. xxvii), allowing students to gain experience incrementally and reduce career-related anxiety (Davis et al., 2009).

5.2. Incremental progress over long-term objective

Alumni reflections reveal a recurring theme: the significance of incremental progress during post-university transitions. Participants recalled initial uncertainty applying academic qualifications to career development, often compounded by anxiety over undefined long-term goals, confirming the findings of Christie (2017). However, with hindsight, they emphasised how a series of micro-decisions and gradual steps led to their current professional positions. On reflection, the first step was the most difficult - with decision-making and workplace immersion, they reported a commensurate increase in self-efficacy regarding career decision-making.

This perspective aligns with the SCET, which prioritises adaptability, experiential learning, and ongoing skill development (De Vos et al., 2020). Participant 254 reflected ‘as soon as you have any job or experience, your foot is in the door. Just try to climb the ladder, take your time, and you’ll land where you want to be.’ This highlights how early, exploratory career behaviors increase confidence and reduces pressure to articulate definitive career objectives prematurely.

To integrate these findings into the SCET, institutions should emphasise directional progress over fixed career destinations. By supporting students in breaking long-term objectives into manageable steps, HEI’s can address the transition-related anxiety identified in this study. Ultimately, this approach underscores the importance of cultivating a mindset of continuous learning and directional growth.

5.3. Retrospective recognition of skill acquisition

This study underscores the crucial role of alumni reflection in bridging academic training and professional application. While alumni recalled initial anxiety, they retrospectively recognised how academic experiences shaped their long-term success.

Interviewees noted their degrees cultivated transferable skills that became evident only with time. Participant 254 stated, ‘I feel like I learned so much from my degree, and you don’t even realise it at the time.’ Similarly, Participant 888 noted, ‘sometimes you’ll think, ‘I didn’t learn anything in uni,’ but then you realise it’s been a gradual thing that’s instilled in you.’ These reflections highlight how career-related anxiety may overshadow recognition of skill acquisition during the student experience.

The findings align with the SCET by emphasising the importance of reflective practices in career adaptability (Savickas, 2013). Alumni insights suggest fostering self-awareness among students during studies could help improving articulating employability capital. Participant 708 described the study of English as ‘cognitive training’, developing specific modes of thinking and working essential for professional success. This highlights the dynamic interplay between academic preparation and evolving professional demands, reinforcing the link between education and work, emphasising the lasting value of non-specialist disciplines like English in preparing graduates for adaptable careers.

6. Recommendations for best practice

This study highlights the key role of alumni perspectives in fostering a sustainable career ecosystem for non-specialist graduates. Operationalising these insights, three key areas of action are proposed:

6.1. Supporting current students

Integrating alumni experiences into the student journey offers a practical means of enhancing career readiness. For example:

- Alumni guest lectures, providing real-world career perspectives.
- Mentorship programmes for personalised guidance.
- Case studies and workshops, linking and bridging theoretical knowledge and workplace skills.
- Micro-internships developing industry-specific skills.
- Digital platforms sustaining alumni-student engagement, providing accessible career resources and real-time contacts.

6.2. Curriculum development

Alumni feedback ensures curriculum relevance in a changing job market through:

- Alumni inclusion in curriculum review panels, aligning courses with industry needs.
- Regular alumni surveys, collecting targeted insights on curriculum applicability.
- Collaborative projects connecting students and alumni for real-world learning.

6.3. Wider subject sustainability

Engaging alumni post-graduation strengthens talent networks and sustains non-specialist disciplines. Key actions include:

- Developing alumni partnerships to highlight the value of English graduates' skills.
- Positioning English degrees as essential for critical thinking, communication, and adaptability, skills needed in a dynamic job market.
- Expanding internships and placements through alumni connections.
- Providing incentives or recognition for alumni supporting student employability.

These recommendations align with SCET's principle of stakeholder interdependence by ensuring that alumni, institutions, and students collaboratively support sustainable career transitions. Embedding alumni engagement is not just an optional enhancement, but a core strategy for sustainable career ecosystems, supporting HEI's to elevate the profile of English degrees, and ensuring their relevance in higher education and the professional landscape.

3. Conclusion

Skills gained from studying an English degree are needed in every sector - from communication and interpersonal skills, to the ability to research, project manage and build relationships. When subject interest declines, or students cannot articulate their skill set to an employer, the

workplace risks losing vital skillsets. Alumni reflections offer a key career development tool, not only to encourage current students but for HEI's to assess their curriculum against ever-evolving workplace requirements. This method has implications beyond English to supporting other non-specialised subjects and their graduate employability. HEI's must engage all elements of the careers ecosystem, valuing diverse stakeholder contributions and fostering collaboration to support sustainable employment, meaningful career development, and future-ready career pathways that benefit both individuals and society.

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Declaration Statements

Conflict of Interest

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Reflections on Effective Employee Development from New Entrants to the UK Agriculture and Agri-food Sector

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Abstract

In the context of workforce challenges in UK agriculture and agri-food, workplace employee development could be a critical tool for developing human capital that supports individual and organisational success. This research aimed to enhance understanding of how those entering UK agricultural and agri-food employment from non-agricultural backgrounds perceived the employee development that they experienced in their first role in the sector. A mixed methods approach incorporating a survey and semi-structured interviews was used followed by statistical and thematic evaluation. The research found that informal employee development was highly valued for professional development but formal development was perceived to have more impact on performance in role. Participants praised mentoring and opportunities for informal communication, while development processes such as induction and performance review were perceived less positively. Overall, this research shows that supporting managers to develop their own skillset and knowledge on employee development, will help to create workplace environments where new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds can be individually supported to learn, engage and develop. The article concludes with recommendations focused on mentoring schemes, informal employee development, and guidance for sector managers, which could support employee development in the UK agriculture and agri-food sector.

Keywords: employee development, skills development, agriculture, agri-food

1. Introduction

Across agri-food and agriculture, there is a recognised need for better training, learning and development (Defra, 2022; Morley, 2016; Nye & Loble, 2021; Swadling, 2018). These industries face challenges in relation to securing and sustaining their workforce to ensure future stability, both across Europe (Zabko & Tisenkops, 2022) and specifically in the UK (ALP, 2022; Prince et al., 2022). Workplace employee development is recognised as a critical component of organisational and individual success (Dachner et al., 2021; Manuti et al., 2015; Martini & Cavenago, 2016) via the development of human capital (Dachner et al., 2021; Noe et al., 2014). However, there has been relatively little exploration of effective employee development in agriculture and agri-food.

An initial literature review incorporates research on employee development from varied contexts, alongside agricultural and agri-food studies, focusing on research applicable to the UK's unique food production and agricultural ecosystem (Dastagiri, 2017). The paper then evaluates the results of a specific research study considering how those entering UK agricultural and agri-food employment from non-agricultural backgrounds perceive employee development experienced in their first role in the sector, before drawing together conclusions and recommendations for practice.

2. Literature Review

A literature search in refereed English language journals and books on the subject of employee learning and development in agricultural and agri-food employment was carried out, with a focus on publications from the last 10 years. Due to the scarcity of publications in this space, the timeframe was subsequently extended to 15 years, and a grey literature search was also carried out. Grey literature typically includes “information produced on all levels of government, academia, business and industry” (Mering, 2018, p.238) and is incorporated in this review to increase scope and reduce bias (Paez, 2017). Online website searches of agriculture and agri-food sector bodies, charities and educators, and relevant government departments, were completed. Publications identified in these searches were then critically evaluated using the AACODS (Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, Significance) grey literature checklist (White et al., 2013). All six criteria had to be met for inclusion.

2.1. Agri-food and Agriculture in the UK

2.1.1. Sector overview

Christiansen et al. (2020) described the agri-food sector through its relationship to agriculture; agri-food encompasses agriculture itself along with “related up- and down-stream activities in input supply, food logistics, food processing, retail, and food services” (p.1). Four million UK jobs are attributed to the wider agri-food industry (13% of UK workforce employment); within this, the agricultural workforce comprises 11% of the agri-food sector (Defra, 2022).

Across agri-food worker shortages have caused concern and calls for urgent action (Development Economics, 2017; Grant Thornton, 2021; Nye & Lobley, 2021). Sector bodies have requested government support (ALP, 2022; FDSC, 2019) and the need for further research within agri-food employment has been identified in multiple reports and studies (Hasnain et al., 2020; Heasman & Morley, 2016; Nye & Lobley, 2021). The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee acknowledged the scale of the issue, and the mental health and wellbeing risk for those working in the sector (EFRA Committee, 2022). 49% of UK food growers and manufacturers rationalised output due to labour shortages (ALP, 2022) and 24% of employees in food production, agriculture and animal care were planning to leave their job within the next year (City & Guilds, 2022).

2.1.2. Recruitment, development and retention challenges

In this context of worker shortages and retention challenges, it is vital to support and develop new entrants. New entrant is a poorly defined term but typically includes anyone new to the industry and excludes successors to existing farm businesses (Creaney et al., 2023). New entrants can experience multiple barriers to entry and challenges to retention (Toogood et al.,

2025). Many do not know enough about agri-food to consider it as a potential career path (Ashworth, 2022), others may have dated views of the sector (Heasman & Morley, 2016; Nye & Lobley, 2021). Insularity can further limit recruitment; 42% of farmers are reluctant to employ staff without prior agricultural experience (Nye et al., 2023).

Access to training and skills development for those not already in the sector can be limited (Jack et al., 2019; Welsh Government, 2019). This situation has persisted for many years, Slee et al. (2008) identified the same barriers. Some shortcomings in staff training, learning and development have been recognised across agriculture and agri-food (Heasman & Morley, 2016; Nye & Lobley, 2021; Swadling, 2018) limiting the skills and development of staff, and ultimately, their progression.

2.1.3. Diversity, inclusion and belonging

New entrants may also experience a lack of relatable role models (Ashworth, 2022). Agriculture, in particular, lacks diversity (Norrie, 2017) and structural racism has been identified (Terry, 2023) along with persistent heteronormative gender and sexual dynamics (Leslie et al., 2019). However, there is potential for change, with organisations such as Agrespect (2025) working to support rural diversity and inclusion and challenge prejudice.

When finance, land, advice and training are all potentially handed down generations in farming, it creates additional challenges (Jack et al., 2019; Welsh Government, 2019), particularly when trying to build social and cultural career capital (Sutherland & Calo, 2020). This challenge is worsened for groups with less likelihood of inheriting land due to structural inequalities (Terry, 2023).

While there is a primary moral and societal obligation for organisations to be diverse and inclusive, as well as a legal requirement, there are also demonstratable business benefits. There are signs that inclusion correlates positively with business performance outcomes (Whiting, 2021, pp. 6–7). The Food and Drink Federation (2021) highlighted that diverse and inclusive agri-food workplaces have better decision-making and innovation, increased profits, and enhancements to reputation, talent pool and retention. Belonging at work is important to employee health (Thissen et al., 2023). When employees feel that they can be themselves at work there is a positive impact on productivity, and when they feel accepted they are more likely to stay with an organisation (Blau et al., 2023).

2.2. Employee Development Principles, Processes and Practices

2.2.1. Employee development principles

When new entrants overcome barriers to begin a career in agriculture or agri-food, employee development will be crucial to developing a sense of belonging, and skills for success.

Employee development brings mutual benefits to the employee and organisation and should thus be conceptualised as a joint responsibility, enhancing the individual's ability to perform in their existing, or future, role within an organisation or sector (Dachner et al., 2021). Formal training and education, informal training and learning through developmental tasks and experiences in the role, and learning from professional relationships and networks are all part of employee development (Noe et al., 2014) supporting the development of social and cultural career capital (Martini & Cavenago, 2016). All elements of employee development are important, whether formal or informal (Felstead & Unwin, 2016; Manuti et al., 2015).

2.2.2. *Induction*

Induction should be tailored to the individual and role, with a focus on both socialisation and alignment with organisational objectives (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010). One-size-fits-all approaches may not work, particularly for more inexperienced recruits (Johnson and Burden, 2003) and ongoing managerial support is required (Woodrow & Guest, 2020). Goal setting supports employees to identify targets and progress; for new employees this should focus on learning and new skills and include continuous feedback and progress monitoring (Wietrak et al., 2021).

2.2.3. *Continuous employee development*

As the employee journey goes on, continuous development positively impacts employee engagement and retention (Rubenstein et al., 2017), career success (Martini & Cavenago, 2016) and supports organisational learning (Johnson & Burden, 2003). However, many employers do not use evidence-informed employee development practices (Crowley & Overton, 2021); agricultural and agri-food studies have suggested this may be connected to the complexity of measuring the impact of learning and development (Adams et al., 2021). To support more effective measurement, administrative functions should be separated from developmental elements in performance reviews (CIPD, 2016; Wietrak et al., 2021). This is also recommended following studies on agricultural students and employees (Adams et al., 2021; Kolstrup, 2012).

In agriculture, particular barriers to ongoing employee development include time constraints, cost, and finding suitable training providers (Nye et al., 2023). Studies have observed specific sector benefits arising from employee development; improving cotton workers' confidence in their skills had a positive impact on engagement and improved connection to farming values (McDonald, 2017), and online supervisor training benefitted worker safety and wellbeing (Rohlman et al., 2021).

2.2.4. *Co-workers, community and networks*

Co-workers influence can significantly affect the integration of newcomers (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010) and the transfer of tacit knowledge (Peroune, 2007). Mutually beneficial relationships support knowledge sharing in line with social exchange theory (Mehner, et al., 2024). This can be a challenge for new employees (CMI, 2021) and potentially exacerbated in the context of new entrants to agriculture and agri-food, who may need to learn farming community 'rules' (Sutherland & Calo, 2020) as well as those of their organisation and role. Strong peer support and workplace communication positively impact employee integration and motivation (Wietrak et al., 2021) developing trust and psychological safety (Plouffe et al., 2023), but where this is lacking it can lead to isolation and increased turnover (Rubenstein et al., 2017; Sahai et al., 2020).

Additional organic support networks may develop from workplace peer groups, or via groups participating in training or qualifications. Networks and community may also collectively support workplace psychological safety, encouraging employees to seek and share information, enhancing overall motivation and performance (Plouffe et al., 2023; Wietrak et al., 2021).

2.2.5. *Mentoring*

Mentoring has positive effects on compensation, promotion, and career satisfaction (Allen et al., 2004) and facilitates informal and personal learning (Noe et al., 2014) while also supporting understanding of workplace social and cultural aspects (Johnson & Burden, 2003). The latter is

particularly important for new entrants to agriculture (Sutherland & Calo, 2020; Žabko & Tisenkopfs, 2022).

2.2.6. The role of leaders and managers

Workplace learning and development rely on leaders and managers who commit to their prioritisation, and the creation of a learning culture at work (Felsted & Unwin, 2016; Martini & Cavenago, 2016; Noe et al., 2014). Leadership and management are recognised as distinct but overlapping concepts. Adams et al. (2021) offer a pragmatic approach to defining leadership and management in agriculture and related areas “in order to be an effective leader or manager, improvement in both is necessary and unavoidable” (p. 7). Leadership and organisational climate also affect employee retention (Rubenstein et al., 2017) with good supervisory support and recognition enhancing employee motivation and commitment (Wietrak et al., 2021). Supervisory behaviours and high-trust environments can also support employee performance and wellbeing (Nielsen et al., 2017) and mediate and reduce workplace isolation (Sahai et al., 2020) a common issue in agricultural settings (Wheeler et al., 2022).

The majority of UK managers have not had any formal management and leadership training; ‘accidental managers’ are common nationwide and in agri-food (CMI, 2024; FDSC, 2019; Nye et al., 2023; Swadling, 2018). This lack of managerial training and experience can lead to sub-optimal or dangerous workplace practices, and affect staff satisfaction and retention (Nye & Lobley, 2021).

3. Research Aim and Questions

Given the sector-wide challenges, and limited evidence on good practice, this research reviewed the employee development experienced by those from a non-agricultural background who have entered agricultural or agri-food employment, to answer the question: **How do those entering UK agricultural and agri-food employment from non-agricultural backgrounds perceive the employee development experienced in their first role in the sector?**

The method and subsequent analysis incorporated two sub-questions: **How did employee development affect professional development?** and **How did employee development affect job performance?**

The researcher’s own context guided the topic and approach; coming from a non-agricultural background working in a primarily agricultural university, the topic was of personal interest.

4. Method

This research was underpinned by a broadly subjectivist epistemology, focusing on individuals, their stories and meaning. Participants therefore self-identified whether their background was non-agricultural, as there is no universal definition of non-agricultural or new entrant (Creaney et al., 2023). Quantitative survey data was collected, supported by qualitative interview data to support deeper understanding, and meaningful conclusions and recommendations (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). An interpretive paradigm and research philosophy applied; the intention of this research was to gain understanding and inform action (Saunders et al, 2019).

Inductive methods were used. After initial reviews, a survey focused on respondents’ first job in agriculture or agri-food that lasted for three months or more (to exclude short-term seasonal work). Respondents were asked to consider the impact of employee development in relation to them and

their professional development, and in relation to their performance in the job. This was to elicit reflections on individually beneficial career capitals (human, social or psychological) developed, but also wider capital development supporting the organisation (Dachner et al. 2021).

The survey was piloted and refined, then circulated through agricultural and agri-food organisations, educational bodies, and social media. 129 people responded, two thirds were under the age of 35. Although widely shared, some groups were difficult to reach. The majority of responses came from England, despite promotion across the UK. Survey respondents were well-balanced by gender, but respondent sexual orientation and ethnic background were less diverse, perhaps reflecting the current make-up of the sector (Norrie, 2017; Terry, 2023). To counterbalance this, those invited to interview were selected both on their original response content, but also to allow deeper examination of experiences across a range of demographics. Interviewees from more diverse ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation were included in the interview population.

The quantitative survey findings were evaluated and used to inform the design and pilot of semi-structured interview questions. The researcher designed questions which would prompt the interviewees to reflect on their agricultural or agri-food journey and the themes identified in the survey. Semi-structured interviews support understanding of the relationships between variables and allow clarification to aid researcher understanding (McIntosh & Morse, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). In hindsight, a more robust approach to the areas identified as lower value in the survey and/or less common in agri-food should have been included. Although the findings and discussion explore a wide range of effective employee development, this could have been enriched further by deeper consideration of what was not taking place or working well. This reflection should be noted for further work in this area. The researcher should also have created additional open questions that would encourage the interviewee to explore wider themes. The focus on survey themes slightly limited this work, and potentially led to homogeneity of response, although it must be noted that not all themes identified in the survey were then explored in the interviews and vice versa; interviewees generally overlooked some existing themes such as induction, and chose to focus on themes less present in the surveys, such as sector belonging, or lack thereof.

A further limitation in the study method lies in the lack of sample stratification by agricultural subsector, organisation size, or type. The agricultural sector is highly diverse, with varying organisational structures, resources, and staff development practices. The absence of disaggregated analysis may therefore obscure important differences in the experiences of new entrants across these contexts. This limitation arose due to the relatively exploratory nature of the study. While the results offer valuable general insights, they should be interpreted with caution, particularly when considering their applicability to specific subsectors or organisation types. Future research would benefit from a stratified sampling approach to capture the nuanced experiences of different groups. This would allow for more targeted recommendations and a deeper understanding of how organisational and contextual characteristics influence new entrant development and support.

5. Results

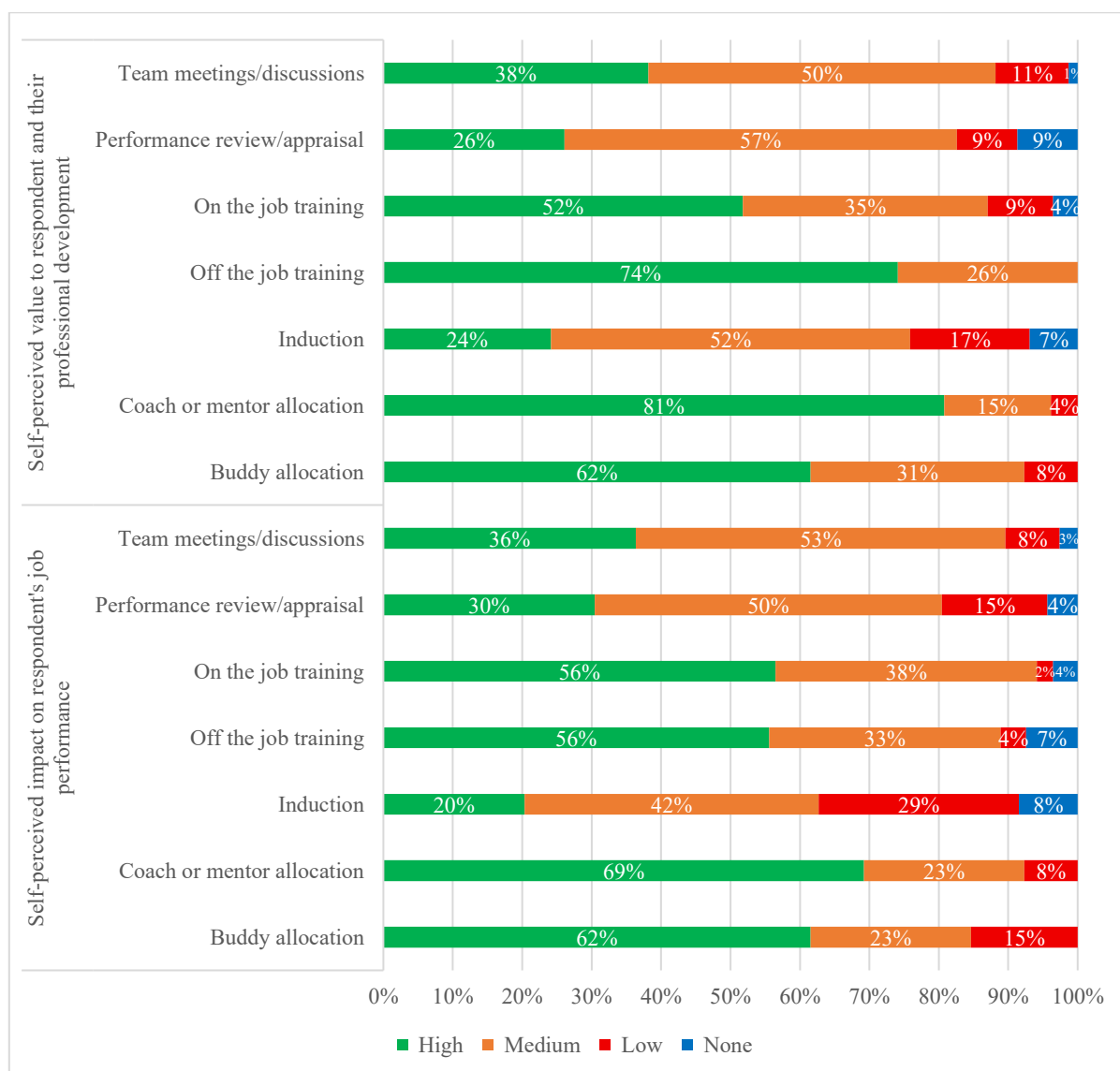
5.1. Survey Findings on Employee Development Provision and Impact

106 survey respondents answered questions about development during their first role in agriculture or agri-food. They were asked about the type of development experienced and their perception of its value to them and their professional development (on a scale of high value, medium value, low

value, no value), and the perceived impact on their role performance (on a scale of high impact, medium impact, low impact, no impact). The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that each type of employee development was overwhelmingly perceived as generally being of medium or high value, in relation to professional development., and shows a similar pattern of high and medium impact on performance.

FIGURE 1. SURVEY RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES



Source: own compilation/calculations

5.2. Further Statistical Testing on Selected Survey Findings

5.2.1. Induction

Induction had the lowest perceived impact and value. Statistical testing was therefore carried out on data collected on induction length, to see if this affected the respondents' views.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the participants' responses on the value of induction in relation to their professional development. Those with an induction period

of one day or less were compared to those with an induction period of two days or more. The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2 (1, N = 58) = 11.519, p = .001, \phi = -0.45$. There was a moderate negative association; those with two days or more were significantly more likely to report that induction had a high value for their professional development, than respondents with an induction period of one day or less.

The same comparison was made with reference to impact on performance, again using a chi-square test of independence. The relation between these variables was also significant, $X^2 (1, N = 59) = 8.503, p = .004, \phi = -0.38$. Again, there was a moderate negative association; those with an induction period of two days or more were significantly more likely to report that induction had a high impact on their performance in the role, than respondents with an induction period of one day or less.

5.2.2. Team meetings

Survey respondents were also asked about the frequency of inclusion in team meetings and discussions. 39% were always included, and 34% were sometimes included. Of the remainder, 16% said they were not included because there were no team meetings or discussions, 6% were not included, but these meetings and discussion did take place, and 5% said they were not part of a team. Relatively low numbers reported that they did not attend team meetings for varied reasons. Therefore, the difference between being regularly included (response = yes, always), and sometimes being included (response = yes, sometimes), was evaluated.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to examine the participants' responses on the value of inclusion in team meetings in relation to their professional development. Those who were regularly included in team meetings and discussions were compared to those who were sometimes included, in terms of reported value to professional development. The relation between these variables was significant, $X^2 (1, N = 76) = 12.142, p = .0005, \phi = 0.40$. There was a moderate association; those who were regularly included were significantly more likely to report that inclusion in team meetings and discussions had a high value for their professional development, than those who were only sometimes included. The same comparison was made with reference to performance, again using a chi-square test of independence. The relationship between these variables was also significant, $X^2 (1, N = 77) = 14.578, p = .0001, \phi = 0.44$. Again, there was a moderate association; those who were regularly included were significantly more likely to report that inclusion in team meetings and discussions had a high impact on their performance in the role, than those who were only sometimes included.

5.3. Interview Themes

Ten interviews were completed, transcribed and themes identified. 70% of interviewees were under the age of 35. Thematic saturation was calculated (Guest et al., 2020), with a base of 2 and a run size of 2 (Table 1). The thematic saturation point was reached after four interviews, partly due to an in-depth first interview, and potentially due to the design of the interview questions being informed by survey findings. Because thematic saturation was reached quickly, interviews continued to ensure this saturation point was genuine, but no new themes were identified after six further interviews. 11 employee development themes were identified in the interview responses which are shown in the latter part of Table 1, assigned to each interviewee.

TABLE 1. CALCULATION OF THEMATIC SATURATION AND OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEW THEMES

Interviewee number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Employee development themes identified	8	5	6	6	6	6	4	7	7	9
New themes	8	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New themes in run		8		3		0		0		0
% change over base		73%		27%		0%		0%		0%
Themes identified by interviewees	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Importance and role of network(s)			X		X	X		X	X	X
Importance and role of mentor(s)	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X
Learning through questions and workplace communication	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Learning through induction	X			X		X				X
Learning through demonstration and/or shadowing	X	X	X				X	X	X	X
Learning through informal training	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
Learning through formal training	X		X	X	X	X			X	X
Feeling a sense of isolation or not belonging			X	X			X	X		X
Feeling a sense of belonging	X	X							X	X
Importance of holding relevant qualification(s)	X				X	X		X	X	X

Source: own compilation/calculations, based on Guest et al. (2020)

6. Discussion

The quantitative survey responses, statistical testing, and qualitative interview themes inform the discussion in this section. These results have been drawn together and interpreted in the context of existing literature.

6.1. Formal Employee Development

6.1.1. Induction

Survey respondents typically perceived induction as low value. However, statistical testing showed respondents with inductions lasting two days or more were significantly more likely to report that induction had a high value for their professional development and high impact on role performance, than respondents with an induction period of one day or less. Given the potential for personalised induction to support both employee and organisation (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010), and to show the organisational value placed on employee development (Martini & Cavenago, 2016; Noe et al., 2014), short inductions may therefore represent a missed opportunity.

Survey respondents with short inductions did not include many further comments. One respondent who had noted low impact and low value, with an induction of less than one day described their induction as *“Here are chickens, here is feed. Give them a bag. If have eggs, collect, take to farm shop”* (Survey respondent 98). In contrast, one respondent who noted high

impact and high value described it as *“A 4-day residential course to understand [...] goals and company ethos. Compared with others this was a ‘world class/industry leading’ experience”* (Survey respondent 126). The potential gap between the experiences is clear. Variation in experience could feasibly be linked to limited understanding of induction’s purpose stemming from the previously recognised lack of managerial training (FDSC, 2019; Nye, Wilkinson & Lobley, 2023; Swadling, 2018). Unfortunately, the interviews added relatively little extra understanding here. Four interviewees specifically commented on induction, but with little further reflection on its purpose or impact. However, only two interviewees had inductions that exceeded the two day minimum that led to high value and impact. potentially explaining the lack of further reflection.

6.1.2. Formal training and education courses

Survey respondents had mixed views on training, with on the job training (typically informal) perceived as having a slightly higher impact on performance in the job, and off the job (typically formal) training perceived as having higher impact on professional development. This difference may relate to perceived transferability between employers, or movement capital (Martini & Cavenago, 2016). Overtly formalising informal learning can undermine the value of workplace learning (Felstead & Unwin, 2016); a value that survey respondents recognised, but only in relation to their performance, not their professional development.

Interviewees considered the formality and informality of training, rather than the setting. Seven mentioned the value of formal training and learning, when relevant and genuinely developmental, supporting Defra’s call for better training both within roles and prior to employment (Defra, 2022). In some cases, the interviewee’s focus was on the requirement for specific qualifications to access the sector or a role i.e. *“I just need that piece of paper to get my foot in the door”* (Interviewee 5). The tone here illustrates that the value of a qualification could sometimes be perceived as the access it provided via movement capital (Martini & Cavenago, 2016), rather than the development and learning.

6.1.3. Performance review/appraisal

Performance reviews were considered to have low to medium impact by survey respondents and were criticised in survey comments as being focused on employer requirements and metrics not employee needs, i.e. *“Basis of reward”* (Survey respondent 30) and *“It was mainly for my employer to see how the placement programme could be improved rather than how my performance was going”* (Survey respondent 2). These comments support the call to separate administrative functions, such as pay, from developmental elements in appraisals (Adams et al., 2021; CIPD, 2016; Wietrak et al., 2021).

While performance reviews have the potential to contribute to employee motivation (Wietrak et al. 2021), the opposite was seen in many survey responses, with comments such as *“Was used to point out failings and demotivating experience”* (Survey respondent 75) and *“Reviews sometimes had a negative [effect], I felt very under pressure all the time to perform”* (Survey respondent 27). There may be a further connection here with limited managerial training (FDSC, 2019; Nye, Wilkinson & Lobley, 2023; Swadling, 2018); managers may not realise that performance reviews offer an opportunity for development and motivation. Despite open questions, interviewees did not expand on this topic.

6.2. Informal Employee Development through Tasks and Experiences in the Role

As mentioned earlier, informal learning was perceived by survey respondents as having a slightly higher impact on performance in the job, than formal learning. One survey respondent explored this further, explaining that in their view, *“Formal training was not really worth the time put in. Company trainers were brought in for one day or less. Learning from managers on-farm over a period of time was much more useful”* (Survey respondent 21).

This subject was explored further in the interviews. Informal training and demonstrations were discussed by eight interviewees in total; seven interviewees specifically commented on shadowing others. The majority of interviewees perceived shadowing as being a valuable source of development, saying *“I found it good to shadow someone for a day or two”* (Interviewee 3) and *“There were two consultants there that sort of took me under their wing and I would follow them around quite a lot and see their clients”* (Interviewee 8). However, one interviewee noted that this occurred instead of, rather than as part of, wider support: *“They showed me what I needed to do and then the onus was on me”* (Interviewee 7). Here, the interviewee appears to feel under-supported and under-prepared. This reinforces the principle of ongoing, individualised consideration for positive outcomes (Johnson & Burden, 2003; Woodrow & Guest, 2020).

Eight interviewees discussed feeling able to ask questions about their work; a topic which led to rich reflection. This links to the concept of psychological safety, and its beneficial impact on employees and organisations (Plouffe et al., 2023; Wietrak et al., 2021), and also to the potential for managers to develop work arrangements that allow learning through discussion, consultation and feedback (Felstead & Unwin, 2016). One interviewee highlighted that questions are part of a trusting, psychologically safe workplace where development is supported (Plouffe et al., 2023); they felt it was vitally important for the employer to *“Make sure new entrants can ask questions and feel like they’re not going to be laughed at or judged”* (Interviewee 1). This resonated with the responses from other interviewees, further comments included *“Questions should be encouraged – I’ve always appreciated managers taking the time to explain something to me. Patience is important, and not laughing at questions”* (Interviewee 2).

6.3. Employee Development from Professional Relationships and Networks

6.3.1. Workplace communication

Statistical testing of the survey results showed that survey respondents who were regularly included in team meetings were significantly more likely to report that this inclusion had a high value for their professional development and performance in role, than those who were only sometimes included. Where survey respondents reported high value their comments included reflections on community, learning and inclusion, such as *“Day to day meetings on what was to be done on the day, I benefited just listening”* (Survey respondent 118) and *“Allowed me to feel more included and part of the team”* (Survey respondent 125).

Four interviewees focused on the importance of informal communication, and one drew out why communication is a key skill, *“To be a good person on farm, you just have to have the skills to communicate and listen and understand people and get along with them and a bit of knowledge about the industry. You can work on that, regardless of where you come from”* (Interviewee 4). Interviewees also reflected on how they learned about the sector and their role (e.g., *“we might sit around the kitchen table and have a little chat”* (Interviewee 1) or *“having a chat, while you’re*

scraping out the inside of the machines” (Interviewee 2)). These positive reflections on very informal, inclusive and warm support link to the wider research showing that peer support, communication and social support networks lead to positive workplace impacts and learning, in a psychologically safe environment (Crowley & Overton, 2021; Felstead & Unwin, 2016; Kolstrup, 2012; Nielsen et al, 2017; Plouffe et al., 2023; Wietrak et al., 2021).

6.3.2. Buddies, coaches and mentors

In the survey, small numbers reported a buddy, coach and/or mentor but those who did praised their value and impact. Comments on buddies from survey respondents highlighted their role in making the individual feel supported and safe *“My role involved travelling between farms alone, having a buddy both made me feel safer and prevented feeling lonely” (Survey respondent 20).* Another survey respondent noted how their buddy had *“Very high impact on my time working as I had someone to talk to about issues and someone who I knew would be supporting me” (Survey respondent 2).*

There was limited further discussion around buddies or coaches in the interviews, but eight interviewees spoke specifically about mentoring. Their experiences were universally positive, and described enthusiastically, *“I really like the fact that I've got these people that are mentors. That's been so useful to me” (Interviewee 1)* and *“He must have had a lot of influence on me because I still I still rely on his advice now and he's 80!” (Interviewee 8).* The mentor's role was considered in terms of offering another perspective, as well as support, with one interviewee noting *“They will see things that I don't necessarily see” (Interviewee 10).*

Multiple interviewees perceived the establishment of mentoring as an organisational or managerial duty, either by the manager themselves being the mentor *“...if a manager is in a position to be that kind of mentor-type person, that's definitely very helpful” (Interviewee 1)* or suggesting that the manager should *“put them with a mentor” (Interviewee 2).* However, other interviewees spoke about establishing mentoring relationships elsewhere, through mutual interests, meeting people at events etc. All were valuable, and praised by interviewees, as in their experience, mentors supported their wellbeing, inclusion, agricultural role and sector understanding, and job performance. Research has suggested that mentor presence may be more influential than the specific activity or level of engagement (Allen et al, 2004); the variety of mentoring experiences shared by the interviewees suggested that mentoring is very individual, driven by the mentor and the mentee themselves, and their relationship.

6.3.3. Networks

There was limited consideration of networks in survey comments. When present, it was typically in relation to challenges in building a network (e.g., *“It has taken time to build a network in the industry and local area, partly due to covid and partly due to not knowing what networks there are in the industry” (Survey respondent 112).*

Six interviewees considered their wider networks in agriculture or agri-food. One interviewee said, *“I think you tend to form quite strong relationships with people because you're all working towards similar collective goals” (Interviewee 10),* articulating the positive environment and connections facilitated by social support in the workplace (Nielsen et al, 2017). However, interviewees highlighted that networks can also be necessary for career advancement, with the importance of word of mouth and connections from agricultural universities specifically

mentioned, and the resulting difficulties for those without such networks noted, consistent with Sutherland and Calo (2020). Whilst interviewees had overcome barriers to gain initial entry into agriculture and agri-food, potential barriers to subsequent progression persisted.

This area overlapped with thoughts around belonging, or a lack of belonging, which were common amongst interviewees. One interviewee expressed their belief that *“Farming can be a very closed-off industry”* (Interviewee 7) and another found the homogeneity of agriculture was exclusionary for them *“It’s a very strong community of people that know the same thing, do the same thing. And I just straightaway felt like I didn’t fit into that”* (Interviewee 4). Personal characteristics were also relevant to sense of belonging. One gay interviewee described themselves as *“holding myself back a little bit”* (Interviewee 10) in workplace conversations, feeling they might not fit into what they perceived to be a very traditional non-diverse environment, in line with Leslie et al. (2019). However, the same interviewee could also see how common interests and goals created community, which did make them feel supported *“So we’re always talking about the weather, how the seasons gone, how farmers are feeling, what the yields are like, and there’s a lot of like emotional investment in the outcomes of the work that we’re doing. So, I think you tend to form quite strong relationships with people because you’re all working towards similar collective goals”* (Interviewee 10). Another interviewee described those that they had met across agriculture and agrifood as *“the warmest people on the planet”* (Interviewee 9). Where belonging developed, interviewees stayed with employers and organisations in keeping with Blau et al. (2023).

7. Conclusions and recommendations

New entrants to UK agricultural and agri-food employment from non-agricultural backgrounds had mixed perceptions on the employee development experienced in their first role in the sector. This is perhaps to be expected in a diverse group where employment context will potentially vary significantly by subsector, or organisation size and type. However, some common experiences which had value to the individual and their professional development, and an impact on their performance in their role, were identified through this work. These have the potential to positively influence employee development policy and practice across agriculture and agri-food, and to underpin future research on this topic.

Survey respondents and interviewees highly valued informal employee development and workplace learning. Existing research has showed that informal learning need not be formalised to be of significant value, and participants’ responses and reflections demonstrated this to be the case in this context. Psychological safety is a long-established principle in workplace and employer best practice, and this research demonstrated that when managers recognise and welcome questions alongside formal and informal development, it can be instrumental in helping new entrants to develop and establish themselves. Interviewee’s reflections on belonging were also poignant; they wanted to not just work in agriculture and agri-food but to belong there. This finding has the potential to influence agricultural and agri-food employment practices for the better.

Participants overwhelmingly benefited from employee development via professional relationships and networks. Informal communication was valued, whether in team meetings and discussion, or when chatting with colleagues. Regular inclusion in team meetings and discussions created high value for professional development, and high impact on performance in role. In particular, mentors supported new entrant wellbeing and inclusion, development of role and sector understanding, and

ultimately, job performance. This research found mentoring to be highly valued by new entrants to agriculture and agri-food. Managers can support this through identifying possible mentors for career and personal development. This is an important step forward, but further research into the nature and scope of mentoring in agricultural contexts is recommended.

The research highlighted that in terms of formal employee development, the purpose and potential of both induction and performance review are poorly understood and utilised. Although formal development activities were less common, and had less impact than informal, they were still perceived as being of medium or high value and impact by most participants. Interviewees also reflected on formal training or education leading to qualifications that ‘proved’ their interest and commitment. Content and timing of formal development activities affected impact; inductions of more than one day are a potential area for focus for supporting the development of new entrants to agri-food. This is an important discovery that warrants further testing and can be used to shape workplace practice.

Ultimately, new entrants to agriculture and agri-food benefitted when their employee development was designed to fit and support them in developing human capital that benefits the individual and their organisation. It is important to recognise that the needs of those from non-agricultural backgrounds might differ from the needs of those with an agricultural background, but potentially also differ from the needs of other new entrants. Given recognised shortfalls in managerial development across agriculture and agri-food, it may be that supporting managers with their own skillset and knowledge around employee development, could help to create workplaces where new entrants can be individually supported to learn, engage and develop. Approaches and effectiveness of managerial development in agriculture and agri-food is suggested as a key area for future research.

As noted earlier in this paper, future research should also focus on the many diverse employment contexts that exist within the agricultural sector, to support targeted future recommendations and a deeper understanding of how organisational and contextual characteristics influence new entrant development and support. It may be possible to draw from research into other traditional or family-dominated sectors i.e. hospitality, to explore whether agriculture and agrifood's challenges in attracting and developing new entrants are sector-specific or part of broader workforce development patterns. If the latter, evidence-based effective practice from other sectors may be of value in agricultural and agri-food contexts; its potential should be investigated.

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Declaration Statements

Conflict of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability

The original project report and data are available from The Farmers Club Charitable Trust at <https://tfcct.co.uk/read-our-fcct-reports> This journal article provides a concise and focused summary of certain elements of the original research and initial project outputs.

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Building Resilience Skills among Educational Managers: Latent Content Insights from Talent Development – Training Plans

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Abstract

As contemporary educational organisations face persistent operational challenges and evolving institutional demands, cultivating organisational resilience among their managerial ranks has become imperative. Amid rapid disruption and systemic transitions, educational managers encounter multifaceted pressures that necessitate proactive and sustained capacity-building. This study addresses this demand by investigating how organisational resilience is conceptualised and reinforced through Training Plans designed for Talent Development. Grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action, this qualitative inquiry employed Latent Content Analysis to examine Training Plans formulated by Filipino and Chinese doctoral students, each offering applied insights into dynamic leadership development and institutional adaptability. The analysis revealed three (3) distinct yet interrelated themes: *Tempering the Tensions*, *Treading toward Thriving*, and *Targeting the Triumphs*. These themes underscore the strategies for enhancing resilience across individual, relational, and systemic dimensions of educational management. Central to these findings is the cultivation of conflict navigation, strategic thinking, and outcome-orientation as foundational resilience skills. The study advances theoretical discourse by asserting that resilience-building is not a passive or incidental process but a deliberate endeavour shaped by belief systems and organisational contexts. Practically, the findings inform the design of training initiatives, enabling educational managers to integrate Organisational Development and Human Resource Management principles to sustain agile, responsive, and future-ready institutions.

Keywords: organisational resilience, educational managers, talent development, training plan, latent content analysis

1. Introduction

In the context of accelerating global and local transformations, organisations are compelled to adapt with agility to maintain relevance and performance (Day & Schoemaker, 2016). As they navigate environments marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), alongside conditions that are brittle, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible (BANI), the competencies of organisational members have become central to institutional sustainability (Millar et al., 2018). These compounded pressures not only underscore the strategic imperative of understanding internal and external organisational forces (Pedersen & Muhr, 2020), but also intensify the psychosocial and operational burdens borne by employees (Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019). Longitudinal trends in organisational dynamics highlight the importance of cultivating resilience capabilities to withstand disruption (Cieslak & Valor, 2024), overcome systemic constraints (Schweiger et al., 2018), and navigate socio-economic shifts (Erakovic & Powell, 2006). Sustainability imperatives, post-pandemic restructuring, and labour-related upheavals have made adaptive and continuous capacity-building essential in the 21st century (Lushyn & Sukhenko, 2022). Educational institutions, despite their distinct pedagogical functions and traditional foundations, face similar destabilising forces. They contend with

work-life imbalances, attrition, digital migration, and mental health challenges, placing them under pressure to build resilience comparable to other sectors (Dadvand et al., 2024). The imperative is clear: educational organisations must accelerate resilience-building to remain viable and future-ready.

Educational managers, situated at the core of teaching-learning organisations, are uniquely positioned to design adaptive systems that respond to institutional complexity across the spheres of people, processes, and products they shape and oversee (Greere, 2022; Sarid, 2021). As stewards of their academic institutions, they must be systematically capacitated to anticipate and address evolving challenges that, if left unattended, may result in fragmented workflows, erratic leadership spans, and deteriorating educational outcomes. The consequences of such neglect are far-reaching; when institutional processes stagnate, the integrity and effectiveness of the organisation decline, ultimately compromising student development (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021). This underscores the urgency of equipping educational managers with both theoretical grounding and actionable strategies for cultivating resilience. Defined in educational literature as the dynamic capacity to counter disruptions, realign internal operations, and renew institutional direction while sustaining the mission of learning and formation, organisational resilience is indispensable to the long-term viability of schools (Yuan & Huang, 2021). A lack of resilience among educational managers may lead to reactionary decision-making, diluted values, and weakened leadership credibility (Siltaloppi et al., 2019), while its presence enables managers to adapt constructively and maintain continuity in the face of adversity (White & Mpamhanga, 2024).

Organisational resilience has increasingly become a focal point within the fields of Organisational Development (OD) and Human Resource Management (HRM), particularly in the context of building talent pipelines (Khan et al., 2017), strengthening institutional systems learning (Evenseth et al., 2022), and developing contingency frameworks responsive to disruption (Nyaupane et al., 2020). Within this scholarly and practical discourse, capacity-building for educational managers emerges as a critical undertaking, particularly given their unique role in navigating institutional dilemmas and ethical decision-making. Conventional modalities for resilience-oriented development include professional learning communities, mentorship and supervision, leadership simulations, and reflective workshops (Owen & Wong, 2020), all designed to enhance both technical and interpersonal competencies. Central to these initiatives are Training Plans, which function as strategic blueprints for structured and contextually grounded skill advancement (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2019). These plans typically integrate authentic organisational scenarios to promote practical engagement and contextual sensitivity (Nicholls et al., 2015), while occasionally drawing from analogical fields such as healthcare, business, and behavioural sciences to foster transdisciplinary transfer of knowledge (Cummings & Worley, 2015). This intentional design enables educational managers to translate cross-sectoral strategies into actionable interventions aligned with their institutional mandates and evolving organisational contexts.

This qualitative inquiry is situated within such a transdisciplinary context. Unlike most inquiries on organisational resilience, which centred on systematic review and quantitative metrics (Hillmann, 2021; Hillmann & Guenther, 2021), this study explores organisational resilience from the lens of a seldomly used corpora of data: Talent Development – Training Plans. These Training Plans, originally crafted by Filipino and Chinese doctoral-level students enrolled in an

advanced OD and HRM course in a Philippine higher education institution, offer rich and contextually-embedded insights on leadership development, adaptive systems, and organisational behaviour that might be relevant to understanding of how organisational resilience is perceived at the conceptual level. The study departs from the prevailing literature by analysing such documents through a Latent Content Analysis (LCA) to surface implicit themes and patterns embedded in these textual corpora.

While existing research has explored organisational resilience in educational settings in the past (Limon et al., 2021), such inquiries have commonly focused on the development of resilience among classroom teachers (Mullen et al., 2021). There remains a notable gap in our understanding of how organisational resilience is inculcated among educational managers and deepened through qualitative data lifted from Talent Development – Training Plans, particularly in the context of the global south (e.g., The Philippines). Such plans were meticulously formulated by Filipino and Chinese doctoral students with considerable school management backgrounds and who can skilfully connect theoretical, academic, and applied viewpoints. Understanding this specific phenomenon is essential for revealing patterns within tacit organisational logic, leadership and management philosophies, and organisational systems thinking present in the dataset.

Considering these foregoing arguments, this qualitative inquiry purported to answer the **central research question**: *What themes illustrating the deepening of organisational resilience among educational managers may be derived from Training Plans developed within the context of Talent Development?*

2. Literature Review

2.1. People in Focus: Accentuating the Intersection of Work-Life Balance and Humanistic Interventions in Resilient Educational Organisations

Recent discourse in educational management reframes organisational resilience as a strategic, transferable skill essential to talent development and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)-aligned upskilling. Duchek (2020) conceptualises resilience through anticipatory, adaptive, and transformative capabilities, establishing it as an embedded function. Linnenluecke (2020) likewise highlights its systemic integration, while Medina-Garrido and associates (2023) affirm that institutional support for work-life balance reduces burnout and sustains well-being. Nyakoty and Goronga (2024) stress that emotional capacity and relational trust, fostered by ethical leadership, form the cultural core of resilient schools. Participative models mitigate exhaustion (Ahad et al., 2024), and structurally supported emotional labour enhances commitment (Yao et al., 2025). Mühl and Korunka (2024) further show that flexible scheduling boosts productivity and well-being. Taken together, these perspectives position resilience as a proactive, human-centred strategy for sustainability in education.

2.2. Process in Focus: Accentuating Open Systems and Change-related Mechanisms in Resilient Educational Organisations

Resilience is increasingly recognised as both a transferable employability skill and a strategic necessity for educational organisations facing rapid change. From an open systems perspective, it is maintained through boundary critique, adaptability, and stakeholder integration (Adams &

Lanford, 2021; Midgley & Rajagopalan, 2021). Organisational responses to disruption are shaped by contextual elements such as time, space, and culture (Baker & Welter, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis, for instance, prompted institutions to adopt participatory strategies and responsive resource use to sustain operations and learning (Jack & Pogodzinski, 2024). This shift entails digital reskilling and the evolving of teaching roles toward modular, personalised learning (Abysova et al., 2023). Addressing institutional inertia requires strategic leadership and continuous feedback to foster innovation and long-term quality (Bendermacher et al., 2020; Moradi et al., 2021; Ordonez-Ponce & Khare, 2020). Frameworks like Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) and Resilience-Intention-Sustain-Endurance (RISE) highlight how human resource development can enhance system-level resilience and support employability (Abysova et al., 2023; Al-Shahwani, 2020; Maher et al., 2020).

2.3. Product in Focus: Accentuating Total Quality Management as the Primary Byproduct of Resilient Educational Organisations

Organisational resilience in education, the institution's ability to anticipate, adapt, and recover from disruptions while maintaining instructional quality, is now viewed as a vital employability skill and a strategic enabler for sustainable development. Within Total Quality Management (TQM), resilience is demonstrated through continuous improvement and responsive adaptation to crises (Yu & Xiang, 2025; Zadok et al., 2024). Leadership commitment and collaborative educator efforts cultivate inclusive cultures that uphold quality and resilience (Konidari & Stathopoulos, 2025). Resilience is further strengthened by strategic innovation, inclusive practices, and learning outcomes (Delgado-Abad, 2022), underpinned by HRM strategies focused on service delivery (Lim, 2022). In the Philippines, curriculum refinement, teacher empowerment, and resource optimisation are key mechanisms for quality-driven resilience (Albert et al., 2023). Institutions exhibiting strong governance, responsive leadership, and stakeholder alignment have advanced resilience agendas (Cabacang, 2021; Gatdula, 2023), supporting global trends that link talent development to sustainability and the pursuit of SDG-aligned lifelong learning.

3. Theoretical Framing

This study is grounded in the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), which posits that behavioural intentions stem from attitudes toward a behaviour and prevailing subjective norms. In the context of educational management, TRA provides a valuable lens for analysing how beliefs and organisational expectations shape professional development efforts aimed at building resilience. The use of LCA to examine Training Plans aligns well with TRA, as these documents implicitly convey stakeholders' values, perceived norms, and strategic intentions. Training Plans act as proxies for institutional attitudes toward leadership development, reflect organizational expectations, and outline targeted actions for cultivating resilience. The thematic patterns that emerge from these texts illuminate the motivational and normative frameworks underpinning capacity-building initiatives. Thus, TRA offers a robust theoretical foundation for interpreting how educational managers internalise and act upon the imperative of organisational resilience.

4. Methods

4.1. Research Design

This qualitative study employed LCA to explore the deeper meanings and institutional intentions underlying educational Training Plans. Unlike traditional Manifest Content Analysis (MCA), which focuses on visible content and frequency counts, LCA interprets implicit themes, ideologies, and context (Bengtsson, 2016; Krippendorff, 2013). LCA is especially suited for uncovering how concepts like resilience and human development are subtly embedded in institutional discourse; elements often missed by MCA's surface-level approach (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). While methods such as ethnographic observation or phenomenological exploration could have also aligned with the TRA, LCA was deliberately chosen for its capacity to decode textual expressions of intention and belief, constructs central to TRA, directly from the Training Plans. By revealing these underlying narratives, LCA provides richer, more actionable insights that align with a constructivist view of meaning as socially and contextually shaped.

4.2. Instrumentation

The primary source of data for this qualitative study comprised Training Plans for talent development, constructed by early- to mid-career Filipino and Chinese doctoral students ($N = 6$), the majority of whom were under 35 years old and, at the time of the study, enrolled in an advanced course on OD and HRM in Education. Each Training Plan followed a standardised structure, consisting of a situational analysis, defined learning objectives, a theoretical foundation, proposed interventions, and evaluation protocols, allowing for a consistent and systematic comparison of conceptual and strategic orientations. These artifacts were not merely instructional outputs but functioned as reflective, professionally grounded documents capturing the plan designers' implicit beliefs and leadership logics concerning resilience, capacity-building, and organisational adaptability. In the Philippine context, such professional development Training Plans are often developed by industry practitioners and scholars-in-training as part of doctoral-level coursework. In this instance, school leaders and educational managers served as the intended recipients of such capacity-building interventions. As context-sensitive representations of practice-informed reasoning, the Training Plans served as a robust textual dataset for LCA, enabling the identification of underlying themes that reveal how emerging and practicing educational managers perceive and construct resilience within institutional settings. A synopsis of the Training Plans is provided in Table 1, while a representative Training Plan is included in the Appendix.

4.3. Mode of Analysis

This study employed Thematic Analysis to systematically identify and interpret latent patterns within the Training Plans, offering insight into how resilience and talent development are conceptualised in educational management contexts (Ahmed et al., 2025; Nguyen & Sondano, 2023). The method was particularly well-suited for extracting both explicit and implicit meanings from structured textual data, enabling the analysis of embedded assumptions and organisational strategies (McLeod, 2024). By integrating both inductive and deductive coding processes, the inquiry drew on TRA, while allowing salient themes to emerge directly from the data (Aksay & Sendogdu, 2022). Following Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase model, namely: data familiarisation, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition,

and report production; the researchers ensured a rigorous and consistent analytic process. All researchers participated in the Thematic Analysis, ensuring triangulated insights across the dataset. To further establish the reliability of coding, a 20% subset of the data was further independently coded and yielded an intercoder agreement of approximately Cohen's $\kappa \approx .80$. This level of reliability underscored the clarity of coding decisions and reinforced the analytical credibility of the study. The authors also jointly engaged in the analytical process of naming the themes and sub-themes, attending to conceptual coherence, linguistic clarity, and methodological rigour to ensure that each category accurately encapsulated the underlying codes across all processed Training Plans; while being mindful of their biases and prejudices.

TABLE 1. THE OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING PLANS USED AS CORPORA OF DATA ($N=6$).

TRAINING PLAN CODE	SYNOPSIS
Training Plan 1	The Training Plan revolves around enhancing organisational change and restructuring through participatory and strategic intervention. The capacity-building activities and interventions focused on the application of theories to real-world challenges. Each is crafted to immerse participants in diagnosing organisational issues and designing inclusive and adaptive intervention responses. Implementing these change strategies aligned with mission, structure, and stakeholder needs.
Training Plan 2	The Training Plan revolves around scenarios such as declining market share and customer satisfaction, structural inefficiencies rooted in bureaucratic systems, strategic misalignment between goals and execution, employee disengagement in change efforts, and stagnation in total quality management. The proposed interventions focus on equipping educators to conduct root cause analysis using diagnostic data, strengthening leadership to promote grassroots transformation through distributed governance, and anchoring organisational values to foster sustained stakeholder alignment and commitment.
Training Plan 3	The Training Plan revolves around three workplace scenarios that expose key organisational challenges: lack of a formal work-life balance policy, rigid HR systems, and high turnover risk. The capacity-building activities and interventions for educators centered on developing resilient leadership, aligning HR practices with employee realities, and fostering a culture of support to retain top talent.
Training Plan 4	The Training Plan revolves around enhancing educators' competencies in OD and HRM through the practical application of theory to real-world organisational challenges. Capacity-building interventions focused on analysing structural changes and their impact on HRM and performance systems, designing aligned appraisal frameworks for cross-functional teams, and applying best practices to evaluate outcomes. These efforts promote a holistic and strategic orientation to educational leadership and management.
Training Plan 5	The Training Plan revolves around enhancing OD and HRM capabilities among current and aspiring leaders navigating organisational change and complexity. Framed within a strategic transition scenario, it allows participants to address leadership challenges and systemic misalignments. Capacity-building activities focus on applying OD diagnostic tools and HRM frameworks to craft evidence-based strategies. Through simulations, collaborative analysis, and reflective exercises, participants cultivate systems thinking, strategic planning, and change leadership skills vital for fostering innovation and resilience across varied contexts.

Training Plan 6	The Training Plan revolves around an educational organisation that encounters balanced challenges amongst its economic, social, and ecological outcomes. The capacity building activities and interventions for educators centered on leveraging Network Development Interventions (NDI), and fostering stronger internal and external networks to support long-term, triple bottom line success.
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Source: Constructed by all of the authors; Refined by the first author (2025)

4.4. Ethical Considerations

The study did not involve human participants, nor did it require the collection of personal data, and thus was exempt from procedures typically associated with human subject research, including informed consent. The data corpora consisted solely of Training Plans produced by Filipino and Chinese doctoral students as part of a formal academic requirement in an OD and HRM in Education course in a Philippine higher educational institution. These documents were developed in response to case analyses adapted from a published textbook. To uphold intellectual property rights and avoid copyright infringement, the study did not reproduce or analyse the original case materials; rather, it focused exclusively on the students' original responses and interpretive strategies. All Training Plans were anonymised prior to analyses, ensuring the confidentiality of contributors and the integrity of the research process.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Tempering the Tensions: Cultivating Resilient Educational Managers

The first theme encapsulates the developmental imperative of preparing educational managers to develop resilience in navigating organisational complexity through adaptive learning and continuous upskilling. At its core is the understanding that cultivating resilience is not only a matter of institutional systems but also a reflection of individual capacity and openness to learn. Two sub-themes emerged in the first theme, namely: *Training for Teachable Educational Managers* and *Taming the Budding Tensions through Continuous Development*. The former captures the intentional shaping of educational managers' adaptive capacities, while the latter emphasises sustained learning as a means to pre-empt, recognise, and manage early signs of organisational strain. Together, they portray resilience as a cultivated, rather than innate, quality within education systems undergoing rapid policy reforms, shifting stakeholder expectations, and internal realignments.

5.1.1. Training for Teachable Educational Managers

The Training Plans 1, 2, and 4 converged in their focus on building adaptive leadership as a foundational element of resilience among educational managers. These plans position professional learning agility as a core trait of effective school managers, particularly in contexts characterised by organisational turbulence and stakeholder complexity. The Training Plan 1 foregrounds diagnostic and critical thinking skills among mid- to senior-level school managers. The lead trainer who crafted the Training Plan 1 intended that their participants are to be trained to lead change from within, transforming internal conflict into actionable pathways for institutional coherence. Its content aligns with open systems theory by encouraging educational managers to scan, interpret, and respond to internal and external pressures (Earl-Rinehart & Alcorn, 2019).

Additionally, the Training Plan 2 complemented this view by adding a dual focus: the strategic orientation for veteran school managers and the operational acuity needed by newly appointed ones. While experienced principals and school managers were trained to apply management skills across contexts, new leaders were introduced to systematic organisational self and personnel diagnosis. In this regard, the logic of TQM becomes relevant. In this Training Plan, the lead trainer ensured that both cohorts were guided to engage in ongoing performance evaluation and continuous improvement. Chang (2005) argued that these are tagged as critical tenets of TQM, thereby allowing for the construction of adaptable solutions among organizational leaders grounded in systemic analysis and collaborative refinement.

Further, the Training Plan 4 revealed how strategy, structure, and people practices intersect within educational management. The lead trainer who crafted this plan intended for the participants to be placed in real-world cases and reflective scenarios to exercise leadership beyond task management. Daniëls and collaborators (2021) emphasised that fostering teachability among educational managers is not a one-time event but a dynamic interplay of feedback, role clarity, and strategic implementation. Across the Training Plans in this sub-theme, convergence lies in their shared commitment to shaping educational managers who are proactive and open to recalibration. Divergence arises in the emphasis; Plan 1 stresses critical reasoning, Plan 2 dwells on intervention design, and Plan 4 centres on relational and communication dimensions of leadership. Collectively, they affirm that resilient organisations require teachable leaders, especially those willing to reframe challenges as opportunities for organisational evolution.

5.1.2. Taming the Budding Tensions through Continuous Development

The Training Plans 1, 4, and 5 collectively articulated the centrality of ongoing capacity-building in mitigating organizational tensions before they escalate. In Training Plan 1, the learning design of the lead trainer reinforced the utility of stakeholder engagement and collaborative problem-solving as mechanisms for defusing latent organizational stressors. The stream of OD lessons emanating from this Training Plan aligned with open systems thinking. Brion (2021) posited that by simulating dynamic interactions within schools and modelling how reflective leadership and adaptive feedback loops reinforce each other, educational managers enhance institutional responsiveness to any organisational crisis.

Moreover, the Training Plan 4 extended such a notion by situating leadership and management practices at the junction of competing demands being manifested by teachers, parents, students, and systemic accountability structures. The pool of activities curated by the lead trainer in this Training Plan highlighted the need for robust communication infrastructures and emotionally intelligent leadership. Continuous development was not framed as a technical skill-set upgrade, but as a practice of relational recalibration in the face of uncertainty. In this regard, WLB theory offers valuable insight. Marsh and associates (2023) averred that school leaders who are better equipped to harmonise conflicting institutional roles are more capable of sustaining long-term well-being, both individually and organisationally.

Furthermore, the Training Plan 5 deepened the sub-theme by exploring the interpersonal and emotional terrain of organizational tensions. By embedding trust-building exercises, the lead trainer of the Training Plan aimed to cultivate psychological safety. In the literature, Liu and Keller (2021) expounded that psychological safety is a prerequisite for innovation, resilience, and shared accountability. It extends the argument that resilience is not merely structural but

profoundly human. Consistent with change management principles, Tasic and fellows (2019) noted that organisational resilience is an emotional and relational journey rather than a procedural compliance. Across the Training Plans in this sub-theme, Plan 1 provided the cognitive tools, Plan 4 emphasised systemic navigation, and Plan 5 delved into affective integration, thereby offering a comprehensive schema for resilience-building through continuous learning among educational managers.

Evidently, the Thematic Analysis of the Training Plans under Theme 1 suggests several recommendations for strengthening organisational resilience among educational managers. First, professional development must be situated within a model of lifelong learning, where diagnostic, interpersonal, and adaptive capacities are continuously exercised and refined. Second, institutions must move from leader-dependent initiatives toward systems of distributed leadership, where resilience is embedded across roles and functions. Third, training designs must mirror the open-system nature of schools, acknowledging external pressures, internal feedback, and the importance of aligning people's practices with evolving strategy. In essence, the enduring value of these interventions lies in their capacity to cultivate self-aware, systems-literate, and emotionally intelligent educational managers; those who do not merely endure disruption, but transform it into a condition for organisational renewal.

5.2. Treading toward Thriving: Recalibrating Educational Management Processes for Adaptive Resilience

The second theme encapsulates the role of strategic organisational recalibration as a key driver of resilience in educational settings. At its core is the understanding that diligent planning, holistic thinking, and stakeholder engagement are crucial for adapting to change. Two sub-themes emerged in the second theme, namely: *Tweaking the Organisational Tactics and Strategies* and *Turning Around the Turbulent Organisational Systems*. The former captures the shift from reactive responses to proactive, data-driven planning, while the latter emphasises system recovery through procedural redesign and collaboration. Together, they portray resilience as a dynamic process of aligning structures, strategies, and people to sustain adaptability and development in education.

5.2.1. Tweaking the Organisational Tactics and Strategies

The Training Plans 1 to 6 converged in their focus on cultivating a paradigm shift in strategic thinking from passive response to active adaptation, emphasising that strategy formulation must balance the relationship between data diagnosis and stakeholder collaboration and viewing it as an important component of education managers' resilience building from theory to institutional internalisation. These plans position professional training with contextual similarities, identifying organisational strategies and strategic bottlenecks, and strengthening organisational system resilience as core characteristics of effective managers, thereby continuously improving the organisation's ability to adapt to internal and external changes.

The lead trainer who crafted the Training Plan 1 intended the participants would adopt a more proactive and systematic mindset while executing change strategies, ensuring that the restructuring process aligns with the mission, structure, and requirements of stakeholders. Glisson and associates (2012) posited that organisational reform ought to emphasise social context, including the influence of organisational structure, culture, and climate. The more an organisation's social context is clarified, the more effective the organisation is perceived.

The Training Plan 2 complemented this view from a methodological standpoint, emphasising that organisational strategy calibration can optimise organisational structure and cultural atmosphere through systematic diagnosis, combining qualitative and quantitative data and stakeholder collaboration, thereby increasing the organisation's resilience to change. In this Training Plan, the lead trainer ensured that the participants addressed the disparity between strategy and execution by reforming the comprehensive governance management process and promoting distributed leadership, aligning with Shet's (2024) assertion that empowerment was essential in a VUCA environment.

The Training Plan 3 proposed that the resilience strategies be linked to the policies of the local education sector. The lead trainer who crafted this plan intended participants to augment their contextual sensitivity and localization skills while improving their resilience policy design abilities to avert the reemergence of systemic blocking issues. To prevent mechanical application, methods must be formulated in conjunction with local restrictions, cultural context, and resource limitations. This aligns with Schensul's (2009) perspective on examining the science of systemic intervention through the four dimensions of science, community, culture, and sustainability.

The Training Plan 4 improved the capacity to connect theory and practice by emphasizing the conversion of OD and HRM theories into practical problem-solving strategies grounded in human experience. The lead trainer who crafted this plan intended to expose any deficiencies in the organisational structure via the participants' personal experiences, enhance the participants' appreciation of organisational complexity, and elevate the participants' collaborative and empathetic leadership skills. This aligns with Sarid and collaborators' (2021) proposal for an ecological model of school openness, which asserted that strategic design should include multiple perspectives and that training must foster cross-functional collaboration and stakeholder management skills.

The Training Plan 5 emphasised the cultivation of dynamic systems thinking and the enhancement of participants' ability to formulate predicted solutions. In this Training Plan, the lead trainer ensured a transition for participants from an experience-based decision-making model to one grounded in evidence while also reorienting leadership focus from problem-solving to opportunity creation. This corresponded with Barends and fellow's (2014) viewpoint that optimal decisions must be based on a synthesis of critical thinking and the most credible data. The core principle of evidence-based practice is that informed judgments must be founded on a synthesis of critical analysis and the most credible data accessible.

The Training Plan 6 advanced the view of organisations as dynamic adaptive systems that balance economic, social, and ecological aspects to promote sustainable value generation. The lead trainer who crafted this plan intended for participants to utilise NDI, a systematic strategic approach, to foster a thorough comprehension of the organisational ecosystem, including internal structure, external environment, and stakeholder network, thereby enhancing the ability of education professionals to improve organisational design. This corresponded with the concept of network as an information pipeline in the Flow Model proposed by Borgatti and Halgin (2011).

Across the Training Plans in this sub-theme, convergence lies in the objective of enhancing educational managers' ability to reformulate organisational strategies through systematic thinking, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven decision-making, thereby strengthening organisational resilience and fostering sustainable development. Divergence arises in the

emphasis: Plan 1 prioritises the comprehensive transformation of strategic thought; Plan 2 seeks to address barriers to organisational change through diagnostic data; Plan 3 focuses on improving capacity for cross-industry policy adaptation in education; Plan 4 investigates the connection between personal experience and theoretical frameworks; Plan 5 highlights situational simulation and proactive intervention; and Plan 6 is committed to the practice of aligning internal and external stakeholders to create an organisational resilience network. Collectively, they emphasise that resilient organisations require leaders who can constantly adapt, learn, and change in order to build resilience within educational institutions.

5.2.2. Turning Around the Turbulent Organisational Systems

The Training Plans 2, 3, 5, and 6 collectively articulated a method of transforming unstable organisational systems into adaptive, resilient networks capable of withstanding internal and external disruptions. In Training Plan 2, the learning design of the lead trainer focuses on translating vision into actionable activities through TQM training and role-playing with stakeholders, grounded in a thorough organisational diagnosis. To address systemic disruptions such as cultural misalignments, burnout among educators, and a decline of trust within educational communities, training plays a crucial role in successful TQM implementation, with various approaches and organisational aspects influencing its effectiveness (Oakland & Waterworth, 1995). Furthermore, Lesha (2017) highlighted that active learning methods, particularly role-playing, enhance participants' skills and self-efficacy in managing complex challenges.

Moreover, Training Plan 3 advanced cognitive rigor through inquiry and peer diagnostics to inculcate organisational resilience in educational leadership. Peer learning partnerships can build organisational resilience in schools through knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation, and social capital development (Godfrey & Muñoz-Chereau, 2024). The lead trainer of the Training Plan reinforces the use of problem-oriented, inquiry-driven, and Socratic methodologies by educational management, fostering systemic thinking through scenario analysis. In fact, role-playing scenarios is an effective approach for developing not only personal attributes but also resilience capabilities in future leadership (Hillmann et al., 2018).

Additionally, Training Plan 5 provides a distinct perspective to the discussion of educational resilience by framing organisational turbulence as a strategic turning point rather than a breakdown. In this Training Plan, the lead trainer ensured the use of high-conflict examples and incorporated the Burke-Litwin Model with Action Research. The Burke-Litwin Model is a diagnostic tool for assessing factors influencing organisational success. It differentiates between transformational and transactional factors such as leadership and culture, as well as procedures and structures. It facilitates discovering underlying causes by visualising twelve interrelated dimensions. Such an approach is beneficial for setting action goals during a period of organisational change (Martins & Coetzee, 2009).

Training Plan 6 leverages NDI to build capacity among educational leaders and stakeholders. The lead trainer of the Training Plan desired to move beyond internal redesign by emphasising network development as an instrument for establishing adaptive capability among educational leaders and stakeholders, transforming segmented systems into resilient, interactive networks. It is based on principles of sustainable transformation and aligns with the triple bottom line (social, environmental, and economic objectives), fostering resilience as both a verifiable condition and an administrative competence that enables organisations to withstand disruptions

while sustaining progress toward long-term goals. Hasyim and Bakri (2024) charted the impact of sustainable development training on community resilience marketing, enhancing participants' knowledge and promoting collaborative practices. The interconnectivity of partnership is vital for implementing effective strategies and ensuring the longevity of knowledge created to collaboration (Holman, 2013). Across the Training Plans in this sub-theme, Plan 2 provided capacity for transformation, Plan 3 resilient leadership development, Plan 5 strategic change readiness, and Plan 6 collaborative and resilience-building.

Evidently, the Thematic Analysis of the Training Plans under Theme 2 suggests several recommendations for strengthening organisational resilience among educational managers. First, organisational resilience must be strengthened by transforming managers' attitudes from passive to active responses and by always developing and refining dynamic strategic processes using calibration tools such as performance metrics, scenario analysis frameworks, and benchmarking systems. Second, organisations should prioritise a stakeholder-participatory system reconstruction strategy, wherein stakeholders collaboratively create solutions to address profound challenges and improve organisational resilience. Third, the training design should incorporate the use of adverse event simulations as an opportunity for systematic learning and procedural improvement, clearly conveying the situational and operational contexts to trainees so as to facilitate the transfer of knowledge across domains. In essence, the value of these interventions stems from their capacity to empower education professionals to perpetually identify issues through acquired methodologies, address problems scientifically, and consistently improve organisational resilience to foster sustainable development within the organisation. Together, they offer a unified approach to navigating change and sustaining procedural transformation.

5.3. Targeting the Triumphs: Aligning Educational Management Outcomes with Resilient Productivity

The third theme encapsulates the strategic imperative of aligning educational leadership development with organisational resilience and productivity goals. At its core is the understanding that resilient productivity is not simply the continuity of outputs, but the deliberate cultivation of systems that adapt, integrate, and evolve in response to internal and external complexities. As Duchek (2020) and Linnenluecke (2020) suggested, resilience in education requires the reconfiguration of capabilities, relationships, and metrics to ensure that performance is sustained even amid volatility. Two sub-themes emerged in this third theme, namely: *Tracking and Sustaining Talent Trajectories* and *Tuning Actions Toward Impact and Visibility*. The former captures how talent development infrastructures scaffold institutional continuity, while the latter underscores how visibility and strategic positioning amplify leadership influence. Together, they portray resilience not as mere reactive stability but as a proactive and systemic alignment of people, processes, and purpose.

5.3.1. Tracking and Sustaining Talent Performance Trajectories

The Training Plans 2, 4, 5, and 6 converge in their focus on demonstrating a clear and aligned approach to performance sustainability as a system-wide leadership function. These plans position talent development not as isolated upskilling but as an embedded feature of educational resilience. The lead trainer in Training Plan 2 emphasised the importance of aligning performance management systems with institutional strategy. Through the strategic use of feedback loops, organisational diagnostics, and support mechanisms such as targeted training,

participants will be taught to develop systemic acuity in identifying and addressing performance gaps. This aligns with Chang's (2005) interpretation of TQM as a feedback-rich environment where continuous improvement becomes a shared leadership task.

In Training Plan 4, the lead trainer designed a hands-on leadership intervention focused on action planning as a vehicle for long-term talent development. By embedding OD and HRM principles into practical exercises, the trainer designed the plan in a way that the participants will be anticipating institutional challenges, establishing accountability mechanisms, and engaging in reflective problem-solving. The trainer structured the sessions to include iterative self-assessment and adaptive planning, encouraging leaders to continuously recalibrate their strategies and performance goals. This approach not only fostered differentiated talent pathways but also activated institutional learning loops that promote resilient productivity and systems-level improvement (Teece, 2018). Through this design, the trainer can cultivate a leadership culture rooted in strategic foresight and accountability, as well as critical capacities for sustaining meaningful change in complex educational environments.

Meanwhile, the lead trainer in Training Plan 5 offered a more diagnostic and psychological perspective by inviting participants to explore the cultural underpinnings of performance dysfunction. Through exercises such as peer feedback, group analysis, and reflective synthesis, the trainer constructed a psychologically safe space conducive to vulnerability and candour. These are the elements that Nyakoty and Goronga (2024) and Liu and Keller (2021) deemed as essential for transformational leadership. Moreover, the strategic use of HRM models can encourage participants to develop sustained interventions grounded in performance data.

In Training Plan 6, the lead trainer extended the scope of talent development by integrating ecological consciousness and social accountability into the leadership learning process. Through the strategic use of NDI, such as network mapping, capacity benchmarking, and collaborative visioning, the trainer encouraged participants to move beyond technical skill-building and embrace systems-based leadership. Rather than treating talent as an isolated individual trait, the trainer guided educational managers to situate leadership within interconnected institutional, environmental, and societal ecosystems. By framing talent development as a collective and sustainable endeavour, the trainer reinforced a trajectory of performance grounded in interdependence and long-term impact. Reflecting the framework of Bendermacher and fellows (2020), the intervention emphasised that cultivating quality culture in higher education requires participatory, multi-level governance, underscoring that resilient leadership must be inclusive, dialogic, and oriented toward the future.

While these plans converged in their emphasis on performance tracking, Training Plan 3 diverged slightly in focus. Rather than focusing on performance per se, the lead trainer in Plan 3 crafted a culminating policy development exercise that prioritised systemic responsiveness and boundary-spanning leadership. Maher and associates (2020) advocated for such approaches, noting that educational leaders must be adept at navigating policy ecosystems as part of their adaptive portfolio. Therefore, although not explicitly performance-driven, Training Plan 3's orientation to policy aligns with Open Systems Theory and strengthens institutional flexibility.

Across the Training Plans under this sub-theme, convergence is evident in their shared commitment to embedding performance sustainability as a core strategy for resilient educational leadership. Training Plans 2, 4, 5, and 6 collectively emphasise the shift from episodic performance evaluation

toward continuous, developmental, and context-sensitive talent cultivation among educational managers. These are anchored in feedback loops, psychological safety, cultural diagnostics, and networked accountability structures. Divergence is observed in the specificity of each plan's intervention: Plan 2 integrates visibility strategies within TQM systems to recalibrate organisational alignment; Plan 4 emphasises personalised action planning as a vehicle for performance transformation; Plan 5 incorporates a strategic workforce planning simulation to prepare educational managers for high-stakes decision-making; and Plan 6 links leadership roles to institutional sustainability through ecological and social frameworks. On the other hand, Plan 3 diverges in form, focusing on policy-based agility and boundary-spanning leadership. Nevertheless, this divergence remains synergistic, reinforcing the broader paradigm that resilient productivity stems from adaptive thinking and institutional responsiveness.

5.3.2. Tuning Actions toward Impact and Visibility

The Training Plans 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 collectively articulated an intentional shift toward translating leadership actions into visible, measurable institutional influence. The lead trainer of Training Plan 1 structured the sessions to ensure alignment between personal leadership practices and institutional philosophy, thereby fostering strategic congruence. Drawing from Open Systems Theory, the trainer emphasised that leadership effectiveness is heightened when internal decisions are anchored in responsiveness to external demands (Midgley & Rajagopalan, 2021). Participants were encouraged to ground their professional identity in organisational relevance, transforming abstract vision into operational influence.

In Training Plan 2, the lead trainer positioned visibility as a strategic tool for driving institutional transformation, rather than as a peripheral concern. Grounded in TQM principles, the trainer designed sessions that emphasised the generation, interpretation, and strategic use of performance data as key indicators of leadership credibility and organisational resilience. Participants were guided to move beyond tracking outcomes and instead engage in adaptive metrics analysis, learning how to use data to recalibrate priorities and narrate institutional progress. Through structured feedback loops, case-based simulations, and storytelling exercises, the trainer intended to cultivate a form of narrative governance, where educational leaders learn to frame data within compelling reform narratives aligned with institutional priorities such as strategic planning objectives and leadership performance metrics. Reflecting Cabacang's (2021) view of visibility as a conscious, data-informed governance function, the trainer embedded this capacity within communication and planning cycles, equipping leaders to steer their institutions with foresight, accountability, and strategic clarity.

The lead trainer in Training Plan 3 adopted a theoretical-practical bridging approach by scaffolding contextualised case studies that culminated in a collaborative policy development exercise. This design positioned participants not merely as policy learners but as collaborative policy architects, capable of aligning OD, HRM, and legal literacy with localised education governance. Implicit in this strategy was an orientation toward strategic visibility, where leadership is demonstrated through the formulation of context-sensitive, theory-informed policy innovations. The plan can instil an evidence-informed advocacy stance, encouraging participants to interrogate institutional constraints and respond with actionable, policy-grounded interventions. This approach aligns with Fullan's (2016) assertion that sustainable reform emerges from the integration of leadership, policy, and practice within educational institutions. Similarly, Delgado-Abad (2022) emphasises that innovation grounded in

institutional realities enhances resilience, an outcome mirrored in this training's emphasis on participatory, systems-responsive policymaking.

Notably, the Training Plan 5 trainer redefined visibility as a core organisational capability. Through metaphor analysis, strategic advocacy simulations, and impact-centred presentations, the training emphasised the need for leadership clarity and communicative precision. Although strong in OD-HRM integration, the absence of structured metrics such as key performance indicators (KPI) or dashboards limited its alignment with TQM's measurement ethos (Konidari & Stathopoulos, 2025).

In Training Plan 6, the lead trainer redefined visibility as a systems-based leadership outcome by embedding talent development within the institution's broader sustainability agenda. Drawing from an ecological perspective, the trainer guided participants to see visibility not as individual recognition but as the result of aligning leadership roles with institutional values and stakeholder ecosystems. Using the NDIs, such as stakeholder mapping, role integration, and collaborative visioning, the trainer intended to facilitate exercises that encouraged interdependence, mission coherence, and contextual responsiveness. Through reflective sessions and strategy co-creation, the trainer could help participants reframe visibility as a relational construct, grounded in meaningful engagement and cross-sector alignment. This approach aligns with the principles of systems leadership in education, which emphasise stakeholder integration, adaptive networks, and moral purpose as catalysts for systemic change (Glowach, 2025).

Across the Training Plans in this sub-theme, convergence is seen in their mutual regard for visibility as a strategic, rather than superficial, construct. Plan 1 prioritised personal alignment; Plans 2 and 3 focused on data-anchored integration; Plans 5 and 6 expanded visibility to include advocacy and ecological engagement. Divergence exists in the degree of formalised metrics and external stakeholder involvement. Yet, collectively, the plans underscore that resilient visibility is the product of systemic alignment between leadership action, organisational communications, and external validation (Greenwood et al., 2023; Zadok et al., 2024).

Evidently, the Thematic Analysis of the Training Plans under Theme 3 suggests several recommendations for strengthening organisational resilience among educational managers. First, institutions must embed longitudinal talent development frameworks that go beyond episodic evaluation and foster continuous growth through coaching, feedback systems, and competency benchmarking (Kravariti & Johnston, 2019). Second, leadership programs should integrate structured visibility metrics, including KPIs, institutional dashboards, and stakeholder engagement indices, to ensure strategic alignment and measurable outcomes (Konidari & Stathopoulos, 2025). Third, network-based collaboration and ecological accountability must be foregrounded in leadership training, allowing educational managers to lead not only within but also across institutional and societal boundaries, reinforcing mission alignment and long-term relevance (Maher et al., 2020). Together, these strategies elevate educational management from operational oversight to strategic stewardship. This form of leadership not only ensures internal coherence but also amplifies institutional credibility, adaptability, and social legitimacy in an evolving educational landscape.

5.4. Thematic Synthesis and Eidetic Insights

The Thematic Analysis culminated in the identification of three intertwining themes that map directly onto discrete yet interrelated skill clusters, actionable interventions, and SDG 4 targets,

thereby underscoring the integrative purpose of the Training Plans (Table 2). Under the thematic category *Tempering the Tensions*, the sub-theme *Training for Teachable Educational Managers* reflects the critical need for cultivating *Emotional Intelligence* among school managers. This connection underscores the value of self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal acumen in managing educational environments. By engaging with Reflective Journals and Peer Coaching, managers are not only able to enhance their own emotional literacy but also to model emotionally intelligent behaviours across their home institutions. These illustrative actions foster environments conducive to understanding, dialogue, and inclusive growth, thereby advancing SDG Target 4.7, which aims to promote education for sustainable development, peace, and global citizenship. Complementing this, the sub-theme *Taming the Budding Tensions through Continuous Development* aligns with the skill cluster *Conflict Navigation and Resolution*, addressing the capacity to mediate, negotiate, and defuse institutional friction before it escalates into systemic dysfunction.

TABLE 2. THE THEMATIC SKILL CLUSTER-TRAINING PLAN-SDG TARGET MATRIX

THEME (SUB-THEME) [LCA]	SKILL CLUSTER	ILLUSTRATIVE TRAINING PLAN ACTIONS	SDG 4 (QUALITY EDUCATION) TARGET
Tempering the Tensions (<i>Training for Teachable Educational Managers</i>)	Emotional Intelligence	Reflection Journals; Peer Coaching	4.7 (Equip learners with knowledge and skills for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace, global citizenship, and cultural diversity)
Tempering the Tensions (<i>Taming the Budding Tensions through Continuous Development</i>)	Conflict Navigation and Resolution		
Treading toward Thriving (<i>Tweaking the Organisational Tactics and Strategies</i>)	Procedural Innovation	Scenario-based Simulations; Policy Formulation	4.4 (Substantially increase youth and adult skills for decent work and entrepreneurship)
Treading toward Thriving (<i>Turning Around the Turbulent Organisational Systems</i>)	Strategic Thinking		
Targeting the Triumphs (<i>Tracking and Sustaining Talent Performance Trajectories</i>)	Functional Data and Metric Literacy	Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Dashboards; Objectives and Key Results (OKR) Periodic Reviews	4.4 (Substantially increase youth and adult skills for decent work and entrepreneurship)
Targeting the Triumphs (<i>Tuning Actions toward Impact and Visibility</i>)	Outcome- orientation		

Source: Constructed by the first and last author (2025)

Meanwhile, the theme *Treading toward Thriving* encapsulates institutional progression through adaptive capacity and foresight. The sub-theme *Tweaking the Organisational Tactics and Strategies* points to the development of *Procedural Innovation*, a skill cluster crucial for restructuring processes and introducing novel operational flows. Scenario-based Simulations and Policy Formulation Tasks, as illustrative actions, enhance problem-solving capacity and adaptive decision-making; skills aligned with SDG Target 4.4, which advocates for the upskilling of youth and adults

for decent work and entrepreneurship. Similarly, the sub-theme *Turning Around the Turbulent Organisational Systems* is grounded in the skill cluster *Strategic Thinking*, advancing leaders' ability to assess long-term scenarios and reposition organisational goals accordingly.

Finally, within the theme *Targeting the Triumphs*, the sub-theme *Tracking and Sustaining Talent Performance Trajectories* supports the acquisition of *Functional Data and Metric Literacy*, while *Tuning Actions toward Impact and Visibility* sharpens the capacity for *Outcome-Oriented*. Through tools such as KPI dashboards and OKR reviews, educational managers develop an evidence-based lens for decision-making, ensuring targeted, measurable contributions to educational equity and efficacy; both central to the fulfilment of SDG 4.4.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative research aimed to explore the implicit dimensions and deepening of organisational resilience among educational managers by analysing Talent Development – Training Plans. Through LCA, three (3) major themes were drawn from these plans: *Tempering the Tensions*, which emphasises the need for adaptive learning and continuous professional development in navigating resilient and organisational complexities of educational managers; *Treading toward Thriving*, which highlights strategic recalibration of educational processes to enable proactive strategies and system-oriented resilience; and *Targeting the Triumphs*, which prioritises the alignment of training initiatives with resilient and institutional productivity. These themes, while distinct, collectively accentuate the transformations of educational management from a reactive approach to a proactive and strategic one. The TRA was pivotal in framing these findings. The TRA allowed for the identification of underlying beliefs, institutional norms, and leadership intentions embedded in the Training Plans, highlighting the role of conceptual and normative frameworks in fostering effective capacity-building initiatives. These themes accentuate the understanding of organisational resilience, paving the way for educational managers to respond to the need for intentional development of their competencies, systems-based reasoning, and aligned strategy execution.

Theoretically, the research contributes by integrating TRA with LCA to introduce a new lens of analysis to explore resilience as a behavioural construct reflected in developmental documents. It expands grounded understanding of resilience development at the managerial tier. This emphasises the potential of Training Plans as repositories of organisational intentions, attitudes, and norms; an understudied yet valuable data source in educational research. Practically, the findings offer actionable insights for educational managers, curriculum designers, and training facilitators. Through adaptive leadership development, participatory organisational recalibration, and performance-oriented training approaches, educational managers can benefit from reframing their roles; not just as administrators, but as cultivators regardless of context. This results in a deeper understanding of how to systematically cultivate resilient behaviour and systems, particularly in environments where educational institutions face compounding pressures from socio-economic, technological, and policy-driven changes.

Despite its contributions, this research has notable limitations. Primarily, it analysed Training Plans that were conceptual in nature and non-operationalised in practice, which limits the ability to gauge actual implementation outcomes or behaviour change. The dataset was also contextually bounded, drawn exclusively from a particular disciplinary setting. Nonetheless, the rigorous and meaningful LCA and thematic triangulation helped to mitigate concerns about

generalisation and reliability. Future research may build upon these thematic findings by engaging in more immersive qualitative approaches such as cross-case study and ethnography. This may include fieldwork-based inquiries that include observations, interviews, and follow-up documentation to validate the resilience that educational managers embody in practice. It is also imperative to test the emergent matrix across non-educational sectors such as healthcare, business, and government administration, among others, to evaluate its cross-sectoral applicability and adaptive relevance. Such directions will help expand the theoretical robustness and practical transferability of resilience-building strategies in diverse organisational contexts.

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Appendix: Sample Training Plan (TP No. 3)

Target Participants:

Department Heads (Master Teachers) and **School Principals** of Department of Education (DepEd)-affiliated basic education institutions in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Rationale:

As frontline educational leaders and managers, Department Heads and Principals play a pivotal role in shaping school culture, managing public school teacher welfare, and fostering sustainable professional environments. Their capacity to understand and address complex issues like burnout, rigid leadership and managerial mindsets, ineffective delegation, and generational transitions directly influences teacher performance, morale, and retention.

Learning Objectives:

A. Cognitive:

- Analyse Organisational Development (OD) and Human Resource Management (HRM) challenges presented in the pre-assigned sub-scenarios from a larger case study by identifying root causes, key actors, and structural implications, and connect them to the Philippine public education context;
- Synthesise evidence-based and policy-driven solutions drawn from OD and HRM principles, relevant DepEd Orders, and national laws to address systemic issues affecting the public education workforce; and
- Evaluate the feasibility and sustainability of the policy recommendations through structured peer critique and reflective questioning.

B. Affective:

- Demonstrate respectful and collaborative professional behaviour by adhering to agreed-upon norms of professional conduct, contributing meaningfully to team tasks, and engaging constructively in feedback sessions;
- Value the relevance of equitable OD and HRM practices in improving organisational practices and supporting educator well-being; and
- Internalise the importance of connecting OD and HRM theories with one's lived experience as a public education leader/manager by reflecting on how local public school realities parallel corporate case studies.

C. Psychomotor:

- Collaborate effectively in learning teams to conduct focus group discussions, generate diagnostic questions, and formulate policy-based solutions relevant to specific OD and/or HRM scenarios;

- Present synthesised case analyses and evidence-based policy recommendations in oral reports, demonstrating clarity, coherence, and integration of legal, organisational, and educational standpoints; and
- Utilise digital tools and visual platforms (e.g., Mentimeter) to communicate insights, summarise ideas, and enhance interactivity during the training session.

Training Plan Proper:

A. Introduction

- The Lead Trainer (AKA The Doctoral Student) starts the half-day onsite capacity-building session by formally orienting the trainees on the expected behaviours and professional etiquette while in training. This sets the tone for a respectful, focused, and collaborative learning environment that fosters productivity and intellectual engagement.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Classroom Management

- This approach aligns with the principles of classroom management as it establishes clear behavioural norms and expectations at the outset. By proactively delineating boundaries and promoting mutual respect, the Lead Trainer ensures a conducive atmosphere for adult learning, reduces the likelihood of disruptions, and enhances the overall efficiency of the training session.
- Following the orientation, the Lead Trainer facilitates an interactive icebreaker activity inspired by a *Rebus* game. Visual puzzles are projected via LED TV or a projector, requiring trainees to decode combined images that represent key terms from the trainees' pre-assigned readings. As an example, an image showing a balance scale with the words "work" and "life" implies the answer "*Work-Life Balance*."

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Motivation and Game-based Learning (GBL)

- This strategy harnesses the principles of motivation and game-based learning. The use of an engaging, cognitively stimulating activity energises participants, fosters collaboration, and primes their recall of foundational concepts. By referencing the preliminary reading materials, the game also reinforces knowledge retention and strengthens connections between abstract concepts and visual cues.
- After the icebreaker, the Lead Trainer provides an overview of the training objectives and the sequence of planned activities. This includes an open floor discussion for questions and clarifications, ensuring all participants are aligned in their understanding of the day's flow.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Classroom Management and Levelling of Expectations

- This aligns with effective classroom management and expectation-setting strategies by fostering transparency, trust, and accountability. Clarifying objectives and processes upfront minimises confusion, empowers learners with a roadmap of the session, and encourages shared responsibility for learning outcomes.

B. Case Study Analysis

- The Lead Trainer transitions to the central agenda of this part of the training session by processing the pre-assigned sub-cases uploaded on Canvas Learning Management System or Google Classroom. The material is drawn from Case 5.1 "*Employee Benefits at HealthCo.*" (Cummings & Worley, 2015). Trainees are pre-divided into three learning teams, with each team assigned a specific sub-case. They are allotted twenty (20) minutes to analyse and discuss the scenario, focusing on the identification of pressing Organisational Development (OD) and Human Resource Management (HRM) challenges.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Flipped Classroom and Small/Focus Group Discussion

- The strategy aligns with the Flipped Classroom model by requiring learners to engage with foundational materials before the session, allowing the on-site interaction to centre around higher-order analysis. The Small/Focus Group Discussion format fosters peer learning, critical dialogue, and diversified perspectives, making abstract theories more relatable through social learning.
- Upon completion of group discussions, each team selects a representative to summarise the key points and identified issues in a ten (10) minute presentation. While one team presents, the others teams generate two (2) diagnostic or needs analysis questions related to the presenting scenario. A five (5) minute Q&A follows each presentation.

Sample Convergent and Divergent Probing Questions:

Scenario 1: Legal Department

1. *How can longstanding policies at HealthCo. contribute to perceptions of rigidity and undervaluation among high-performing staff?*
2. *What organisational structures might mitigate burnout and retention risks for employees with caregiving responsibilities outside work?*

Scenario 2: Laboratory Services

1. *How can informal support mechanisms evolve into sustainable organisational practices?*
2. *What barriers exist in implementing work-life support in high-demand, continuous-operation units?*

Scenario 3: Pediatrics Department

1. *What policy-level interventions can promote phased retirement without compromising institutional consistency?*
2. *How can mentorship programs be structured to ensure retention of institutional knowledge and leadership succession?*

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Problem-based Learning (PBL), Inquiry-based Teaching and Learning (IBTL), and Socratic Questioning (SQ)

- These strategies emphasise learner-driven exploration of real-world issues. Problem-based learning fosters analytical thinking and solution-oriented discussion, while inquiry-based learning encourages the formulation of critical questions that deepen understanding. Socratic questioning enhances intellectual rigor by probing assumptions and revealing underlying values in each case.
- Following the discussion, the Lead Trainer flashes a QR code on screen leading to a secure *Mentimeter* platform where trainees anonymously submit takeaways in the form of keywords summarising the HRM and OD issues discovered. Results appear in real-time, hence allowing for visual synthesis among the trainees or participants.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Reflective Learning or Reflection-on-Action

- Reflective learning is embedded here as trainees introspectively condense their case learnings into single-word insights. This promotes metacognition, reinforces knowledge acquisition, and facilitates communal or peer learning through visible keyword appreciation.

C. Application of Organisational Development and Human Resource Management Principles

- Drawing from the keywords in the last component of the training, the Lead Trainer uses dynamic and direct instruction teaching strategy to deliver a structured PowerPoint presentation covering essential concepts: *Workforce Diversity and Wellness, Work-Life Balance, Staffing, Employee Benefits (Leaves), and Succession Planning*. Trainees are encouraged to raise clarifying questions during or after the discussion.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Direct Instruction, Structured Inquiry, and Socratic Questioning

- Direct instruction delivers foundational knowledge in a clear and organised manner. Structured inquiry encourages trainees to contextualise concepts within their professional realities, while Socratic questioning stimulates deeper exploration and critical examination of prevailing OD and HRM practices.
- Trainees will then reconvene in learning teams and will be prompted to identify similar occurrences in the DepEd system that mirror their assigned sub-cases. They will analyse how these situations manifest in the public education system in the Philippines, citing challenges and contextual constraints. They will be given twenty (20) minutes to accomplish the brainstorming activity. Afterwards, they will be instructed to select one (1) representative to report about the realities in the DepEd setting as it mirrored their pre-assigned sub-case from the book of Cummings and Worley (2015). Each learning team will be given five (5) minutes to report or speak about it.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Prior Knowledge Activation

- This strategy leverages the trainees' existing professional experiences as a scaffold for new learning. By connecting case studies to real DepEd contexts, the trainees personalise abstract concepts and deepen their relevance.

D. Development of Solutions and Recommendations

- As the three learning teams already culled an analogous incident existing in the DepEd system that is parallel to their originally assigned sub-case, they will be prompted to arrive with policy-based solutions to somehow resolve the said recurring problem. To accomplish this, each learning team will be provided with printed copies of the following:

- **LEARNING TEAM 1 (Scenario 1)**

Expected Core Issues in DepEd: Work-Life Balance conflict, burnout, rigid organisational development mindset, last-minute planning, and retention risks.

Applicable DepEd Policy:

DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2009 – *Establishing a Policy Framework for Work-Life Balance in the Department of Education* (This policy advocates for the institutionalisation of Work-Life Balance mechanisms and underscores the responsibility of leaders to create supportive work environments, especially for employees with caregiving duties.)

Relevant Philippine Law:

Republic Act No. 11165 – *Telecommuting Act of 2018* (This law supports alternative work arrangements such as remote work and flexible schedules, which are critical for employees balancing caregiving and high-demand professional roles.)

- **LEARNING TEAM 2 (Scenario 2)**

Expected Core Issues in DepEd: Lack of empathy-driven support or individualised consideration and reliance on politicised initiative.

Applicable DepEd Policy:

DepEd Order No. 35, s. 2004 – *School-Based Management (SBM) Framework* (Encourages decentralised and context-sensitive decision-making; including support for staff welfare initiatives.)

Relevant Philippine Law:

Republic Act No. 11036 – *Mental Health Act of 2018* (This law mandates organisations to provide workplace mental health policies and services, institutionalising what Francis informally offers and ensuring sustainable support for staff with caregiving stressors.)

○ **LEARNING TEAM 3 (Scenario 3)**

Expected Core Issues in DepEd: Lack of phased retirement, retention of institutional knowledge, and missed mentorship opportunities.

Applicable DepEd Policy:

DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2011 – *Policies and Guidelines on Training and Development Programs* (This policy promotes professional learning and mentorship, enabling the design of systems where senior educators like Robin can transfer knowledge through structured mentoring roles before full retirement.)

Relevant Philippine Law:

Republic Act No. 9994 – *Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010* (This law encourages continued engagement of senior citizens in institutional and community programs, providing legal grounds for phased retirement and post-retirement mentoring models.)

- Each learning team is expected to come up with policy recommendations to prevent the similar incidents from happening in the DepEd context. Their recommendations should be centering on the supporting actual or relevant DepEd policy or Philippine Law; and must be supported by the principles of OD and HRM covered in the previous theoretical discussion. They will be given one hour or 60 minutes to accomplish the theoretical and legal formulation of proposed policies.

E. Discussion and Sharing

- Each learning team will then present its policy recommendations in a thirty-minute report. Presentations should integrate the legal bases and OD and HRM principles learned so far in the training session. While one team presents, the other two teams will be given the chance later to critique the feasibility of the proposed policy solutions in a five-minute commentary.

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Mini-Portfolio Sharing and Reporting

- Mini-portfolio sharing and Reporting encapsulates the trainees' interpretive, analytical, and solution-building processes in a concise format. This promotes ownership of learning and allows for authentic peer validation.
- To facilitate the critical analysis and constructive feedback during the peer evaluation portion of the policy recommendations, the Lead Trainer will project the following guide questions. As part of the CONTINGENCY PLAN of the Lead Trainer, in the event that the trainee-evaluators will be experiencing difficulty in appraising the policy recommendations using the guide questions, a prepared Developmental Rubric will be offered to them as an alternative evaluation tool. Please see the **Assessment section** of this Training Plan to view the said Rubric.

○ **CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT GUIDE QUESTIONS:**

- a. *How do the proposed policy solutions align with the overarching goals and policies of the Department of Education (DepEd)?*
- b. *Considering the current resources and infrastructure, how feasible and sustainable are the recommended policy interventions?*
- c. *What potential impacts, both positive and negative, might these solutions have on various stakeholders, including teachers, students, and administrative staff?*

Teaching and Learning Strategy: Peer Evaluation

- Peer Evaluation is a collaborative learning strategy that engages participants in assessing each other's contributions, fostering a deeper understanding through critical analysis and reflection. In this context, it encourages trainees to critically appraise the solutions proposed by their peers, promoting a culture of constructive feedback and continuous improvement.

F. Conclusion

- Once the *Discussion and Sharing* portion are both done, the Lead Trainer will briefly cover and synthesise the extent of the OD and HRM problems and issues through the presentation of trends about the problematic areas that they have just covered.
- The presentation of the trends that will substantiate their policy recommendations will be culled from scholarly journals and news articles. The purpose of this strategic late exposition of the literature support is NOT TO PREEMPT AND INFLUENCE the isolation of the OD and HRM problems from the assigned sub-case derivation of recommendations of the trainees. Moreover, this purposeful action serves as a way to reaffirm that the experiences of the DepEd personnel are no way different from what is transpiring across the country and in other professions or disciplines. The expected scholarly journals and news articles that the Lead Trainer will present are as follows:

- **Scholarly Journals:**

Dominado, N. L., & Valdez, L. G. (2021). Stress in the workplace, depression, and academic workloads of public school teachers. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 2(5), 417–423. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.02.05.08>

Quines, L. A., & Arendain, E. I. (2023). Job satisfaction, organisational culture and work-life balance: Structural equation model of organisational commitment among public school teachers. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(9), 285–316. <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejes/article/view/4971/7605>

Enad, F., & Pabalan, A. P. (2023). Employment management in the public schools: A proposed recruitment, selection, and placement system. *Psychology and Education*, 13, 618–625. <https://doi.org/zenodo.8354727>

News Articles:

Chan, J. (2024). Filipino teachers need workload reform. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/179491/filipino-teachers-need-workload-reform>

Salcedo, M. J. (2025). Teachers welcome DepEd's 57% cut in their paperwork. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/2066928/teachers-welcome-depeds-57-cut-in-their-paperwork>

Adonis, M. (2021). Yet another challenging year for public school teachers. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1486913/yet-another-challenging-year-for-public-school-teachers>

Teaching and Learning Strategy Used: Understanding by Design (Backward Design Approach)

- By introducing evidence-based data and trends after the trainees have developed their analyses and policy recommendations, the Lead Trainer ensures that participants' learning is authentic and grounded in actual challenges.

- The session will formally conclude with the Lead Trainer expressing appreciation for the active participation and collaborative spirit demonstrated by the trainees, emphasising the importance of continued engagement and application of sound OD and HRM principles in the educational setting.
- The Lead Trainer will then flash a Quick Response (QR) code of the Google Form bearing the Evaluation Link for the outgoing capacity-building session.
- Upon the successful completion of the evaluation form, the Google Form platform has been configured to send two (2) additional reading materials as supplementals that the trainees could read to further enrich their knowledge about the prevailing OD and HRM issues in the Philippine public education system. Such readings will be automatically sent to the registered email of the trainee. The said materials are as follows:

Supplementary Reading Materials:

Lupu, I., & Ruiz-Castro, M. (2021). Work-life balance is a cycle, not an achievement.

Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/01/work-life-balance-is-a-cycle-not-an-achievement>

Act Forum Online. (2023). *Filipino Teachers, Stand Firm for Salary, Rights and Education! Struggle for a Nationalist, Progressive and Free Education!* <https://actforum-online.medium.com/filipino-teachers-stand-firm-for-salary-rights-and-education-2d3a371e60aa>

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Conflict of Interest

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Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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Does the Winner Truly Take It All? Rethinking Youth, Perpetual Competition, and Character Development Through a Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Competition is an intrinsic aspect of human behaviour, evolving from fundamental survival mechanisms to complex socio-cultural phenomena such as status acquisition, achievement recognition, and recreational engagement. Despite its ubiquity, our understanding of competition—particularly among vulnerable youth—remains limited, with variability across cultural, temporal, and individual contexts. This systematic literature review, based on high-quality peer-reviewed articles, seeks to analyse the opportunities and challenges of early competition, providing a comprehensive overview for stakeholders. The review focuses on three key areas: competition in general, its advantages and disadvantages, and its future prospects. The findings indicate that, notwithstanding prevalent negative associations (e.g., akin to war), competition and cooperation are interdependent constructs that collectively underpin motivation, engagement, and developmental processes across diverse domains. Here, an interesting paradox emerged: healthy competition fosters cooperation by enhancing motivation and goal attainment, while its absence may reduce engagement and intrinsic motivation. By its nature, competition produces unequal outcomes, generating winners and losers, which can elicit diverse psychosocial responses (ranging from pressure to pleasure). Despite limited cognitive understanding of competition, children evidently show preferences for competitive play structures, which, when thoughtfully managed from an early age, foster the development of essential life skills such as resilience, coping strategies, humility, and teamwork. As per the findings, foundational principles including fairness, equity, and a calibrated balance between challenge and enjoyment are essential to fostering adaptive coping and positive developmental trajectories. However, effective implementation requires sustained collaboration between parents and educators, prioritizing cooperative, task-focused pedagogies and fostering

respectful relational dynamics through appropriate feedback, guidance, pressure. Additionally, the alignment of expectations with children's developmental readiness—accounting for individual and contextual factors—seems to be crucial for optimizing developmental outcomes. The review concludes by outlining methodological limitations and emphasizing the need for further research due to the limited understanding in this field.

Keywords/key phrases: globalisation, competition, coping with winning and losing, youth, character development, systematic literature review (SLR)

1. Introduction: A 'Win or Perish' Scenario from Early Times?

Competition has long been embedded in human society, historically celebrating exceptional individuals—rulers, generals, and Olympians—who gained status, power, and recognition. Rooted in evolutionary and social mechanisms such as self-interest, individuality, freedom, herd instinct, social comparison, (in)equality, scarcity, and the formation of hierarchy and rules, competition has always shaped hierarchy and rule systems (Thorbjørnsen, 2019). Many secured immortality through history, as we believe the victors often shaped the narrative...

In today's globalized and digitized world, driven by rapid change and VUCA dynamics (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) illustrated by challenges such as long-ongoing conflicts in the East, the COVID-19 pandemic, or climate change, the pressure to excel begins early. Children are increasingly exposed to competitive demands in academics, sports, and extracurriculars, aiming to secure future opportunities in an intense global labour market (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). Globalization, ICT, and AI advancements have intensified these demands by eroding spatial and temporal boundaries, raising standards and expectations (Achoki, 2023; Bajor et al., 2019; Donald & Mouratidou, 2022; Fellows, 2024; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Németh et al., 2021; Omelchenko et al., 2018). While national talent was once celebrated independently, individuals now compete on a global scale, pushing parents, teachers, and coaches to emphasize high performance from early childhood. Márta Fülöp, a Hungarian psychologist specializing in competition, noted that although the human tendency to compete remains constant, competitive stimuli have multiplied—particularly in school environments and on social media (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). As Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016, p. 311) put it; *"higher education has become a crowded global marketplace"*, adapting to an increasingly digital and dynamic environment.

This growing pressure is reflected in various cultural contexts. In the USA, this pressure is frequently dramatized in American media, where students are shown juggling demanding schedules, challenging coursework, and extracurricular activities in their pursuit of admission to elite universities—a common theme in many films. These challenges can lead to significant stress, sometimes even driving reliance on performance-enhancing substances to cope (Choi et al., 2014). Meanwhile, on the other side of the globe, in China, the intense academic pressure during entrance exams has historically led to tragic outcomes reported by many news sources, including a rise in student suicides, underscoring the grave consequences of an excessively competitive environment (Andrada, 2023; Zhao et al., 2018).

These developments raise urgent questions: How does lifelong competition affect youth development? Is it worth and/or sustainable? Does the winner really take it all? Building on existing literature, this review explores both the benefits and challenges of early and ongoing competition. It aims to identify critical factors for supporting children, parents, educators, and coaches in fostering resilience and mitigating the potentially adverse effects of excessive competition in an increasingly demanding world.

2. Systematic Literature Review

The following section discusses the methods, design, and findings of the paper.

2.1. Method & Design

To explore the complex phenomenon of early competition, this study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) focusing on peer-reviewed international research related to competition and character development. SLR enables the transparent, replicable identification, evaluation, and synthesis of existing literature. Studies were selected from major databases—including Scopus, EBSCO, ScienceDirect, and Web of Science—based on predefined inclusion criteria, followed by a manual refinement of relevant sources (Anand et al., 2022; García-Peñalvo, 2022; Gough et al., 2012; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021; Okoli, 2015; Paul & Barari, 2022; Paul et al., 2023). The review proceeded through structured phases of screening, appraisal, and synthesis to ensure methodological rigor and comprehensive coverage:

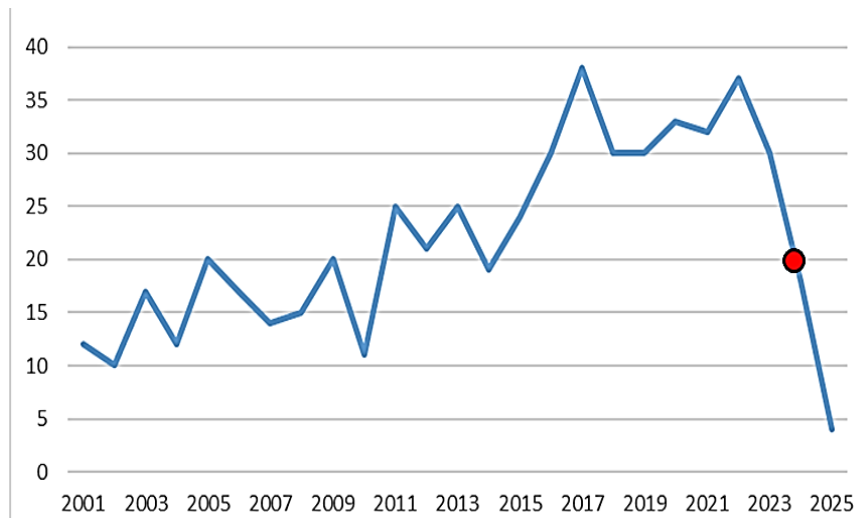
1. Article identification: A web search was conducted to locate potentially relevant papers within the primary domains of interest. The parameters were as follows:
 - a. Year published: no limitations (data gathering concluded in January 2025)
 - b. Keywords: competition & character (development)
 - c. Keywords scope: title/abstract/keywords
 - d. Language: English
2. Selection of relevant articles: The exclusion criteria emphasized high-impact journals (based on Scimago.com rankings) and prioritized open-access full-text publications. Included sources comprised of books, book chapters, conference proceedings, forum papers, summit reports, notes, and research articles/reviews in English, with duplicates removed.
3. Qualitative analysis of papers: The selected documents were manually analysed qualitatively to identify the most relevant papers and key themes for this study:
 - a. Loosely related: mentions competition and youth without these being a central focus (excluded).
 - b. Partially related: discusses the implications of competition on youth development to some extent (included).
 - c. Closely related: focuses on the pros and cons of competition for youth (included).

This process yielded a comprehensive overview of the literature, highlighting key trends, methodologies, and publication patterns, and informed the development of a conceptual model to structure the paper's findings.

2.2. Relevant Literature

As Figure 1 indicates, publication trends show a marked rise in scholarly interest in terms related to this study since the 2000s, underscoring the topic's growing relevance (based on the initial review stage, using given keyword searches limited to English-language publications).

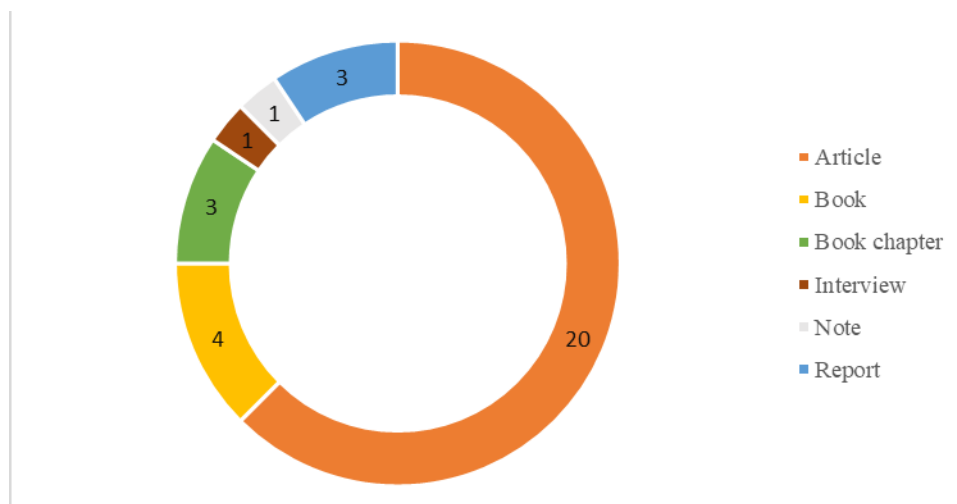
FIGURE 1. STAGE 1 DOCUMENTS BY YEAR OF PUBLICATION (N=769)



Source: own compilation

The initial broad search required refinement to ensure relevance and quality. As advised, by applying further filters such as access, source type, and journal ranking, we narrowed the selection for manual qualitative analysis. Given the topic's specificity, additional relevant articles were identified through supplementary searches (e.g., following the example of Griszbacher (2024) using Google Scholar as an additional source), enhancing the dataset. Together, these steps yielded the key sources forming the basis of this review (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. SELECTED DOCUMENTS FOR THE REVIEW (N=32) BY TYPE



Source: own compilation

From a methodological perspective, research on this topic seems to frequently employ experiments (e.g., Castle & Howells, 2024; Deci et al., 1981; Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004; Vallerand et al., 1986a, 1986b; Wadhwa & Kim, 2015), meta-analyses (e.g., Johnson et al., 1981; Stanne et al., 1999) and discussion papers (e.g., Choi et al., 2014; Daniels, 2007; Kochanek et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2017) to explore its complex landscape. To uphold a consistent standard of quality, the analysis primarily focused on papers from Q1-Q2 journals:

TABLE 1. PAPERS IN SCOPE BY JOURNALS

Author	Title	Journal	Q
Agans et al. (2018)	Peer motivational climate and character development: Testing a practitioner-developed youth sport model.	Journal of Adolescence	Q1
Castle and Howells (2024)	Model for effective learning in competition: a pedagogical tool to enhance enjoyment and perceptions of competency in physical education lessons for young children.	Children	-
Choi et al. (2014)	Children's development through sports competition: Derivative, adjustive, generative, and maladaptive approaches.	Quest	Q1
Daniels (2007)	Cooperation versus competition: Is there really such an issue?	New Directions for Youth Development	Q2
Deci et al. (1981)	When trying to win: Competition and intrinsic motivation.	Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	Q1
Epstein and Harackiewicz (1992)	Winning is not enough: The effects of competition and achievement orientation on intrinsic interest.	Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	Q1
Fülöp (2009)	Happy and unhappy competitors: What makes the difference?	Psychological Topics	-
Fülöp and Jurišević (2020)	The beauty and the beast paradigm: Is it good or bad to be competitive? An interview with professor Márta Fülöp.	Horizons of Psychology	-
Garcia et al. (2013)	The psychology of competition: A social comparison perspective.	Perspectives on Psychological Science	Q1
Johnson et al. (1981)	Effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic goal structures on achievement: A meta-analysis.	Psychological Bulletin	Q1
Kochanek et al. (2019)	Competitive readiness: Developmental considerations to promote positive youth development in competitive activities.	Journal of Youth Development	Q4
Mossman and Cronin (2018)	Life skills development and enjoyment in youth soccer: the importance of parental behaviours.	Journal of Sports Sciences	Q1
Nguyen (2017)	Competition as cooperation.	Journal of the Philosophy of Sport	Q2
Omelchenko et al. (2018)	Competition as a factor of social development.	Studia Warmińskie	-
Rieger et al. (2014)	The winner takes it all: The effect of in-game success and need satisfaction on mood repair and enjoyment.	Computers in Human Behavior	Q1
Stanne et al. (1999)	Does competition enhance or inhibit motor performance: A meta-analysis.	Psychological Bulletin	Q1
Tauer and Harackiewicz (2004)	The effects of cooperation and competition on intrinsic motivation and performance.	Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	Q1
Thornton (2013)	The winner takes it all?	Practical Pre-School	-
Uyanik et al. (2023)	The analysis of relationship between competition styles and play skills of preschool children.	International Journal of Progressive Education	-

Moreover, current winner-take-all dynamics are thought to favour risk-takers, potentially disadvantaging more risk-averse individuals (Rieger et al., 2014).

As noted by Fülöp (2004, 2009) and Stanne et al. (1999), competition is a complex, pervasive feature of human societies, embedded within systems of both cooperative and competitive relationships. According to Deutsch (2014, p. 4), one of the founding fathers of the field of conflict resolution, social dynamics depend on goal interdependence—positive (“*sink or swim together*”) or negative (“*if one sinks, the other swims*”, and vice versa)—with most situations involving a mix of both. As per Garcia et al. (2013), Festinger’s social comparison theory further explains how individuals engage in competition to assess and improve their performance relative to others, which is also often influenced by socialization patterns (Fülöp, 2022). While competition offers valuable competence feedback, especially in zero-sum settings, it can also reduce intrinsic motivation following failure, despite individuals’ fundamental need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Rieger et al., 2014; Vallerand et al., 1986a, 1986b).

Modern competition manifests early and in diverse forms, influenced by individual, situational, and cultural factors, and is often driven by social comparison in both real and digital environments. While young children may not fully grasp the concept, they naturally engage in competitive behaviours—competing for toys, attention, grades, or extracurricular success (Bajor et al., 2019; Daniels, 2007; Fülöp, 2004, 2009; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Kochanek et al., 2019; Stanne et al., 1999; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004; Thornton, 2013; Uyanık et al., 2023; Vallerand et al., 1986a, 1986b). Playtime serves as a vital context for learning and development, enabling children to explore, express emotions, and acquire cognitive, social, and emotional skills safely. Despite definitional variations, play is widely recognized as essential to childhood development, with cooperative and competitive play both contributing to early literacy, numeracy, and broader competencies (Parker & Thomsen, 2019). Notably, children often prefer competitive play, which enhances attention, motivation, and performance, suggesting the value of balancing enjoyment with challenge in early education (Castle & Howells, 2024; Uyanık et al., 2023).

Societal norms often glorify a win-at-all-costs mindset, fostering hyper-competitive behaviours in youth settings. While this result-driven culture can motivate excellence, it may also overwhelm young participants. Competitive readiness, as Kochanek et al. (2019) noted, is a gradual process shaped by individual and environmental factors. If introduced appropriately, competition can empower rather than intimidate. Although children demonstrate cooperative behaviours from infancy (Warneken, 2018), those aged 3–7, in Piaget’s pre-operational (egoistic) stage, may struggle with the emotional demands of competition (Castle & Howells, 2024). Competition is learned—emerging around age five—and by age ten (Uyanık et al., 2023), children begin using peer feedback for self-evaluation (Choi et al., 2014; Daniels, 2007; Kochanek et al., 2019). Hence, age-appropriate support and consideration of developmental stages are critical to ensuring that competition fosters growth without undue pressure.

Fostering positive youth development requires setting realistic expectations aligned with children’s physical, mental, and emotional readiness—shaped by factors such as maturity, traits, prior experiences, motivation, and social evaluation (Kochanek et al., 2019). While competition, particularly in sports, is influenced by these variables, Thornton (2013) noted that children naturally develop competitiveness. Therefore, rather than avoiding early competition, efforts should guide it constructively. As Kochanek et al. (2019) and Castle and Howells (2024) emphasized, competition is not inherently good or bad; its developmental impact depends on its delivery and the child’s perception.

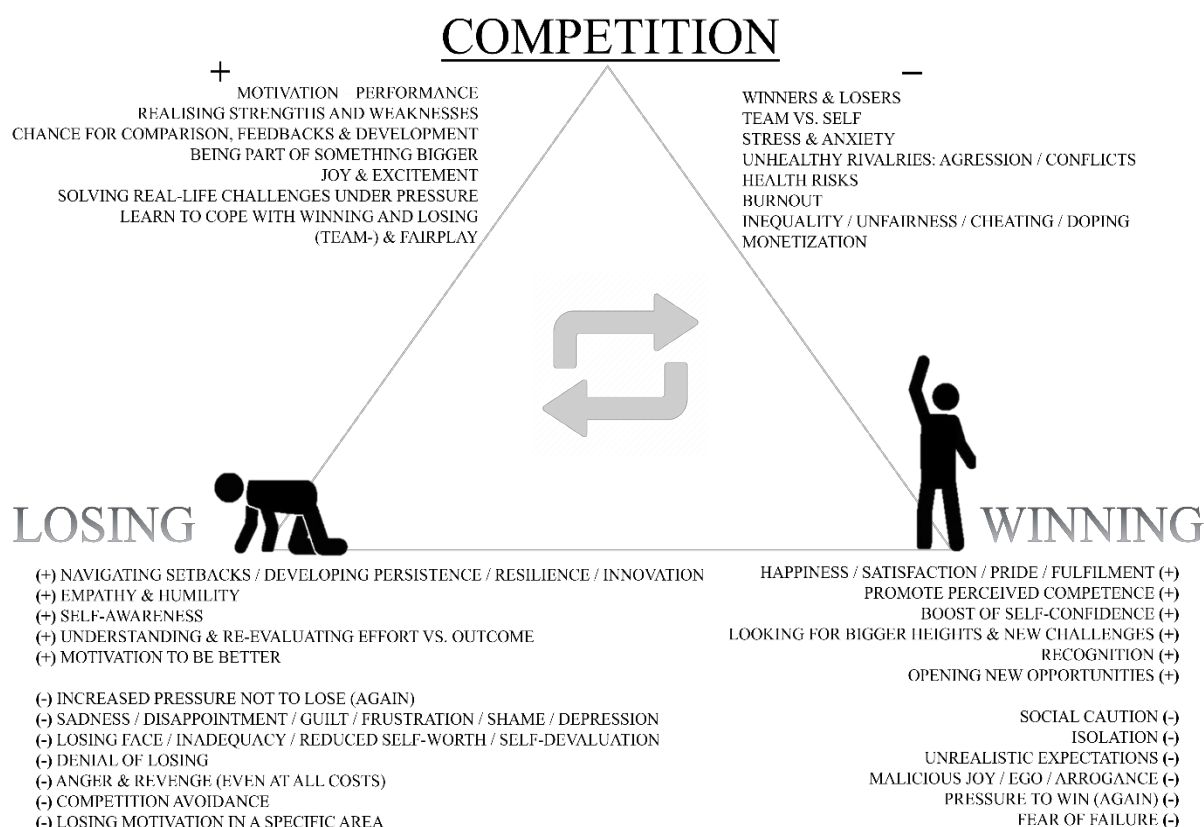
3.2. Winning or Losing? Experiencing the Pros and Cons of Competition Early On

The win–lose structure of competition can exert emotional and psychological pressure. Accordingly, Fülöp and Jurišević (2020, p. 128) described a desired “*balanced*” coping pattern: winners feel proud and motivated for new challenges, while losers may feel disappointed but remain determined—promoting resilience regardless of outcome. However, repeated success may also trigger pressure to maintain performance, potentially leading to stress and reduced engagement in other areas (e.g., over-investing in competition and failing to balance sports and academics; Choi et al., 2014). As Thornton (2013, p. 19) notes, being a consistent winner—or “*big fish in a small pond*”—can also limit opportunities to build resilience. Repeatedly outperforming weaker peers may diminish motivation, increase boredom, and hinder the development of persistence. This dynamic, visible in both education and youth sports, may contribute to burnout, particularly among high-achieving children (“*gifted kid burnout*”; Grugan et al., 2024). When later faced with stronger competition, such individuals may struggle with self-doubt and underperformance.

Additionally, Wadhwa and Kim (2015) found that while clear failure may reduce motivation, near-success can heighten it, often intensifying effort toward unrelated tasks. Rooted in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, this “*almost winning*” effect can drive persistence and even fuel engagement in activities like gaming (see also “*The Gamification of Learning*” by Sailer & Homer, 2020). Thus, partial or near-success may serve as a powerful motivator across diverse contexts.

Schools are key arenas for constant comparison—grades, skills, and performance—all contributing to a competitive academic climate (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). As education increasingly resembles a globalized marketplace (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016), many families still prefer the “*small fish in a big pond*” model, valuing peer learning opportunities (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020, p. 130). Early failure, while emotionally challenging, can foster resilience, persistence, and adaptability (Choi et al., 2014; Kochanek et al., 2019). Learning to manage pressure, time constraints, and public evaluation equips children with strategies to navigate future high-stakes environments. As Daniels (2007) and Kochanek et al. (2019, p. 49) argue, such formative experiences are key to developing responsibility, purpose, and “*competitive kid capital*.”

FIGURE 4. THE TWO FACES OF COMPETITION



Source: own design based on Agans et al. (2018), Bajor et al. (2019), Choi et al. (2014), Daniels (2007), Fülöp (2009, 2022), Fülöp and Juriševič (2020), Kochanek et al. (2019), Thornton (2013)

As summarized in Figure 4, competition can motivate growth, support peer relationships, and foster character development. Yet, it may also cause stress, anxiety, and conflict. Its effects depend on goals and context—while balanced competition is beneficial, extremes of hypercompetitiveness or complete avoidance are problematic (Fülöp & Juriševič, 2020). Tauer and Harackiewicz (2004, p. 210) note that competition is a “*double-edged sword*,” potentially undermining intrinsic motivation when perceived as over-controlling or enhancing it through challenge and positive feedback.

As shown in Figure 4, both winning and losing can negatively impact mental health, causing stress, burnout, or fear of failure. As a result, Thornton (2013, p. 18) questioned: “*How young is too young to encourage children to compete to be best in sport or any aspect of life? How are we to nurture the majority, who (on purely statistical grounds) cannot be winners, or the children who will generally be losers?*”. These questions become especially critical during early developmental stages when children’s brains are malleable and vulnerable to external influences (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Kochanek et al., 2019), such as coaches, parents, competitors and referees in this case. Competition may lower self-esteem and motivation in young children, risking disengagement and diminished lifelong interest, affecting health and well-being. This developmental stage is critical for shaping children’s preferences, including their attitudes toward competition and free-time activities. While evidence shows that competitive behaviours can emerge as early as age four, enjoyment remains a key factor influencing children’s preferences and willingness to engage in an activity (Castle & Howells, 2024).

Many studies reviewed focus on sports competition (e.g., Agans et al., 2018; Castle & Howells, 2024; Choi et al., 2014; Daniels, 2007; Mossman & Cronin, 2018; Nguyen, 2017), reflecting parallels between sports and other competitive settings like classrooms, where individuals develop skills, face challenges, and compete for success (Daniels, 2007). Choi et al. (2014) emphasized (sports) competition as pivotal in shaping children’s identities. Sports offer an ideal setting for adolescent development due to high participation and social-emotional engagement. Skill acquisition and enjoyment drive participation, with enjoyment crucial for retention and dropout prevention. Coaches, peers, and parents—through appropriate praise, guidance, and pressure—significantly influence life skills development (Mossman & Cronin, 2018). Children learn actively from experiences and social contexts, because emotions and relationships deeply impact learning—and stem from how children are treated at school, home, and in their communities—a positive (supportive) climate is essential. It fosters the physiological and psychological conditions necessary for effective learning (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

FIGURE 5. CHILDREN GAME DAY RULES ILLUSTRATING EARLY COMPETITION CHALLENGES



Source: own design based on Choi et al. (2014) and Murphy (1999)

In early development, emphasis should be on pleasure rather than pressure, though parents and coaches may sometimes overlook this (Figure 5). A win-centred approach can foster excessive competition, leading to poor social skills, unrealistic expectations, and fragile self-concepts (Choi et al., 2014). Murphy’s *“The Cheers and the Tears”* book (1999) provides valuable insights and alternative approaches to navigating the competitive and stressful world of youth sports. The book addresses questions such as, *“Put Fun and Development into Your Child’s Youth Sports Experience?”*, *“My son came home in tears and says he wants to quit the team—why??”*, *“How can I make practices and games fun??”*, *“When my daughter gets injured, is she playing too hard or getting pushed too hard??”*, *“I suspect my son may be taking steroids—what should I do??”*, *“Are competitive sports bad for my child?”*.

Thornton (2013) highlighted the delicate balance in managing competition among young children: while winning is naturally preferred (find key reasons in Figure 4), inevitable winners and losers can cause frustration and lasting impact on both children and parents (Figure 5). Early exposure to low-stakes competition helps children (and parents) learn to navigate these

inequalities. The Positive Coaching Alliance's "*Triple-Impact Competitor*" model encourages character development by focusing on improvement of 1) self, 2) teammates, and 3) the game rather than just outcomes (Agans et al., 2018). This approach nurtures character traits that extend beyond the sports context. Similarly, Kochanek et al. (2019) and Mossman and Cronin (2018) stressed that growth and the acquisition of life skills are most likely when youth engage in developmentally appropriate environments, both internal and external, guided by supportive adult mentors.

It is observed that framing an activity as serious competition often reduces intrinsic motivation by shifting focus from enjoyment to winning (Deci et al., 1981; Fülöp, 2009; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004; Vallerand et al., 1986a, 1986b). Intrinsic motivation—engaging for inherent pleasure—is undermined when competition fosters a controlling environment prioritizing outcomes (e.g., "*must beat the opponent at all costs*") over mastery (e.g., "*making a nice pass*"). This shift, marked by external pressures, deadlines, and even (money) rewards, especially harms children and amateurs by diminishing enjoyment, long-term interest, and psychosocial development (Choi et al., 2014). As summarized by Epstein and Harackiewicz (1992), control, information, and competence evaluation processes critically influence intrinsic interest. Many can recall overly strict parents, coaches, or teachers whose harsh methods left lasting negative impressions, causing individuals to harbour aversion or resentment toward a subject or activity even decades later.

Children's motivation to achieve competence is clearly influenced by parents and coaches (Daniels, 2007; Kochanek et al., 2019; Mossman & Cronin, 2018). Well-motivated athletes who enjoy their sport are more likely to persist and benefit from competition, especially in supportive environments with moral role models (Agans et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2014; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Conversely, hostile atmospheres and pressure can impair performance and reduce persistence, leading some children to quit activities (just think of a young child ending a game early with a "*never playing again*" tantrum after repeatedly losing rounds to older siblings in a board game). As a consequence, adults must understand children's perceptions of competition, avoid forced participation, and as mentors guide competitive experiences sensitively (Daniels, 2007; Kochanek et al., 2019; Thornton, 2013). Encouraging healthy interactions between winners and losers and promoting rivals as partners is essential, as unguided competition may be harmful (Fülöp & Juriševič, 2020). In sports, an individualistic, win-focused culture can foster toxicity, while a task-oriented climate emphasizing mastery, skill development, and teamwork enhances enjoyment and performance (Daniels, 2007; Fülöp & Juriševič, 2020). Task orientation encourages athletes to focus on skill development, embrace challenges, and improve against the best, regardless of winning or losing (see equally "*other-referenced competition*" and "*task-referenced competition*" in Fülöp and Juriševič (2020, p. 125)).

Despite potential drawbacks, leisure activities like competitive sports and games are vital for well-being. Many engage in these intrinsically motivated (switch-off) programs, hobbies during free time, enhancing enjoyment and social bonds (Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992; Stanne et al., 1999). Mahayosnand and Sabra (2024) highlighted rising depression and anxiety in Gen Z, underscoring leisure's role in improving mental, physical, and emotional health, as well as life satisfaction and employability. For example, amateur sports support holistic development and healthy lifestyles, but outcomes depend on perceptions and competition structure. Properly

managed competition fosters behavioural growth, moral development, cooperation, and social skills, while also offering psychosocial and therapeutic benefits (Choi et al., 2014). However, Mahayosnand and Sabra (2024) cautioned that the commercialization of such activities may harm mental health, raising concerns about intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation.

3.3. The Inevitable Presence of Competition: Future and a Double-Edged Reality

It is clear that competition cannot be simply labelled good or bad, nor eliminated, as it is inherent to society and essential for goal pursuit and well-being (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). Societies have always competed—over resources, in sports, and through economic systems—with competition evolving alongside social development into complex forms involving self-regulation and social control (Fülöp, 2004; Omelchenko et al., 2018). Competitive skills are crucial for youth to realize their potential and optimize talents, with competitions serving as key mechanisms to identify gifted individuals across fields like science, arts, and sports (Bajor et al., 2019). Today’s competition extends beyond physical resources to the contest for talents themselves, vital in knowledge-based economies where attracting and retaining talent is a critical global concern (Achoki, 2023; Bajor et al., 2019; Donald & Mouratidou, 2022; Fellows, 2024; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Németh et al., 2021). Resultantly, talented individuals must develop adaptive coping strategies to succeed amid heightened standards. This intensified competition spans sports, arts, academics, and science, fuelled by financial stakes and supply-demand dynamics (Frank & Cook, 1996). Prestigious events like the Nobel Prize or the Olympics epitomize this phenomenon, not to forget that the entertainment industry also heavily invests in so-called game shows like *“Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”* or *“Survivor”*.

Despite its widespread appeal, the benefits of competition have been widely debated, especially given associated issues such as emotional distress, injury, and unethical behaviour (e.g., doping) (Daniels, 2007; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Johnson et al., 1981; Kohn, 1986; Stanne et al., 1999; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004; Vallerand et al., 1986a, 1986b). While competition can enhance performance, studies have shown that cooperation often yields even better outcomes than both competitive and individual conditions (Stanne et al., 1999; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004). However, findings remain inconsistent, influenced by variables such as setting, task type, and participant characteristics (Epstein & Harackiewicz, 1992; Fülöp, 2004; Johnson et al., 1981; Stanne et al., 1999; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004; Vallerand et al., 1986b). Historically framed in opposition to cooperation, competition has often been viewed negatively, complicating efforts to define when it is constructive—what Fülöp (2004, 2009) terms the *“Beauty and Beast”* paradigm. Main critics like Kohn (1986) argue that competition undermines motivation, promotes extrinsic goals, damages self-esteem, and fosters unethical behaviour, ultimately *“making everyone a loser”*. Eventually, such notes have led some to propose eliminating competition in schools and workplaces. Kohn and others propose restructuring institutions to eliminate zero-sum dynamics. Still, as Fülöp (2009) suggested, the impact of competition largely depends on its ethical and moral framing.

Nguyen (2017) explored a moral paradox in competition: players must engage intensely with opponents to fully enjoy the game, blending competition with cooperation. While some models view cooperation as intentional, Nguyen argued that competition can offer a context in which aggression is positively channelled depending on consent, intentions, and game design. This balance, however, is fragile. Poorly designed or unjust/unfair competitions risk long-term harm,

especially for youth (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). As Fülöp (2022) noted, fair competition allows winners and losers to celebrate mutual effort, reinforcing social bonds. In contrast, unjust competition fosters secrecy, mistrust, and a desire for revenge, weakening relationships and trust in future competitive contexts.

Evidently, most of us grow up in competitive societies, and whether we prefer it or not, we frequently find ourselves in competitive situations. Living under these circumstances necessitates learning to navigate both success and failure early on, developing resilience and maintaining integrity. While research has yielded valuable insights, it has also exposed limitations—particularly the tendency to frame competition narrowly, often in opposition to cooperation (Fülöp, 2004). Moreover, as concluded by Fülöp (2022) and Kollár and Szabó (2017), foundational theories in this field, largely developed between the 1980s and early 2000s, continue to shape current discourse, with few scholars challenging these frameworks (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). Consequently, determining the conditions under which modern competition yields positive outcomes remains an ongoing challenge. As Fülöp (2009) noted, the key question has shifted from whether competition promotes well-being to identifying which forms are most constructive. This reframing highlights important avenues for future research on how competition can support both individual development and societal progress:

1. How and when should children be introduced to competition?
2. What roles do parents, teachers, and coaches play in fostering healthy competition?
3. How do children perceive competition at various developmental stages?
4. What is the optimal balance of pressure for children (e.g., sports, academics, and extracurricular activities vs. fun-time a week)?
5. What are the most effective coping strategies for competition-related character development?
6. How do cultural, gender, and family dynamics influence (youth) competition?
7. What is the appropriate level of parental involvement in children's competitive activities?
8. How can we ensure positive competition and character development?
9. What is the right balance between competition and cooperation?
10. To what extent and for how long can competition remain (healthy) in our lives?

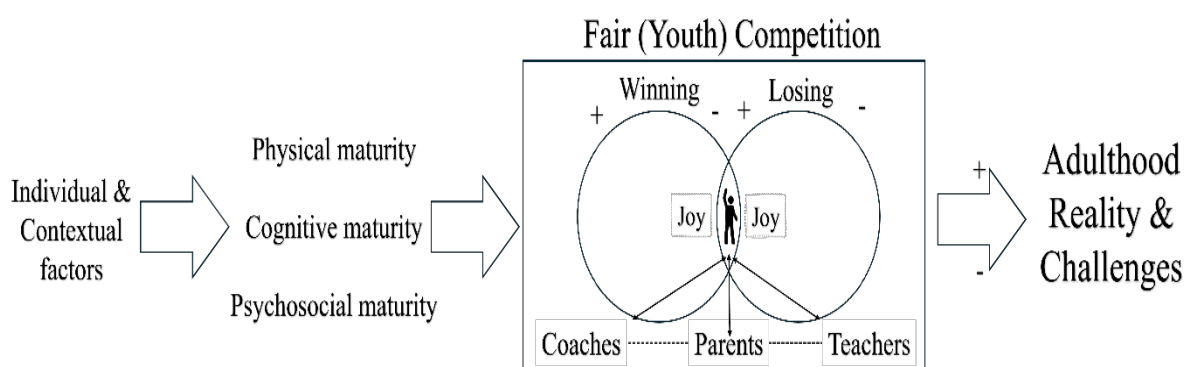
4. Discussion: It is Not Only About Winning, After All?

In today's globalized world, individuals are increasingly exposed—consciously or unconsciously—to competitive dynamics across education, sports, business, and broader societal interactions. Managing these forces constructively is essential to fostering adaptive outcomes. As stated by theorists, recent global developments, including globalization and the COVID-19 pandemic, have underscored the importance of resilience, motivation, and skill development—core components of effective competition (Achoki, 2023; Donald & Mouratidou, 2022; Fellows, 2024; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Németh et al., 2021, among others). This study affirms that competition is a fundamental aspect of human behaviour and, when appropriately structured, can benefit even young children. However, to date, existing research remains limited, particularly regarding early childhood, and often frames competition primarily

in contrast to cooperation (Castle & Howells, 2024; Fülöp, 2004, 2022; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). Given the divergent views in the literature, this review offers a timely synthesis of key findings, contributing new insights to the field. It examines the complexities of youth competition, identifies emerging challenges and opportunities, and outlines directions for future research. In doing so, it provides practical and theoretical guidance for policymakers, educators, and researchers, while underscoring the need for collaborative efforts to promote healthy, developmentally appropriate competition.

This review confirms that while competition entails inherent advantages and disadvantages—particularly concerning the experiences of winning and losing (see Figure 4)—it holds significant potential as a catalyst for both individual and collective development. It fosters opportunities for skill acquisition and the cultivation of essential life competencies, including resilience, emotional regulation, and coping strategies, among others. Nevertheless, in the absence of appropriate support, competitive experiences—especially for youth and novices—can evidently lead to negative consequences such as demotivation, burnout, and unequal participation. The underlying tension between pleasure and performance pressure, exemplified by Daniel’s question “*Did you win?*” versus “*Did you have fun?*” (2007, p. 50), further highlights the importance of a balanced approach. Aligning with Fülöp and Jurišević (2020), we advocate for helping young people navigate both victory and defeat constructively, emphasizing persistence and the pursuit of new challenges. To promote healthy development, it is recommended to align competitive experiences with realistic expectations and developmental readiness, accounting for physical, cognitive, and psychosocial factors (Figure 6). It is suggested that central to this process are supportive interpersonal relationships (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). Schools, in particular, play a key role by providing structured environments where social and competitive interactions—guided by professional mentors—foster engagement, adaptability, and a sense of belonging among peer groups.

FIGURE 6. SUMMARY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPETITION AND DEVELOPMENT



Source: own design based on Choi et al. (2014), Daniels (2007), and Kochanek et al. (2019)

One of the most compelling derivatives of our research is the inherently complex and seemingly paradoxical nature of competitive games, which often integrate elements of both competition and cooperation. This duality invites further consideration of psychosocial dimensions related to cooperative dynamics, as discussed by Richard et al. (2002), including factors such as perceived power in parent–child relationships, security in parental attachment, self-concept, internalized feelings of safety, environments that encourage autonomous conflict resolution, opportunities to test one’s capabilities through challenging tasks, experiences of peer rejection

or popularity, and the quality of friendships between participants. These variables may all influence, or be influenced by, competitive behaviours. As Nguyen (2017) noted, competition is not antithetical to cooperation; rather, each element reinforces the other, as competitors mutually drive one another toward higher levels of performance and continuous improvement. This interplay is aptly captured by football legend Cristiano Ronaldo in his remarks about his rivalry with Lionel Messi: *“Maybe Messi also plays a part in motivating me, the same way other players make you raise your game because you’re working at being better than them. Any kind of competition adds to my motivation. (...) I’m sure the competition we provide motivates him as well. It’s good for him, for me, and for other players who want to develop. Messi has four Ballon d’Or and I’ve got three. All of this is positive for the world of football.”* (AS, 2015). Such reflections illustrate the value of reframing competition as a constructive, developmental force rather than through a zero-sum lens.

As evidenced, competitive activities such as games often function as a form of escapism, providing participants with the opportunity to suspend social constraints and engage in equitable, skill-based challenges that channel focus, determination, and even aggression into constructive and often exceptional outcomes (Nguyen, 2017). In light of growing global pressures that have placed early childhood playtime under strain (Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Parker & Thomsen, 2019), educators are increasingly urged to implement child-centred pedagogies that support holistic development. Integrating play that cultivates social competencies and facilitates experiential learning is vital. Expanding access to free, self-directed play—particularly when supported by high-quality resources—is strongly recommended. Such play also contributes to the formation of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships, which are essential to children’s well-being (Uyanik et al., 2023). Nevertheless, as discovered, issues of fairness, justice, and equal opportunity remain central, as children—still adapting to new and complex environments—are particularly vulnerable to the detrimental effects of perceived injustice (Fülöp, 2009; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). Echoing the insights of Choi et al. (2014), Daniels (2007), and Mahayosnand and Sabra (2024), this review underscores the importance of incorporating both structured and spontaneous leisure activities into daily life in a way that balances enjoyment and competence (Castle & Howells, 2024). Such integration not only enriches experience—as described by Stanne et al. (1999, p. 134) as adding *“spice”* to life—but also promotes healthy competitiveness, personal growth, and psychosocial development.

Consistent with previous research, this paper reinforces the view that, despite often carrying negative connotations, competitive experiences are diverse and context-dependent—they are not inherently beneficial or detrimental. Individuals engage with competition in varied ways, and most real-world contexts integrate both cooperative and competitive elements, making it difficult to isolate or define either in their purest form (Fülöp, 2009; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Stanne et al., 1999; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004). There is a growing need to better understand individual motivations, particularly by listening to children and developing personalised approaches that align with their developmental needs and goals (Castle & Howells, 2024). Striking a balance between competition and cooperation is critical: insufficient competition may limit growth and achievement, while excessive competition can undermine self-confidence, especially among less-skilled participants, leading to withdrawal and disengagement (Choi et al., 2014). The consequences of competitive experiences—both positive and negative—can have a lasting impact on future life choices, particularly during pre-adolescence, a formative period spanning roughly ages 4 to 10 (Castle & Howells, 2024;

Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Kochanek et al., 2019). Contrary to Kohn's (1986) argument that competition is inherently harmful and akin to warfare, contemporary research affirms that competition plays a significant role in stimulating development, enhancing motivation, and providing excitement (Agans et al., 2018; Bajor et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2014; Daniels, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Fülöp, 2009; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020; Kochanek et al., 2019; Parker & Thomsen, 2019; Thornton, 2013). Nonetheless, prolonged or poorly managed competition can produce harmful effects, as even elite athletes require recovery periods (both physically and mentally) and often experience early retirement due to burnout. As Thornton (2013) argues, efforts to eliminate competition entirely in childhood may simply drive it underground, as children naturally love to play (Castle & Howells, 2024; Uyanik et al., 2023). Consequently, competition becomes harder to observe and regulate, while the innate human drive to compete persists. Rather than seeking to suppress competition, the focus should shift toward helping children cultivate a healthy outlook on both winning and losing. As this review has shown, equipping young people with integrity, resilience, and perspective in competitive contexts prepares them to thrive in an increasingly competitive global society. When guided appropriately, competition can serve not as a source of division, but as a powerful mechanism for empowerment, personal growth, and the promotion of positive societal outcomes.

5. Conclusion, Limitation, and Recommendation

Competition, for better or worse, has endured from antiquity and remains integral to human society. Although this review does not provide definitive answers to currently popular questions, such as to "*what makes a happy competitor*" (Fülöp, 2009) or what constitutes a life of endless competition, it contributes to academic discourse and professional practice by offering valuable insights and encouraging further exploration of this critical topic. The findings of this study strongly indicate that, despite its challenges, competition—when approached the right way—can be essential for both societal and personal growth, especially for young people who enjoy playing and competing but require proper mentorship, especially in the beginning. These results also have wider implications, advocating for a robust collaboration among parents, educators, and coaches (Castle & Howells, 2024; Choi et al., 2014; Daniels, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Kochanek et al., 2019; Mossman & Cronin, 2018; Thornton, 2013), while encouraging cooperative, task-focused ("*balanced*") approaches and fostering respectful, nurturing relationships. Based on the reviewed literature, these strategies can help cultivate environments in which young people prioritise self-improvement, teamwork, and skill acquisition over mere victory. Mentors and educators are also advised to frame competition as a form of real-time feedback rather than a fixed measure of self-worth (see Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). While competitiveness represents one expression of the broader social comparison process (Garcia et al., 2013), establishing supportive settings in which both success and failure are viewed as learning opportunities can foster resilience and mutual development (Figure 4 & 6). Ultimately, this orientation seems to help to equip children to navigate the complexities and inequities of adult life, thereby enhancing their capacity for long-term success and well-being. Although this paper centres on youth competition and development, its conclusions are broadly applicable to a wide range of competitions across diverse domains beyond sport, including adult amateur, semi-professional, and professional stakeholders.

While the systematic literature review provided valuable insights into existing knowledge on competition, this study has limitations that warrant further investigation. As with any SLR (see Anand et al., 2022; García-Peñalvo, 2022; Gough et al., 2012; Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021;; Okoli, 2015; Paul & Barari, 2022; Paul et al., 2023), a key limitation is the lack of primary research, restricting conclusions to the analysis of existing data. Additionally, research/review decisions can be subject to debate, and may be influenced by factors such as the researcher's background, expertise, and perspective. For instance, language constraints, keyword selection, or quality criteria (e.g., prioritizing English, Q1-Q2 journal articles with the given keywords) could result in the exclusion of relevant studies, while the sample (n=32) remains inherently limited by the available content in the chosen databases (e.g., ScienceDirect or Google Scholar).

Although many theoretical papers compare competition and cooperation (e.g., Daniels, 2007; Deutsch, 2014; Fülöp, 2022; Johnson et al., 1981; Nguyen, 2017; Tauer & Harackiewicz, 2004), while others focus primarily on sports competition (e.g., Agans et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2014; Daniels, 2007; Nguyen, 2017), the broader landscape of (healthy) competition remains insufficiently explored. Despite its widespread presence, competition is often under-researched, particularly when not contrasted with cooperation (Fülöp, 2004; 2022), and its effects on certain age groups remain unclear (Castle & Howells, 2024; Fülöp & Jurišević, 2020). Given that competition can be a sensitive issue for youth, further research is essential to prevent potential long-term harm. A deeper understanding of its impacts is crucial for educators, researchers, and students to navigate expectations and outcomes effectively. Based on the insights from the review, future research could explore: (1) the optimal introduction of competition, (2) the roles of parents, teachers, and coaches, (3) competition at different developmental stages, (4) balancing pressure on children, (5) competition-related character development and coping strategies, (6) cultural, gender, and family dynamics, (7) parental involvement, (8) the role of positive competition in character development, (9) finding the right balance between competition and cooperation, and (10) the long-term effects of constant competition in modern life. To address these issues, both qualitative and quantitative research is needed, plus given the complexity of competition, interdisciplinary collaboration—incorporating insights from sports, education, psychology, ethics, and related fields—can provide a more holistic understanding of its multifaceted effects.

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Reviewing the Primary Generalist Teacher's Role in Teaching Fundamental Movement Skills and Prosocial Behaviour

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Abstract

The delivery of the primary school physical education (PE) curriculum has been subject to ongoing debate in Western countries. In Australia, the primary school teacher is by and large considered a generalist. Previous research indicates that primary school PE programmes that employ the teaching of fundamental movement skills (FMS) and Hellison's Teaching Personal and Social Responsibility (TPSR) model have a positive impact on children's development by increasing motor skill proficiency, positive values, autonomy, and prosocial behaviour. While both generalist and specialist teachers are responsible for helping children develop FMS, they are also required to help children identify their emotional, social, physical and intellectual characteristics. While FMS might provide optimal support to the development of motor skills, TPSR can help develop social skills. The challenges involved for the primary generalist PE teacher in understanding the pedagogical content knowledge required to teach and evaluate both FMS and TPSR is an under researched area. Specifically, there is a lack of research on pedagogical content knowledge, the challenges and the content required for primary generalist teachers to implement both FMS and TPSR. Therefore, the issue of what constitutes effective pedagogical content knowledge along with the organization of the educational process related to the discipline of PE for the primary generalist teacher requires further attention. Structured FMS and TPSR professional development hold considerable promise for supporting active, child-centred learning environments for primary PE teachers and presents an adaptable framework for implementation. This narrative review explores the advantages and challenges for primary generalist teachers in teaching and learning FMS and TPSR. Practical implications to improve the PE profession are suggested to re-focus professional development efforts for primary generalist teachers, locally, nationally and globally, to concentrate on the expansion of a strategic and longstanding program intended at merging FMS and prosocial frameworks.

Keywords/key phrases: teaching personal social responsibility, fundamental motor and movement skills, primary generalist, primary school

1. Introduction

Physical education (PE) in primary schools is an ideal vehicle to promote life-long learning in physical activity via the development of fundamental motor skills (FMS) combined with teaching prosocial behaviour (i.e., social and emotional learning). Prosocial behaviour is a valuable life skill for children, as knowing how to get on with others promotes positive interactions, builds relationships, and can help children feel connected to others. Practicing prosocial skills can stimulate the development of emotional regulation (being able to manage a range of emotions), social skills, and social competence; problem-solving skills, conflict resolution skills, and responsible decision-making in children. The latter is generally labelled positive youth development (PYD).

Given the social character of PE, it is an appropriate means of developing children's personal and social skills, such as personal and social responsibility, cooperation, and other prosocial skills (Parker & Stiehl, 2005). According to Goudas and Giannoudis (2008), one of the reasons that PE and sports are suitable contexts for learning these skills is the transferability of these skills to other domains in life (Martinek et al., 2001). Moreover, it has been suggested that PE can positively predict prosocial behaviour (Hui et al., 2022). Even though there is an increasing interest in the role of in the promotion of personal and social development, it is important that by children simply participating in PE and sports does not automatically lead to positive outcomes (Cryan & Martinek, 2017). Therefore, it is the responsibility of PE teachers to create the pedagogical circumstances under which positive outcomes for children can be obtained.

As Petitpas et al. (2005) noted, programs that promote psychosocial development are those that use activity as a vehicle to provide experiences that promote self-discovery and teach participants life skills in an intentional and systematic manner. In addition, these programs have clearly identified goals and strategies to enhance the generalizability and transfer of life skills to other important life domains. While the development of personal and social skills seems to be an extensively accepted goal of PE, and although the body of evidence on this topic is developing, the literature currently appears to be fragmented in terms of terminology, the methods used, and the resulting conclusions when considered from a primary generalist teacher standpoint. However, prosocial skills need to be explicitly taught, practised and reinforced, as with any new skill. Teachers should provide ample opportunities to continue skill development by encouraging actions such as helping, sharing and volunteering while simultaneously teaching FMS and prosocial behaviour strategies. Primary school teachers have opportunity to integrate both FMS and PYD components along with educative initiatives into a broader PE process.

It has been suggested that the generalist primary school teacher, a qualified teacher but with limited training in PE, has insufficient expertise and finds PE, with its distinctive content, difficult to develop competence in (Talbot, 2008). Nevertheless, in many primary schools, PE is usually taught by generalist classroom teachers, many of whom are likely to have little PE teacher training or have partial, or inadequate, human movement discipline knowledge or the required skills to implement both FMS and PYD. In turn, this potentially diminishes PE's potential learning effects in primary school-aged children. This is supported by the view that a lack of specialist PE provision in primary schools is perceived to compromise the quality of PE offered (McKenzie et al., 1993).

Arguably, since 1993 little has changed. It is viable, although there is a need to explore this prediction with more robust research designs, that children may be more active if they had a specialist primary school teacher who ‘modelled’ both FMS and PYD in an effective way.

Programmes aimed at promoting positive values, life skills, and prosocial behaviour among children through physical activity (Hardcastle et al., 2015) are increasing in numbers. Nonetheless, not every programme has been effective in promoting these adaptive outcomes, both from a PYD and FMS perspective. Supporting children’s holistic development necessitates a high-quality PE programme with clearly defined objectives, effective content, and clear methods of delivery. Together with these qualities, it is important that the programme is founded on social psychological theory that delivers an explanation of the mechanism by which manipulable psychological factors impact positive values and behaviours and outlines how the values and behaviours can be promoted in the social environment of young physical activity participants (Toivonen et al., 2019). In this sense, PE provides children with opportunities to improve fitness, to be active, and to counter societal trends towards increased sedentary behaviours. Moreover, it impacts positively on learning and behaviour in the classroom.

According to Bandura’s (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, children learn by viewing the behaviour of others and emulating these behaviours. As teachers are role models to children, it is plausible that a child’s learning in PE will vary depending upon whether the teacher is a generalist PE teacher or a specialist PE teacher based on pedagogical and discipline specific knowledge. For instance, the positive effect of modelling on children’s behaviour is supported in primary school PE lessons with those taught by PE specialists shown to participate in 57% more moderate - vigorous intensity physical activity with a concurrent increased emphasis on the promotion of physical fitness (McKenzie et al., 1993). Again, it is debatable if anything has changed since 1993.

To the extent that primary school teachers are considered to possess specialist pedagogical knowledge, they are viewed as specialists in educating young children in a discipline-specific area. Consequently, expertise and interest has meant that some areas of the curriculum, such as PE, are most appropriately taught by a teacher with specific skills and experiences which may warrant specialisation. Yet this is frequently the exception and not the norm. Generally, teacher-centred styles are positively associated with increased FMS learning and skill development, while student-centred styles have not (Zeng, 2016). Regardless of teaching style, PE teachers are of utmost importance to successfully integrate PYD and teach FMS into primary school PE. For instance, how teachers motivate young people, and how instructors evaluate and recognise effort and achievement, play a significant role (Gould & Carson, 2008). While motivation is important, as prior research has consistently demonstrated that generalists have lower levels of confidence to teach primary physical education (e.g., Randall & Fleet, 2021), this may be a barrier to the intrinsic motivation of generalist teachers and the delivery of quality physical education. Furthermore, teachers, who through their behaviours and communications create task-involving environments, can provide direct psychological and behavioural benefits to their students (Atkins et al., 2015). However, this can be both positive and negative depending on the teacher’s confidence and motivational levels. The unknown consequence is the impact that this may have on children. Untrained or unskilled teachers do not have sufficient experience in providing instruction that can promote the kinds of values and life skills that may enrich children’s experiences of FMS and their future social development.

In Australian school settings, primary school teachers and their associated classrooms have been traditionally viewed as self-contained, with the respective classroom teacher responsible for instruction across the full range of learning areas (Mills & Bourke, 2020). This includes discipline areas such as English, mathematics, science, the arts and humanities. Within this paradigm, primary school teachers and their classrooms have been considered as generalist teachers in terms of their subject matter knowledge (Mills & Bourke, 2020). In Australia and much like many Western countries, disruptive behaviour is consistently regarded as one of the biggest concerns and challenges for PE teachers. Proactive planning requires primary generalist teachers to provide children with structured lessons, which begins with the establishment of clear expectations, rules and routines, followed by the production and implementation of well-planned and well-presented lessons which are individualised to the needs and interests of children.

There is increasing interest from researchers and education professionals about the potential for PYD-based initiatives in PE that can positively impact prosocial behaviour that can transfer to academic-related outcomes, including classroom behaviour. Children's positive learning experiences and on-task behaviour during PE are associated with academic success and positive outcomes beyond the school years (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005), helping teachers explicitly prioritise meaningful experiences for children while simultaneously helping teachers teach FMS.

Professional expectations are behaviour controlled by external sources (i.e., doing it because it is a requirement rather than choosing to do it) and is the least autonomous form of extrinsic motivation (Spittle et al., 2022). However, teachers are often faced with children who are learning what it is to engage, to respect, to value their peers and teachers in a dynamic and unpredictable PE environment. Such values require teaching. Therefore, primary generalist PE teachers are optimum targets for the introduction of PYD and prosocial behaviour models such as teaching personal social responsibility (TPSR).

The TPSR model is recognised internationally as a method to foster autonomous, self-directed activity that can empower children to engage in decision making and to take responsibility for their own actions and their relations with others within a physical activity context. The goal of the TPSR model is to have the participants (i.e., children) adopt and transfer these skills to their everyday life. Nonetheless, while primary generalist teachers can promote prosocial behaviour by modelling daily prosocial values and caring routines during physical activity tasks, the assumption commonly made is that the teacher has the necessary skills in both FMS and prosocial models such as TPSR. An initial starting point is defining what PE and FMS constitute and why they are important in today's contemporary curriculum.

1.1 Physical Education and Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS)

Establishing healthy lifestyle behaviours in primary school children is important, as these behaviours are likely to track into adulthood (Tay et al., 2021). Low levels of physical activity among children, globally and locally, is a pressing issue, as physical activity levels tend to decline as children transit into adolescence (Ortega et al., 2013). Evidence from previous studies suggest that this transition period is a critical period to intervene in children's physical activity behaviours as children begin to take responsibility for their participation (Wang et al., 2020). Furthermore, health behaviours adopted at this stage have shown to track into adulthood

(Craigie et al., 2011). However, across their educational journey, primary school children should not only develop academically, but should also develop the physical skills, values and behaviours that will help them develop physically and emotionally.

Physical education is designed and developed mainly to improve the physical development and motor skills of young children. Physical education also plays a central role in delivering opportunities for children to adopt a healthy lifestyle, develop motor skills and accomplish personal and social skills needed to reach their full potential in life. Yet PE has two sides: training and education (Currie, 2013; Griggs, 2012), both of which require pedagogical content knowledge in human movement and motor control, inclusive of motor development, motor learning, motor behaviour and motor skill. The movement and physical activity dimensions have a strong focus on children's acquisition of motor skills in the early primary years. Physically competent children enjoy greater social success than do physically inept children.

The proposition being that PE can be used as an intervention strategy to enhance the peer status of physically incompetent children by improving their motor skills (Evans & Roberts, 1987). The latter is often denoted as physical literacy, defined as the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities (Whitehead, 2007). The PE domain necessitates teachers to teach children the knowledge, skills and behaviours that permit them to acquire good health and live a healthy lifestyle, understand the role of physical activity in ensuring good health and engage in physical activity. Those skills considered fundamental are often linked to the skills that are inherently integrated in common sports. Yet there is also a degree of pedagogical and anatomical appropriateness needed to effectively teach, progress, regress (if needed) and measure FMS.

Fundamental motor skills (FMS) are movements that have specific observable patterns and are part of a movement continuum that begins before birth and continues throughout life. (Logan et al., 2018). An FMS includes the basic elements of a particular movement and does not emphasise the combining of a variety of FMS into complex skills. With exposure to movement experiences the children start to learn FMS that will be refined through practice, instruction and modelling. Children who master FMS in the early primary years will be more likely to be active and enjoy a range of recreational and sporting activities (Bolger et al., 2020). Each FMS is considered in relative isolation from the others. Basic FMS comprise:

- Locomotor skills such as running, jumping, hopping, galloping, rolling, leaping and dodging.
- Manipulative skills such as throwing, catching, kicking, striking and trapping and
- Stability skills such as balance, twisting, turning and bending.

Traditional FMS are a pedagogical focus in PE programs, incorporating FMS development into curriculum expectations. PE teachers play a critical role in the development of physical literacy (the confidence and competence to apply a variety of physical skills in several different physical contexts (Grauduszus et al., 2023) appropriate activities that promote motor competence and the ability to participate in and accomplish increasingly complex tasks.

Childhood physical activity (PA) promotes the development of FMS (Zeng et al., 2017). Motor skill proficiency, in turn, is known to be an important factor accounting for future PA

engagement and sports motivation (Ericsson, 2011). Thus, motor skills play an essential role in the basis of a life-long active lifestyle. Moreover, the mastery of motor skills, incorporating gross and fine motor competence, has not only been shown to contribute to physical health and physical development, but also substantially contributes to cognitive and social development. To this end, it is necessary to develop the skills and competences that can help children adapt to these different demands (Larson, 2000). Yet little is known about the levels of FMS understanding that the primary generalist teacher possesses. Despite the importance of FMS in overall physical development, consideration of the needs of primary generalist teachers and their respective roles in FMS teaching should consider integration of professional development to ensure overall programme fidelity.

Teachers can scaffold lessons in such a way that FMS are learned before advancing to these complex tasks and ensure that children achieve success before moving to the next stage of skill complexity; for example, children must first learn how to jump and land properly before they can learn how to do a long jump in a track and field event context. In this regard, skilled PE teachers are important agents in facilitating skill development in children. In contrast to primary generalist teachers, specialist PE teachers are advantageously placed to ensure that PE lessons receive quality planning, teaching, and learning, while ensuring continuity and progression as the student develops and grows.

From a behavioural and prosocial behaviour perspective, improvements in self-esteem and confidence that are associated with a sound development in motor skills can have a flow on effect to other areas of a child's education (Erickson, 2011). Nonetheless, much like FMS, positive prosocial behaviour is a skill that requires teaching. The knowledge and pedagogical methods taken by the teacher is of paramount importance in the early primary years to help children accomplish both motor skill competence and the personal and social skills expected. In this regard, both generalist and specialist primary teachers have different knowledge and experiences with PE combined with the facilitation of FMS development in primary school-aged children.

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of studies conducted to examine the influence of the primary generalist teacher's aptitude to correctly teach FMS and associated prosocial behaviours. Faulkner & Reeves (2000) revealed the lack of competence primary generalist schoolteachers perceive they have in teaching PE. These findings suggest that the teacher's experience of PE and their lack of perceived competence in delivering PE may influence children's learning. Notwithstanding the perceived lack of competence, it is expected that a primary generalist teacher has appropriate pedagogical content knowledge to teach motor development principles and FMS. Added to the challenge of integrating theory and evidence-based programmes that consider FMS and TPSR and applying them in practice requires adequate theoretical and pedagogical content knowledge by the generalist teacher.

For interventions to be effective, an improved understanding of the factors influencing children's PE behaviours is important from a learning and behavioural viewpoint. However, studies conducted to understand the determinants of PE behaviours among children often neglect the influence of correct FMS teaching and the importance of establishing prosocial behaviour frameworks. This narrative review aimed to analyse the current challenges and opportunities that primary generalist PE teachers encounter when teaching FMS and integrating prosocial PYD frameworks such as TPSR. The review commences by examining the

differences between a primary generalist teacher and a primary specialist teacher in PE. Then, the social pedagogical PYD model TPSR is explored with skill identification, challenges, advantages, and suggestions for the primary generalist teacher presented. In accordance with meta-ethnographic guidelines, literature was subsequently selected and interpreted. Working exclusively with qualitative data, this type of knowledge was synthesised to generate new insights or conclusions about a topic with the aim to draw insights and analysis from current publications of qualitative research to construct new knowledge that spans across these individual, and often small scale, studies (Sukhera, 2022). Literature was selected based on the topic (primary PE teachers, FMS, TPSR and PYD) with an open-ended date-range selected. The abstract of all literature, including journal articles and book chapters, were initially screened for suitability before the full paper was read and analysed.

2. Generalist and Specialist PE Teaching

According to Lawson's occupational socialization theory (1983), teachers are exposed to the social, psychological, and political subtleties of what it means to be a PE teacher during their years of education and socialization in different PE settings. These encounters shape the practices and actions they will adopt afterward as professionals in school contexts. Lawson notes that occupational socialization consists of three discrete phases:

- a) acculturation, which reflects childhood and adolescence experiences of participation in PE and sports contexts (e.g., through 'apprenticeship of observation' of family, friends, teachers, and coaches)
- b) professional socialization, that happens when pre-service teachers enrol in teacher education programs (e.g., influences from university curricula), and
- c) Organizational socialization, which occurs as part of the job and throughout teachers' working situations and context (e.g., influences from colleagues and the local community).

Experiences amassed during these phases have a long-lasting impact on teachers' views about the scope and content of their teaching (Richards, 2015). More recently, however, the notion of primary school teachers becoming subject specialists has come into focus. Changes to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) teaching standards now require all pre-service primary teacher preparation programs to provide all primary graduates with a subject specialisation (AITSL, 2017), with a focus on prioritising science, mathematics or a language (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG), 2014). Yet some have noted that variable expertise and interest amongst teachers meant that some areas of the curriculum, such as PE, were most appropriately taught by a teacher with specific skills and experiences, and therefore may warrant specialisation (Ardzejewska et al., 2010). Still the perception of specialisation in a primary school setting has not been clearly and consistently defined in the literature, with the definitions to describe specialisation and their corresponding roles varying notably.

In Australia, the primary teacher is, by and large, deemed a generalist; conversely, an existing paradox exists whereby there are claims that specialists are needed to deliver the PE curriculum. Underlying this is an assumption that primary teachers are generalists who have an ability and

possess appropriate pedagogical content knowledge to provide instruction in all key subject areas. In contrast, there appears to be a parallel discourse increasingly promoting the need for specialist teachers in the primary PE school setting. In England it has been long been argued that the idea of the generalist is outdated and does not reflect practice (Alexander et al., 1992). In other contexts, it has been claimed that the generalist primary teacher might be more appropriately employed as an 'expert' deliverer of prioritised key learning areas such as literacy, numeracy and science. Masters (2009) asserted that preferably, every primary school teacher would be an expert teacher of literacy, numeracy and science, thus explicitly prioritising the development of teacher competencies in some subject areas over others.

A major challenge faced by the primary generalist teacher is acquiring the personal agency and self-efficacy to teach both FMS and TPSR. Agency, self-efficacy and confidence can create a positive learning environment. Children's participation in PE that considers TPSR has been connected to positive developmental outcomes such as increases in self-control, goal setting and leadership skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Such outcomes are often equated with social and emotional learning competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision-making (Jacobs & Wright, 2014) along with self-control, goal setting and leadership skills (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

Yet salient issues exist that influence the value of teaching PE in primary school settings and the way that generalist teachers' domain knowledge and skills may influence both FMS and TPSR implementation. The rise in 'specialist' PE teachers in primary schools can be viewed as a response to longstanding criticism that initial teacher education fails to sufficiently prepare generalist teachers to teach PE (Hyndman, 2017). While this research gap has implications for how teaching FMS and prosocial behaviour in PE could be efficiently applied in higher education settings, this fails to address the present situation for currently practicing primary generalist teachers and the professional development needed to adequately prepare them to teach FMS and TPSR. Consequently, the following section explores the theoretical proposition for the TPSR model and how, when implemented efficiently, can positively predict children's personal and social responsibility. This fact suggests that the strategies related to the TPSR model applied by a teacher, such as offering leadership opportunities and giving choices and voices to children, can contribute to an improvement in social skills and communication of children.

3. Theoretical rationale for the TPSR model

Social demand has led to formal education serving to specify tools for learners to be able to adapt to the constant changes demanded by society. PE is no exception. Establishing an effective prosocial behaviour policy has been recognised as necessary to the smooth running of a school. In this regard, good behaviour by children is a necessary condition for learning (Spielman, 2019) so that children can learn, teachers can teach, and parents/carers can be confident that their child is safe. Hellison (2011) and other scholars (e.g., Jacobs & Wright, 2014) have highlighted the role played by PE in fostering these outcomes and suggested the need to implement TPSR in the early primary years. Others (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011) believe it paramount to foster social and emotional learning through effective evidence-based programs that target these types of outcomes. Models such as TPSR may shed light on how to generate social and emotional learning outcomes through the early primary years in PE.

The TPSR model (Hellison, 2011) is a values-based pedagogical model that uses physical activities as an instrument for helping children become more personally responsible for themselves and more socially and morally responsible for the well-being of others. The TPSR model (Hellison, 1985, 2011) was originally developed to use physical activity to promote valuable transferrable life skills for young people at risk of being socially excluded. TPSR-based programmes focused on providing these opportunities through four themes: integrating responsibility into physical activity, empowering children to take responsibility, building strong instructor–participant relationships, and promoting transfer of responsibility (Hellison, 2011). TPSR-based programmes present children with guidelines for, and practice in, taking responsibility for their personal well-being and contributing to the well-being of others. The goals and means of TPSR are in line with social psychology theories, particularly Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997), with theories from sport pedagogy, such as the teaching styles spectrum (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008) alongside aspects of positive psychology. Therefore, TPSR is well placed for translation to primary school PE practice. Hellison (2011) created a lesson format and selected specific teaching strategies to make it easier for teachers to implement the essential parts of the model and to assure opportunities for children to practise and learn personal and social responsibility during each lesson. To accomplish this, TPSR model relies on five levels of responsibility:

- a) respecting the rights and feelings of others
- b) effort and cooperation
- c) self-direction
- d) helping others and leadership
- e) taking it outside (transfer of responsibility)

TABLE 1. TPSR LEVELS AND GOALS

Responsibility levels	Goals	Examples
Level 1: Respect the rights and feelings of others	Respect: The rights and feelings of all children must be protected. are responsibility It demands children to practice self-control, to include everyone in the activities and to solve conflicts peacefully.	Resolve conflicts through dialogue; accept and include all children in the activities; listen to the teacher and classmates when they are speaking; speak without interrupting others; avoid insulting others or calling them names
Level 2: Effort and cooperation	Effort Participate in planned activities even when they are not the child's favourite.	Continue in all activities even if they are difficult; follow the rules of the class such as wearing the appropriate clothing and adhering to rules and procedures
Level 3: Self-direction	Self-direction Set short and long-term goals; reflect on and	Assume responsibility for tasks; take on leadership roles;

	evaluate your own progress honestly.	participate in activities whether the teacher is watching or not
Level 4: Helping others and leadership	Helping others and caring for others; pay attention to the needs of your classmates, leadership in PE	Setting up and packing away PE equipment without being asked by the teacher (i.e., leadership).
Level 5: transfer of responsibility outside the physical activity setting	Application of what is learned in PE to other contexts	Transfer of positive behaviour to family environment (outside of school)

From Hellison (2011) and Coulson et al. (2012).

TPSR has been successfully implemented in many countries including Spain (Escartí et al., 2010), New Zealand (Gordon, 2010), Canada (Beaudoin et al., 2015), Turkey (Agbuga et al., 2015) and Finland (Romar et al., 2015). Implementation of TPSR programmes has been shown to have positive behavioural, social, emotional, psychological, and educational outcomes (Pozo et al., 2018). Moreover, TPSR can connect to respective curriculum areas given that it is perceived as appropriate for all teachers. Therefore, the applicability of TPSR does not have more suitable content or more specific groups than others, but it can be used for any teacher or course independently of these aspects and is appropriate to improve educational values without detriment of the content.

The themes that characterise TPSR align with primary school children's developmental needs and the pedagogical guidelines recommended for primary school children's developmental stage. Notably, the teacher–child relationship is deemed to have a critical role as children should be valued, supported and treated with respect. Hence, the quality of the teacher–child relationship in early primary school is considered critical to facilitating a positive climate and predicting positive developmental outcomes. However, notwithstanding the positive changes TPSR can make, the assumption is that the teacher can work within the TPSR framework while concurrently teach FMS, that is – ensure that an activity or skill remains the core focus of the lesson. Underpinning this is the competence required to pedagogically teach both components.

Social and emotional learning competencies have been considered key at this developmental stage as many scholars (Hellison, 2011; Holt, 2016) have shown that an intentionally designed environment may increase positive developmental outcomes (e.g. academic performance, positive social interactions). Still, a focal challenge with theory and evidence-based programmes is how to apply them in practice. Quality TPSR programs are influenced by teachers' ability to incorporate a sound TPSR philosophy and coherent practices (Holt, 2016), inclusive of physical activity practices. The opportunities for the integration of TPSR into primary school PE are somewhat endless but require the generalist teacher to have knowledge of developmental motor sequences, PE specific pedagogy and movement concepts if they are to ensure that what they are teaching is best practice.

There are underlying pedagogical principles at the core of TPSR that are aligned with the developmental needs presented by children (Wright & Stork, 2013). Moreover, the pedagogical guidelines included in preschool education emphasise the need to intentionally design PE experiences and implement concrete strategies that help children learn a sense of self, foster positive relationships with others and become active learners (Wright & Stork, 2013). While

TPSR attracts many teachers with its empowerment-based philosophy and prevalent practical implications, given the limited domain and pedagogical content knowledge of primary generalist PE teachers, any attempt to adopt and apply the strategies of the model with insufficient or no formal training is likely to result in limited transferrable benefits to children. Specifically, while there is no single correct way to implement TPSR, a lack of formal training and a lack of consistency and competency in training may introduce considerable variability in the extent to which TPSR is implemented alongside the fidelity of the interventions.

It has been reasoned that generalist teachers, with their knowledge of the individual needs of their students and the security and psychological support that they provide in primary classrooms, are ideal candidates for providing developmentally appropriate, best-practice instruction in PE (Callcott et al., 2012). An extension of the argument is that it is the generalist teacher works daily with the children, has a solid relationship built with them and can construct curriculum experiences which deliver the knowledge and skills of other curriculum areas, in, about and through movement. Nonetheless, in addition to teacher knowledge about what the domain of a primary generalist PE should constitute, logistical issues as well as school-level and national-level physical activity and prosocial behaviour priorities will determine the pedagogical content and skill-based knowledge required by the primary generalist teacher. The suggestion being that these barriers can be overcome through professional learning programs for generalist PE teachers with the recognition that the PE curriculum, inclusive of prosocial behaviour, is vital in a child's development.

Intertwined with these contextual factors is a concern for teaching standards. Arising from similar concerns is that all subjects are being taught equally well and that primary generalist teachers cannot have equivalent expertise across all subjects, inclusive of PE. In addition to contextual or standards-based concepts of the specialist teacher, is the nature of the subject to which a specialist might be allocated and the values implicit in this decision. Yet a significant number of studies in the field fail to examine teaching competency and a generalist's teacher's ability to assess, progress, regress and apply essential anatomical knowledge. This research gap also has implications for how teaching prosocial behaviour in PE could be efficiently applied. Despite this, the primary generalist teacher's knowledge of the practical applications of the key elements of TPSR are required to effectively apply the responsibility-based teaching strategies, responsibility levels, and lesson format.

4. Practical Implications

Physical education and physical activity are inherently practical by nature. At this pivotal juncture, the practical implementation and progress of FMS development and TPSR in the early primary years of PE reflects a field-wide transformation shaped by the efforts of educators and researchers around the globe. PE has evolved with specialised pedagogical frameworks that are distinct to other subject disciplines, offering new avenues for enhancing learning and engagement for primary generalist teachers. This evolution has been supported by a growing body of research, which has broadened applications of PE and the importance of prosocial models such as TPSR which have demonstrated its potential to foster meaningful, progressive and sustainable FMS development. The recent advances underscore the practical and theoretical developments within PE, positioning it as a specialised skill.

Learning in movement involves acquiring the knowledge pertaining to movement skills, concepts and strategies that are essential to support children to move with competence and confidence and build upon the important early foundations of play. While much of the literature references the importance of teaching FMS in children, the requirements to effectively teach FMS at the primary generalist level is often assumed rather than critiqued and assessed. Moreover, the importance of correct and segmented FMS teaching in the early primary years by the teacher requires a basic level of anatomical knowledge. Without this, it could be argued that a primary generalist teacher is teaching movement with little to no contextual knowledge. Yet creating a more coherent and connected form of primary PE is a complex and long-term endeavour.

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that generalists have lower levels of confidence to teach primary physical education (Randall & Griggs, 2021). A closely related concept is perceived self-efficacy, which is an individual's belief about their capability to complete a task. These parameters are often difficult and underpinned by a lack of knowledge about what PE entails. Developing empirically verified training programmes would allow replication of the effective training strategies and practices used in TPSR-based interventions. As Martinek and Hellison (1997) note, focusing on personal strengths and available resources and enhancing interpersonal processes between children and teachers is essential for increasing the prospects of successful implementation of a TPSR programme. While this applies to all aspects of teacher education, the need here is for greater learning for primary generalist teachers in social justice (pedagogies) by enacting the socially-just TPSR approach.

Looking ahead, structured FMS and TPSR professional development holds considerable promise for supporting active, student-centred learning environments in PE and presents an adaptable framework for generalist PE teachers. TPSR training programmes often target PE and sports teachers and focus on their professional development. Future research will be instrumental in providing continued professional development for primary generalist teachers. It should focus on adaptive and context-sensitive approaches that cater to individual children's FMS developmental needs and the cultural and behavioural characteristics of the learning environment. Professional development is considered crucial to meet the needs of contemporary students (Armour et al., 2017). Effective professional development to address this issue should be supportive, job embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative and ongoing. Furthermore, primary generalist teachers need to provide a positive learning environment that focusses on skill progression for all children.

5. Conclusion

Across their educational journey, primary school children should not only develop academically, but they should also develop the physical skills, values and behaviours that will help them develop physically and emotionally. As TPSR continues to evolve and be refined over the next decade and beyond, its potential to support meaningful learning and lifelong physical activity habits in students will depend on ongoing collaboration among researchers, educators, and communities. Ultimately, these advancements will contribute to a more nuanced, context-sensitive, and impactful approach to the designs and implementations in PE. It is incumbent on the PE profession to re-focus its professional development efforts for primary generalist teachers, locally, nationally and globally, to concentrate on the expansion of a strategic and longstanding program intended at merging FMS and prosocial frameworks such

as TPSR. While both generalist and specialist teachers are responsible to help children develop holistically by helping them form and identify their emotional, spiritual, social, physical and intellectual characteristics, and while FMS might provide optimal support to the development of motor skills, TPSR can help develop social skills. Therefore, the issue of what constitutes effective content knowledge along with the organization of the educational process related to the discipline of PE for the primary generalist teacher requires further attention.

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Women Scholars Pilot E-mentoring Peer Program: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Despite a growing body of research exploring e-mentoring among women, literature on e-mentoring in peer teaching between women scholars is limited. Women scholars often face challenges which hinder their academic progress. These challenges include gender bias, limited access to professional networks, and difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities. Aiming to foster an inclusive research community for women from diverse backgrounds, this exploratory study examined the experience of six women scholars in a 6-week Pilot E-mentoring Peer Program hosted by the Ronin Institute Women's Interest Group. The objectives of this pilot program were to empower women scholars by offering professional and psychosocial support from their peer scholars. Participants were asked to create a participant profile followed by a self-matching process to find their peer-mentor. Participants were expected to communicate at least one hour every week for six weeks via an agreed digital communication method with self-directed mentoring goals. A survey, including Likert scale, open-ended and close-ended questions, was designed to explore participants' experience of the program. We conducted basic text analysis on the open-ended responses and used a descriptive approach to present the results. Our findings evidenced the presence of professional and psychosocial support between participants, achieving the aim of this pilot program.

Recommendations for future improvements include extending the mentoring period, expanding participant networks, and offering continued support after the program finished. The practical implication of such programs has the potential to create inclusive academic environments that support underrepresented groups.

Keywords/Keyphrases: e-mentoring, peer teaching, women scholars, women in research, digital communications, mentoring in academic and industry

1. Introduction

Ronin Institute is a virtual organisation for independent scholars around the world. While higher education institutes have departments for different academic disciplines, Ronin Institute has Interest Groups where members met and collaborated on topical projects. Unlike traditional institutes, these Interest Groups were self-organised and community-based thus allowing cross-disciplinary exchange, enabling members to contribute and participate at a level of their own commitment. Ronin Women was one of the Interest Groups where women independent scholars with different academic backgrounds from all over the world, spanning at least six different time zones, met once every month through online platforms. Ronin Women aimed to support and foster an inclusive research community for women, as well as facilitating the professional development and psychosocial well-being of these scholars.

1.1. Peer Mentoring and Women Scholars

Peer mentoring, as known as peer teaching or peer learning, is a dynamic relationship between peers who share the process of learning and growth for professional support and development (McLoughlin et al., 2007; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2021). Peer mentoring programs play a crucial role in addressing the unique challenges faced by women scholars by providing tailored professional and psychosocial support, guidance, and opportunities for professional development (Murphy et al., 2024; Schmidt & Faber, 2016; Smith et al., 2024; Wendt & Jones, 2024). In supporting community building and reducing isolation, peer mentoring fosters collaboration and mutual learning among participants. Long-term studies of peer mentoring have shown significant improvements in academic skills, confidence, and career progression for women in academic medicine (Mayer et al., 2014; Sambunjak et al., 2010).

1.2. E-mentoring in Women Scholars

E-mentoring is a process where mentoring occurs through digital communication platforms (Neely et al., 2017). E-mentoring leverages digital communication tools to connect mentors and mentees, offering flexibility and accessibility (Gish-Lieberman et al., 2021; Mahayosnand, 2024; Mahayosnand et al., 2021; Wendt & Jones, 2024). E-mentoring has the same goals and outcomes as traditional face-to-face mentoring, except it takes place through digital communication. E-mentoring allows participants to engage in meaningful mentoring relationships regardless of geographic distance or logistical barriers, making it an invaluable approach in today's digital age. Structured e-mentoring programs improve self-efficacy, enhance career development, and provide critical support for women scholars, particularly those in STEM and public health fields (Wendt & Jones, 2024). Rockinson-Szapkiw et al. (2021, p. 270) acknowledged that “literature on STEM peer mentoring, especially in virtual environments, is even more sparse”. This highlights the critical need for continued research in

this area—a need our current study directly addresses by contributing to the literature, addressing existing gaps, and informing more effective practices.

1.3. Women Scholars

Similar to many other women academics within conventional academic frameworks, women scholars often face unique challenges in their careers, including gender bias, limited access to professional networks, difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities (Diele-Viegas et al., 2021; Mahayosnand et al., 2021; Murphy et al., 2024; Ntshongwana, 2024; Smith et al., 2024; Wendt & Jones, 2024). These systemic barriers hinder the advancement and retention of women in academic and research careers. These barriers made it particularly difficult to connect with women from underrepresented backgrounds, especially those from racial and ethnic minority groups, limiting their access to support and engagement (Ntshongwana, 2024; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2021; Wendt & Jones, 2024). This challenge in outreach is also reflected in the small sample size of this study, as it limited our ability to engage participants from underrepresented backgrounds. Addressing these challenges requires innovative and inclusive approaches that empower women, and foster equitable opportunities for them to excel. The online feature of Ronin Women enabled their members to be part of a research community, giving them a chance to collaborate and advance their research career that would not normally be possible in conventional academic frameworks.

1.4. Women Scholars Pilot E-mentoring Peer Program

Ronin Women's Interest Group received very positive feedback from its members due to its flexible and yet supportive nature. However, not all members are equipped with the same knowledge and skills that enable them to be successful in the way they wanted to be. Therefore, Ronin Women hosted a pilot e-mentoring program – Women Scholars Pilot E-mentoring Peer Program (WSPEPP), as an innovative initiative to support women scholars through peer mentoring. This program was designed to be self-directed, providing a structured platform for women scholars to connect, share experiences, and develop professional skills through mutual learning and collaboration. By combining the benefits of e-mentoring and peer teaching, WSPEPP aims to empower women scholars by offering professional and psychosocial support.

While the literature on e-mentoring and peer mentoring among women is limited (Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2021), there seems to be a growing body of research exploring e-mentoring among women. Due to limitations in connecting women scholars from diverse backgrounds, this study adopted an exploratory approach to examine peer mentoring experience in an e-mentoring program for women scholars.

2. Methods

Six women scholars, from a diverse racial and ethnic background located in six different time zones, enrolled in the Women Scholars Pilot E-mentoring Peer Program. They were given a 7-day open enrolment period to create an online profile for all participants to view. Profiles included information on location and time zone, preferred modes of contact, general academic interests, current research projects, the kind of knowledge they can share and they would like to learn, and the type of mentoring they would like to have.

Participants had one week to perform a self-matching process by connecting with other participants to find their peer mentor based on the online profiles. Three pairs of peer mentoring groups were formed, followed by six weeks of digital mentoring activity for at least one hour every week. Participants were free to choose their digital communication platforms that were suitable for them. This pilot e-mentoring peer program was designed to be self-directed. Therefore, each peer-mentoring pair (peer-pair) were instructed to discuss and agree on what they want to achieve during the mentoring period, such as mode and frequency of their communication, and goals of their meetings. All the participants were encouraged to join a Meet & Greet session in Week 1 of the program, where participants have a chance to meet other women scholars and the program leader (the Chief Investigator of this study). The three peer-pairs met on their agreed schedule for another five weeks, until the end of the program. Participants were then asked to complete a survey after the 6-week program. This survey consisted of 45 questions, including eleven open-ended questions, twenty-four 5-point scale questions (1=very dissatisfied/not very, 5=very satisfied/very much), and ten closed-end questions.

Since this is an exploratory study with only six participants, we used a descriptive approach to present the outcome of the twenty-four 5-point scale questions, including measures of central tendency (mean) and their variability (standard deviation). We also used Voyant Tools (Sinclair & Rockwell, 2016), an open-sourced web-based application, to perform text analysis on the open-ended responses. Word clouds were generated to explore patterns in the text responses, thus providing a visual understanding of participant experiences.

3. Results

3.1. Text Analysis

Text analysis was conducted with a word cloud generated from all the open-ended responses using Voyant Tools (Sinclair & Rockwell, 2016). The word cloud presents the words used in the text response. A larger size word means high frequency use. *New*, *experience*, *time*, *peer*, and *support* are five of the frequently used words in the participants' responses. This word cloud (Figure 1) provides a visual presentation of the participants' experiences in this pilot e-mentoring.

FIGURE 1. WORD CLOUD PRESENTED THE MOST FREQUENTLY USED WORDS IN PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES FOR THIS PILOT E-MENTORING PEER PROGRAM.



Source: generated by Voyant Tools, 2025

3.2. Overall Feedback

Participants were generally very satisfied with the e-mentoring program and think that this program was helpful in facilitating their professional development and psychosocial well-being (Table 1). Their overall feedback through open-ended responses provided further insight into their high satisfaction ratings. Participants generally found the program positive and meaningful. One participant thought “it was great to meet and work with someone [she] hadn’t met before”. Another indicated that there was a “need for [women scholars] to support and help each other”. Participants generally felt that “exchange of new ideas is very useful”, they “really enjoy the whole journey”, and commented that joining the e-mentoring peer program “was a very good experience”. They felt that joining this e-mentoring program gave them a chance to learn and collaborate with other women scholars, which was a “win-win” situation.

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON SATISFACTION LEVEL ON WSPEPP

Questions	Mean	SD
How satisfied were you with the Ronin Women Scholars Pilot Peer E-mentoring Program?	4.50	0.55
How relevant and helpful do you think the Ronin Women Scholar Pilot Peer E-mentoring Peer Program?	4.17	0.98

Source: own compilation/calculations

Participants provided additional comments expressing gratitude and optimism. They described the experience as “beautiful” because they “learned a lot regarding [their] research”. Their comments highlighted the program’s potential for women scholars to grow and learn.

3.3. Top Benefits

Participants generally perceived the e-mentoring program as relevant and helpful (Table 1). Participants highlighted the main benefit of joining this e-mentoring was personal growth,

including “patience, empathy, and flexibility”. Other key benefits include learning new ideas, gaining insights into others’ struggles, and receiving practical support. They had learnt “how to be gentle and generous to another individual’s life struggle and realise the presence is a good enough support” to their peers. The program also facilitated connections among women scholars, fostering a supportive and collaborative community. They felt that joining this e-mentoring program was a fantastic way to connect with other women scholars. Their responses evidenced the psychosocial support of this e-mentoring program (Wendt & Jones, 2024).

3.4. Most Satisfying Aspect

Participants’ most satisfying aspects of the program included forming new professional relationships, sharing resources, and learning from each other’s academic and personal experiences. Participants felt that “[sharing] resources and real-life experience as a female scholar” was the most satisfying aspect. The ability to “publish a simple research paper together” is definitely another satisfying experience shared by the participants. These responses, again, clearly evidenced both professional and psychosocial support can be achieved through this pilot e-mentoring peer program.

3.5. Suggestions for Improvement

Participants suggested extending the program’s duration to facilitate deeper connections and learning. They suggested offering “group mentorship sessions with people in the same field ... would facilitate research collaboration”. Other recommendations included setting clear timelines for profile submissions and matches, as participants generally felt that the peer-matching process was “very rush[ed] due to people posting their profile at the last minute”. They also felt that “more guidance during the program” might be helpful. However, responses varied, with some expressing indecisiveness about improvements.

3.6. Self-improvement

Participants noted areas for self-improvement, such as better time management, earlier engagement during the matching phase, and making a more significant effort to focus on program goals. However, some felt constrained by external commitments, limiting their ability to engage fully. Participants commented that “due to a number of projects [they were] working on, [they] could not allocate more time to this [program]”.

3.7. Satisfaction Level on Peer-pair Goals and Guidelines

These ten questions should be understood and interpreted in pairs. For example, the first pair of questions asked about the method of communication agreed between the pairs, then the second question of the pair asked if both participants adhered to what they had agreed on. At the end of the following section, we try to integrate these pair-question results into understanding our participants’ overall e-mentoring experience. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations (SD) of the participants’ satisfaction level on Peer-pair Goals and Guidelines. Results showed a high level of satisfaction in agreeing and adherence to the choice of communication methods.

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON SATISFACTION LEVEL FOR PEER-PAIR GOALS AND GUIDELINES

TopicItem#	Questions	Mean	SD
Communication methods mode Q19 - Q20	Agreeing with the preferred mode of communication	4.67	0.52
	Ability to adhere to your agreed-upon modes of communication	4.50	0.84
Communication frequency Q21 - Q22	Agreeing to the frequency of communication	4.17	0.98
	Ability to adhere to your agreed-upon frequency of communication	3.83	1.47
Relationship guidelines Q23 - Q24	Setting peer relationship guidelines	3.83	1.47
	Ability to adhere to the peer relationship guidelines	4.00	1.26
Establish goals and outcomes Q25 - Q26	Establishing program goals/outcomes individually and collectively as a peer-pair	4.00	1.26
	Ability to adhere to your established program goals/outcomes	3.83	1.17
Communication Structure Q27 - Q28	Developing a structure for your communications	4.00	1.26
	Ability to adhere to the structure of your communications	4.33	0.82

Source: own compilation/calculations

3.8. Preferred Communication Modes

Participants found it easy to communicate in their preferred mode. Their responses indicated that Telegram is the preferred method of communication for this e-mentoring program. Table 3 showed the preferred method of communication in priority order.

TABLE 3. ORDER OF PREFERRED COMMUNICATION

Communication Mode	Rank
Telegram	1
Email	2
Mobile/VOIP phone call	3
WhatsApp	4
Zoom	5
Slack	6
Other	7

Source: own compilation/calculations

3.9. Feedback on Self-directed Peer-pair Goals and Guidelines

While most participants appreciated the flexibility of the program, some struggled with time zones and mismatched goals. Some participants stated that they could not meet frequently because of the “significant difficulty with schedules, time zones for video [and] call meetings”. Others suggested an extended program duration would be helpful to accommodate varying schedules and priorities. They generally thought more guidance on how to achieve scholarship within the 6-week program would be helpful.

3.10. Least Satisfying Aspect

Feedback in the last section (3.9.) aligned with participants’ responses on their least satisfying aspect of the program. Challenges expressed by participants included difficulties in finding a suitable match, time management, and meeting expectations. While some participants felt their matches were not aligned with their needs, others cited external factors like illness or moving home hindered engagement.

The feedback on time zone difference and mismatched goals also explained the relatively lower satisfaction level on setting and adhering to relationship guidelines, establishing and adhering to program goals and outcomes, and developing and adhering to communication structure, as shown in the mean values in Table 2. The larger standard deviation values indicate a wide range of participants’ experience in the program.

Despite the mentioned challenges, some participants “really [enjoyed] working with [their] peer”. They said: “things happen in our life but we remain [present] to support each other”. This experience is a perfect example of what e-mentoring between women scholars aims to achieve – providing both professional and psychosocial support to make academic achievement possible for women scholars (Wendt & Jones, 2024).

3.11. Feedback and Satisfaction Level on Program Logistics

These questions explored the general operations of the program. The program modules included pre-program advertising, enrolment period, self-matching period, use of communication platforms, a Meet & Greet session, weekly prompts, periodic polls, program length, and the program lead’s abilities to answer questions. The maximum mean score of “Week 1 – Meet & Greet” indicated that participants found this module very helpful. Despite the average satisfaction level of the self-matching period appearing high (Table 4), its standard deviation value indicates some differences in participants’ response. In fact, these differences were reflected in the open-ended responses. Several participants noted that the self-matching period was too short, making it challenging to find a suitable peer. They commented that “the time between enrolment with a profile and the actual match was too short”, as it took “time ... to get connected to someone who showed interest in what [they are doing] and vice versa”. Participants agreed that extending this period by one to two days would be sufficient to assess compatibility and establish connections.

TABLE 4. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ON SATISFACTION LEVEL FOR PROGRAM LOGISTICS

Questions	Mean	SD
Pre-Program Advertising/Marketing	4.33	0.82
Enrolment Period	4.67	0.52
Self-Matching Period	4.17	1.17
Mandatory requirement to download and use Telegram	4.83	0.41
Single Peer-Pair Matching	4.67	0.82
Week 1 - Meet & Greet instructions	5.00	0.00
Weekly Prompts	4.50	1.22
Periodic Polls	4.17	0.98
Program length: 6 Weeks	4.33	0.82
Program Lead's abilities to answer your questions and concerns	4.50	0.84

Source: own compilation/calculations

3.12. Future Participation

Finally, all participants expressed that they are interested in future women scholars e-mentoring peer program. All participants indicated that they will recommend this e-mentoring peer program to other women scholars.

4. Discussion

4.1. Implications for Women and Mom Scholars

This study underscores the significance of tailored e-mentoring peer programs for women and mom scholars, addressing unique barriers such as professional isolation, time constraints, and balancing family and academic responsibilities (Murphy et al., 2024; Ntshongwana, 2024; Smith et al., 2024; Wendt & Jones, 2024). Participants valued opportunities for empathetic connections and productive networking, emphasising the need for structured yet flexible platforms to foster these relationships. Such programs have the potential to create inclusive academic environments that support underrepresented groups (Maguire et al., 2024; Wendt & Jones, 2024).

4.2. Peer Mentoring and E-mentoring Methodology

The hybrid peer/e-mentoring approach demonstrated in this study highlights the effectiveness of virtual formats in bridging geographical divides and promoting accessibility (Gish-Lieberman et al., 2021; Mahayosnand, 2024; Mahayosnand et al., 2021; Wendt & Jones, 2024). High satisfaction and strong adherence to communication preferences underscore the practicality of such methods in modern academia. However, feedback about the need for enhanced mentor-matching suggests refining the selection and pairing processes could further improve participant experiences.

4.3. Evaluation and Future Refinements of E-mentoring

Extending the program duration, for instance, may allow participants more time to build deeper connections and achieve their goals. Incorporating structured feedback loops during the program may also help identify and address any emerging issues in real time.

4.4. Limitations and Outliers

This study has several limitations that should be considered. The short six-week duration limited participants' ability to establish and deepen peer-mentoring relationships, as reflected in some text responses. Moreover, the small sample size of six participants provides only a glimpse of how e-mentoring peer program can be beneficial to women scholars, so the results cannot be generalised. The high degree of uniformity in responses to certain questions, such as unanimous satisfaction and interest in future participation, may also mask more nuanced trends. As a pilot study, these findings serve as a foundation for designing more robust and large-scale research in the future.

5. Conclusion

This study explored a six-week pilot e-mentoring peer program for women and mom scholars. The results indicate high satisfaction, showing evidence of professional and psychosocial support, and unanimous interest in future participation. Key areas for improvement include better mentor matching and extending the program duration, while the “Week 1 – Meet & Greet” module emerged as uniquely impactful due to its instructional nature. This finding also aligned with participants' request for more guidance during the program.

The findings highlight the practical potential of e-mentoring to support underrepresented academics. The findings also emphasise the importance of clear communication structures and tailored program designs. Reflecting on our positionality, we acknowledge potential biases in interpreting the results and the study's limitations as a pilot with a small sample size. Nevertheless, this exploratory study offers invaluable insights for scaling e-mentoring and peer mentoring initiatives, fostering inclusive academic growth for women research scholars.

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Data Availability

Data supporting the conclusions of this study can be made available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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Generalists vs. Specialists – The Benefits of Adopting a Horizontal Career Path for Gen Z and Early Graduates

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Abstract

Career development has significantly changed in recent years. Traditional career paths with vertical advancement leading to specialist positions become restricted for young individuals due to organisations' structural changes, forcing them to build their career horizontally as a generalist. Given contemporary careers have become more turbulent and complex, the significance of horizontal transitions between jobs allow individuals to gain a wide set of skills and experiences, aiding them to understand the complexities of the ever-evolving workforce. Previous studies demonstrated that generalists with horizontal career paths were more adaptable and likely to transfer their skills between jobs. As Gen Z is approaching 30 years old, their vertical career advancement could be affected by the structural changes in organisations, horizontal career paths may become their alternative approach. Since there is very limited research that focuses on horizontal career paths, future research on this topic would be very meaningful by adding insights into career development as generalists vs. specialists. Recommendations are offered for further research on horizontal career paths and training for early graduates, which could optimise better to provide broader opportunities and enhance career development outcomes.

Keywords/key phrases: Gen Z, careers, career paths, career development, career changes

1. Horizontal and Vertical Career Paths

Career advancement plays an important role in personal career success and social mobility. Traditional careers highlight the importance of vertical paths along the job ladder in one's respective field and eventually becoming a specialist. This type of career path provides job security in exchange for loyalty. However, career trajectories are restricted by formal job ladders that are hierarchical, controlled, and linear (Chudzikowski, 2012). The implied career trajectories from the organisations may not match the actual trajectories of individuals

(Chudzikowski, 2012; DiPrete, 1987). Contrarily, horizontal transitions are flexible and becoming increasingly prevalent due to reduced vertical advancement opportunities as a result of structural changes within organisations (Steindórsdóttir et al., 2023). As such, individuals are looking for alternatives to build their career horizontally to achieve their career goal. Horizontal career trajectories involve moving across different roles and functions, facilitating personal growth and development as well as improving person-environment fit, and are important to both objective and subjective career success (Steindórsdóttir et al., 2023). Given contemporary careers have become more turbulent and complex, the significance of horizontal transitions between jobs allow individuals to gain a wide set of skills and experiences, aiding them to understand the complexities of the ever-evolving workforce, making them more attractive candidates (Chudzikowski, 2012). Generalists usually thrive on adopting horizontal career paths with their diverse skill set, and the horizontal career paths provide broader opportunities for recent graduates, reducing entry barriers and enhancing career prospects. Since there are very limited studies on horizontal career paths, future research on this topic would be very meaningful, adding insights into career development as generalists vs. specialists both academically and in real-life.

2. Generalists vs. Specialists on a specific field: Generalists are easily adaptable and capable of moving horizon

Generalists possess broad skill sets and knowledge across multiple areas; specialists, on the other hand, focus on understanding specific tasks and fields with organisation-specific knowledge, their range of tasks is considered narrower than that of the generalists (Fahrenkopf et al., 2020). Studies have shown the advantage of being a generalist. Agcayazi et al. (2024) demonstrated that a generalist CEO has been shown to be an effective strategist leading to financial gain only because they were able to utilise their wider knowledge across multiple areas of the corporation. Contrastingly, specialists possess deep knowledge and expertise in their singular field, which is significant for careers that require in-depth knowledge. Specialists, however, depend heavily on collaborating with other area specialists. They may need extra training on the social aspect of their role to coordinate with others to complete a task (Fahrenkopf et al., 2020). They may find difficulties within the job market in our increasingly horizontal world where versatility and cross-functional capabilities are crucial. The findings of Fahrenkopf et al. (2020) revealed that generalists were observed to be more adaptable in different work contexts since they are more likely to transfer their skills from previous jobs to a new work environment, whereas specialists may take longer to adapt because their skills may not be transferable between jobs. Horizontal and lateral transitions of generalists and specialists are equally important for career success across the lifespan and in the workforce (Steindórsdóttir et al., 2023).

3. Embracing Horizontal Career Paths: Gen Z and Graduates

Data from Parker and Igielnik (2020) of Pew Research Centre indicated that Gen Z is projected to become a very well-educated and technologically adept generation because they are likely to be enrolled in college with college-educated parents, as well as growing up with technologies. They were observed to be highly ambitious and self-confident, motivated by finding opportunities to expand their skills (Dolores et al., 2022; Mahayosnand & Sabra, 2024; Parker & Igielnik, 2020). The oldest members of Gen Z are approaching 30 years old, and their career

opportunities would be caught up in the organisations' structural changes that restricted their vertical career advancement, forcing them to develop a horizontal career path, making this a meaningful research topic. Furthermore, Gen Z's career aspirations align with those of horizontal career paths with skills diversification and an ability to shift across different roles and departments as an entrepreneurial generation (Dolores et al., 2022; Estaiteyeh et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

Horizontal career paths offer significant benefits in today's dynamic workforce, particularly for Gen Z and graduates. We recommend that skill diversification should be taught during internships and cross-functional training (Estaiteyeh et al., 2023). Understanding and embracing horizontal career paths can provide broader opportunities and enhance career development, positioning young individuals for success in a rapidly evolving job market. As the workforce continues to change, adopting a horizontal career path mindset would be crucial for future career development. Companies could help to increase students' awareness in acquiring and developing soft skills in adapting to the changing labour market, improving their employability (Succi & Canovi, 2019). Existing research has demonstrated the benefits of horizontal career paths, with diverse and broad skill sets in furthering career development and opportunities. Further research on horizontal career paths could focus on the development of systems and strategies that schools or institutes may implement to enhance skill diversity and development in the workforce, alongside long-term impact studies.

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