

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2025

Print ISSN: 3007-7362

Online ISSN: 3007-7370

Journal of Trends in Arts and Humanities



Copyright© Upubscience Publisher

Journal of Trends in Arts and Humanities

Volume 2, Issue 1, 2025



Published by Upubscience Publisher

Copyright© The Authors

Upubscience Publisher adheres to the principles of Creative Commons, meaning that we do not claim copyright of the work we publish. We only ask people using one of our publications to respect the integrity of the work and to refer to the original location, title and author(s).

Copyright on any article is retained by the author(s) under the Creative Commons

Attribution license, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Authors grant us a license to publish the article and identify us as the original publisher.

Authors also grant any third party the right to use, distribute and reproduce the article in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Journal of Trends in Arts and Humanities

Print ISSN: 3007-7362 Online ISSN: 3007-7370

Email: info@upubscience.com

Website: <http://www.upubscience.com/>

Table of Content

DEMOCRATISATION: TRANSITIONS AND OBSTACLES AMONGST FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES Olaoye Elijah Olawale	1-7
EXPLORING THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA Okechukwu Chidoluo Vitus	8-14
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING, INTEGRITY, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN GENERATION Z: ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF MODERN SOCIETAL CHALLENGES ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT Joshua HK. Banda	15-25
SIMULACRA REPLACE REALITY IN BORGES' SHORT STORIES SuWen Dong	26-29
ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF FALSE INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETY Prosper Kwame Kuorsoh*, Ebenezer Nyamekye Nkrumah	30-41
THE CURRENT SITUATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' OCCUPATIONAL TENDENCY AND COUNTERMEASURES--TAKING HUBEI INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AS AN EXAMPLE Na Wang, ShaoHua Hu*	42-46
COVID-19 'S IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM ABIA STATE CIVIL SERVICE Uduma Ulu Eke, Goodluck I. Nwaogwugwu*	47-52
THE LEADING ROLE OF GRASSROOTS PARTY ORGANIZATIONS IN IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL OF JIANGXI APPLIED TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY Qing Xu*, Hui Wang	53-63
BEYOND SOCIOPATHY: UNDERSTANDING EVIL THROUGH THE LENS OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE Ya Ma	64-68
DIGITAL TWIN RECONSTRUCTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN DUNHUANG MURALS: AN ENGINEERING WORKFLOW GROUNDED IN PHYSICAL REPLICAS ZiLe Liu*, JiaYang Du	69-73

DEMOCRATISATION: TRANSITIONS AND OBSTACLES AMONGST FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Olaoye Elijah Olawale
Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.
Corresponding Email: Walejah1970@gmail.com

Abstract: The democratic process that was triggered in Africa in the 1990s, especially in Francophone West Africa is choked with various problems. Few years ago, many African countries were either under military regimes or one party system. Today, the continent has witnessed a positive change at least in form and nomenclature with the exception of few countries where there were military coups recently namely: Mali, Niger Republic, Burkina Fasso. From Gambia to Benin Republic to Togolese Republic, countries have adopted democratic constitutions through popular elections. Yet in the course of transition through national conferences or military regimes to democratic regimes, most of these countries find themselves at crossroads. Democratization is synonymous to democratic consolidation which must entails guarantee of free and fair elections, fundamental human rights, freedoms, participation and rule of law. This paper discusses transitions to democracy of some francophone West African countries and analyses the problems confronting its development process. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex process of democratization in Francophone West Africa.

Keywords: Democratization; Francophone West Africa; Democratic transitions; Obstacles

1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy is usually defined as a set of institutions or governmental processes. Yet one seldom wonders what makes these institutions democratic. Thus when these institutions are used, as they most often are, for non democratic purposes, identifying them automatically to democracy leads to a situation where democracy itself is a bad name [1].

Democracy was born in the ancient city of Athens in Greece. Greek democracy was probably the first form of democratic politics after which western civilization was patterned. To an Athenian, every male citizen ought to play his part in the affairs of his city. Politics was the business of the ‘city’. The Greek thinkers who first commented on Athenian democracy and whose works contain some of the challenging and durable assessments of democratic theory and practice that have been written are Thucydides (460-399 B.C.); Plato (427-476 B.C.); and Aristotle (348 B. C. – 322 B. C.). The ideals and aims of Athenian democracy are recounted in the famous funeral speech attributed to Pericles, prominent Athenian General and politician. The speech recomposed by Thucydides thirty years after its delivery extols the political strength and importance of Athens. The following passage is worthy to be highlighted here:

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is not in the hands of a minority, but of the whole people. When it is a question of settling private disputes, everyone is equal before the law; when it is a question of putting one person before another in position of public responsibility what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty. We are free and tolerant in our private lives, but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respects. We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially, those which are for the protection of the oppressed. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussion: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated. Thucydides cited [2].

Subsequently, there was the emergence of the concept of the “republic” in Rome, to establish the participation of citizens in the management of public affairs. Gradually the need to involve citizens in public decisions extended to Europe and America. Liberal model of democracy emerged with universal suffrage and the willingness to promote citizens’ rights and liberties.

Democratization in Africa in general was also launched immediately after the end of the cold war with the collapse of communism and the last wave starting in the last decade of the twentieth century and especially when donor countries like France imposed democratic label on aid-dependent countries mainly its former colonies. In addition, internal agitations from civil society associations compelled the military and one party civilian dictator to open up the political terrain for multiparty elections. These brought dramatic political change to Africa. The whole continent is swept by a wave of democratization; government after government was forced to compete in multiparty elections. As at 1998, as many as twenty-nine countries in Africa were operating the one-party system. These countries included: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d’Ivoire, Djibouti Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principé, Seychelles, Sierra

Leone, Somalia, Tanzania, Togo, Zaire and Zambia. As at 1998, about ten African countries were military oligarchies. These include: Burkina Faso, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Lesotho, Libya, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, and Uganda. In addition, two of these countries namely Morocco and Swaziland operate a monarchical form of government. Presently, four Francophone West African have returned to Military rule namely Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso and Chad in Central Africa. Western governments no longer had strategic interests in propping up repressive regimes merely because they were friendly to the West. Along with the World Bank, they concluded that one party regimes lacking popular participation constituted a serious hindrance to economic development and placed emphasis on the need for democratic reform. At a France-African summit at la Baule in France, in June 1990, which was attended by thirty-three African delegations, twenty-two of which were led by Heads of State, President Francois Mitterrand stated that French aid would be dependent on efforts towards liberalization. While pledging to stand by Africa during its current economic crisis, President François said that French aid would in the future flow more enthusiastically to countries that take steps towards democracy [3]. The emergence of a western consensus in favor of promoting democratic principles coincided with the rise of increasingly vocal & powerful African Pro-Democracy movements, popular protests and demands for political reform often emerged as a response to the intensification of government-sponsored political repression and human rights abuses throughout the 1980s.

This trend peaked in 1991, when, according to a commentator; a total of eighty six popular protests were recorded in thirty African countries – protestors were emboldened by the adoption of continent-wide human rights norms, which was confirmed by the ratification of the African Charter of Human and People’s Rights by the majority of African Countries at the beginning of the 1990s. Protesters were also driven by the severe deterioration of African economies that made it difficult for individual families, already perilously close to abject poverty.

Transitions from authoritarianism to democracy have been extremely varied, making it difficult to discern patterns that aid explanation. This complexity is sometimes compounded by confusion between the causes of authoritarian breakdown and the processes by which democratic replacement are introduced, as with a classification of the “routes” to democracy as: “modernization”, which focuses on the economic prerequisites of democracy; “structural”, which focuses on the effects on authoritarianism of changes in class and power; and “transitional” which focuses on the bargaining between elites which negotiate the transition to democracy [4].

2 TRANSITION THROUGH ONE PARTY- SYSTEM

From the list above, we can see that as late as 1988, one party state and military regimes were dominant, while opposition parties were outlawed in most African countries. The political norm was a highly personalized executive who governed through tightly controlled one party- systems. A good example of such a country was Côte d’Ivoire, then, home to some 15 million people in West Africa, a former French colony, where the first three decades were dominated by one individual, Felix Houphouet-Boigny. He was the focus of all state activity, master-minding the centralization of the government. Houphouet-Boigny exercised personal rule from the office of President, gaining legitimacy for his regime through a complex network that cast his influence in all areas of the Ivoirian society.

He ruled through the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d’Ivoire (P.D.C.I). He was, however, forced by many pressures including the former President Laurent Gbagbo, to compete in his first multi-party contest for the post of President (after holding this office for 30 years). Felix Houphouet-Boigny died in 1993, marking the end of an era. This pattern was followed by a number of African countries- Zambia, Gabon, Burkina Faso and Kenya. Needless to say, there are variations in the countries in which the pattern has been adopted, especially as regards the space of time within which the change was effected. The political frameworks bequeathed to the African continent at the beginning of the contemporary independence era embodied an authoritarian-democratic paradox in which African leaders, educated in authoritarianism during the colonial era, were expected to perform like seasoned experts in democracy. Despite their almost complete disregard for the promotion of democratic values during the colonial era, departing colonial administrators hastily constructed political arrangements that purported to embody western democratic ideals, such as systems of checks-and-balances, in which offices of the president, legislatures and judiciaries would balance each other’s power and prevent the emergence of authoritarianism.

In France’s former colonies, the centralized Elysée model was introduced. Generally the so-called democracies left behind by the colonial masters represented largely untested and ill-suited political procedures that were not grounded in African political cultures

Schraeder P.J. highlighted a variety of authoritarian measures taken by those African leaders to enhance their political power and ensure political survival at the expense of competing interests. Among those actions taken were the [5]:-

- ❖ Staffing of bureaucracies, Militaries, and police force with members of leader’s ethnic or clan groups, as well as with their principal ethnic or clan allies.
- ❖ Rejection of “Federalist” arrangements, such as constitutional amendments that allowed for the political autonomy of groups or regions based on ethnic, linguistic or religious claims.
- ❖ Marginalization or even disbanding of independent parliaments and judiciaries that at best became “rubber stamp” organizations incapable of serving as a check on the powers of the executive.

- ❖ Imprisonment or exile of vocal critics from civil society, including women's groups labour unions, student organizations, and religious groups.
- ❖ Outlawing of rival political parties.

3 TRANSITION BY NATIONAL CONFERENCES

Among Francophone West African countries, the Republic of Benin was the pace-setter in democratic transition by national conference which was really like a popular coup d'état though no violence was involved [6]. The Benin Republic's transition to democracy through National Conference is a significant event in African history. In response to popular agitation featuring mass demonstrations supported by an umbrella of organisations called Assemblée des Forces Démocratiques, (Assembly of Democratic Forces) comprising four different movements, the one party- government of president Matthew Kérékou in January 1990 officially renounced Marxism-leninism, and called for a National conference on democratic reforms with members drawn from the government, the ruling party and the military both at home and in exile. The Benin Republic instituted a national Conference with sovereign powers which culminated in political democracy for the country [7].

The conference, at its meeting on February 21, 1990 declared itself, without due authorization, as having power to draft a new constitution, to give binding effect to its decision and to implement them accordingly. Against protestation by president Kerekou who declared that, "the conference had not been set up as constituent assembly and could not turn itself into one", the conference proceeded, in line with its earlier declaration, to take decision on multi- party presidential election to be held on January 27, 1991. It appointed Nicéphore Soglo as Prime Minister to head of a new cabinet with predominantly pro-democracy members.

The National Conference created what was called, Le Haut Conseil de la République meaning The High Council of the Republic (HCR) to oversee the executive, supervise the elections and approve the draft constitution. "Four former presidents of the country and the conference chairman (a bishop) were members of the H.C.R. At the same time, the country was re-named the Republic of Benin, thus dropping the word "people" [8]. Parliamentary elections, contested by 17 political parties, were held in February 1991, and presidential election in March in which, Nicéphore Soglo emerged the winner, defeating the incumbent Matthew Kérékou. The transition process in Benin was certainly "one of the most remarkable changes among the moves by African states towards democracy in 1990, It was novel, a revolutionary trail which many African countries: Togo, Niger, Ethiopia, Congo and Mali followed. The national Conference was a pivotal moment in Benin transition to democracy. It brought together various stake holders, including politicians, civil society representatives and traditional leaders to discuss the country's future and establish a new democratic framework. As Andre Salifou, the President of Niger's National Conference described it Le Benin fait l'école - "Benin is setting the exemple" [5]. This statement highlights the significance of Benin's National Conference as a model for democratic transition in Africa.

In Mali a new multi-party constitution drafted under the auspices of an interim government appointed by the national conference was approved at a referendum in January 1992, and elections for local government councils contested by 20 parties were held.

The national conferences of Togo and Niger were interrupted by the army assigned by the incumbent military heads of state to restore their powers. In Niger Republic, the national conference, inaugurated on 29 July, 1991 with 1200 delegates representing trade unions, students' unions, thirty political parties, the Chamber of Commerce and the civil service, constituted itself as the supreme authority for the government of the country, reducing the then President Ali Saibou to a mere ceremonial Head of State. In November 1991, the national conference, headed by an academic from the University of Niger, Professor Andre Salifou, came up with an interim government installed to rule the country for 15 months during which general elections would be held. The army was divided between those supporting and those opposed to the national conference, resulting in an uprising in which, the former took over the radio station, arrested some members of Ali Saibou's regime and forced the dissolution of his council of ministers. Jibrin Ibrahim explained how this development fostered the passion for liberty throughout the country:

It generated very wide public interest in politics which expressed itself through popular participation in political discussion in the newspapers, three of which had sprung up during the period, and through numerous petitions for investigations into corrupt practices and other abuses. It reversed the marginality of the population and the will and determination for people participation in politics became the order of the day [9].

According to Schraeder P. J., the democratization process with the guidance of the national conference generally follow five major steps [5].

First, a broad coalition of leaders responds to a growing crisis of governance in the country by convening a national conference in the capital city. The guiding principle of this body is its self-appointed "sovereignty" (i.e. independence) from either the existing constitutional framework or any interference on the part of the ruling regime.

Second, the national conference appoints a transitional government that initially seeks dialogue with the ruling regime. Over time, however, a weakened president is either robbed of his executive powers or is simply declared an illegitimate authority that no longer has authority to lead. In either case, the president is usually reduced to a figurehead. Third, the national conference transforms itself into a transitional legislative body (often called the High Council) that, in turn, formally elects a

Prime Minister who manages the transition process. Finally, the transitional government adopts a new constitution and holds legislative and presidential elections, subsequently dissolving itself on the inauguration of the newly elected democratic regime.

Another transition through national conference but with different perspective was held in Togo. General Eyadema, the then military President of the country made concession to the opposition when faced with successive waves of popular protests, but retained the control of the army to decide what the outcome of the National Conferences would be. After month of strikes, demonstration and violence. In April 1991, he allowed opposition parties to operate and in July, yielded to demands for a national conference. In a mood of euphoria, suddenly free to speak out, opposition activities used the conference in July and August to denounce the years of brutality and repression they had suffered at the hands of his regime and to demand his prosecution [10].

Many gave harrowing first-hand accounts of detentions, torture and murder. Defying Eyadema's authority, delegates then declared the conference to be sovereign, appointed a High Council of the Republic under the leadership of a Catholic Bishop to draft a new constitution, chose a well-known human rights crusader, Kokou Koffigoh, as Prime Minister and scheduled election for June 1992. Eyadema denounced what he describes as "civilian coup" and rejected the new dispensation [11].

4 OBSTACLES TO DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN FRANCOPHONE WEST AFRICA

Since many African countries became independent, experience has shown there are various challenges confronting democracy in the continent. This has led some scholars to wonder whether democracy is feasible in Africa. Claude Ake for instance queried:

Is democratization feasible in Africa? That is the question that I wish to address. It should not be confused with the question of the possibility of democracy in Africa which, though often asked, does not really arise, because democracy is in principle possible everywhere. The question is not whether democracy can be or even whether it ought to be but how it "becomes" in the light of the circumstances of a particular historical situation [12].

5 COLONIALISM

History and the physical environment are very important in shaping national character and institutions. A Tocquevillian approach calls for tracing the origins of contemporary societies. If applied to African countries, this means analysing the impact of colonization on African societies would go a long; in fact, the immediate source of the African post-colonial crisis is situated in the colonial history of Africa. Colonialism can be said to be a part of the disastrous history of slavery and imperialism. The legitimating of the colonial enterprise started with the intellectual denigration of Africans perpetuated by Kant, Hegel and Hume to mention but few European scholars who stamped the African with the badge of sub humanity. Then, in the agenda of the European "civilization mission" laid the economic necessity which drove an industrializing Europe into an imperialistic imbroglio culminating in the 1884 Berlin Conference.

It was in Berlin that the African continent was balkanized into colonies serving the metropolitan economic, political and socio-cultural interests of Europe. Scholars have argued that the brief seven year period between the 1884 Berlin Conference and 1891 which signaled the beginning of the decolonization process represents an inadequate understanding of the history of the Western exploitation. The important aspect of western exploitation could be traced to the beginning of the maritime commercial incursion into Africa by the early European merchants in the mid-fifteenth century. It was a commercial enterprise aimed at the extraction and exploitation of the natural and raw materials of the African continent which led to the horror of the slave trade. One can mention such commercial traders and explorers like Lord Lugard in Nigeria, Cecil Rhodes in South Africa, Brazza in Congo, Mongo Park in Mali and Hugh De Lamere in Kenya. Eze supported this view:

The European imperial incursions in Africa, which began in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and grew into the massive transatlantic slave trade, (2) the violent conquest and occupation of the various parts of the continent by diverse European powers which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and (3) the forced administration of African lands and peoples which followed this conquest, and which lasted into the years of independence in the 1950s and 1960s... slave trade, conquest, occupation, and forced administration of people, in that order, were all part of an unfolding history of colonialism [12].

The two phases of European colonialism led to the indescribable crisis and deep suffering of Africans, which consequently led to the disruption of their culture and psyche. The first and major effect was the partitioning of the continent into colonial fiefdoms for the interest of the European powers. Writing on the consequences of colonialism on African culture, Abiola Irele stated:

... For the intensity of the ambivalence we demonstrate in our response to Europe and Western civilization is in fact a measure of our emotional tribute: It is expressive, in a profound way, of the cultural hold which Europe has secured upon us- of the alienation which it has imposed upon us as a historical fate [13].

The effect of colonialism according to him led to the pathology of alienation. An average African was schooled to abandon and even to work against the cultural heritage of his forefathers. He was not free to determine the condition of his existence and the colonialists never encouraged such conditions.

6 LACK OF LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

Alexis de Tocqueville, a nineteenth century French thinker of liberal democracy in his book titled: *On Democracy* warned that formal rules providing for democratic institutions and liberties would not easily be enforced by rulers nor invoked by people in society without liberal traditions. He regarded concentration of power in the hands of a single person or political institution as an obstacle to liberal democracy because it can lead to centralized power and centralized administration [14]. Throughout francophone West Africa, one party regimes and military regimes violated the right guaranteed by their countries' constitutions.

Generally, in postcolonial Africa, the state has been the primary arena of class formation and the primary means for the accumulation of personal wealth, leading to corruption, the concentration of power, the emergence of a parasitic bureaucratic bourgeoisie, and the absence of a middle class to demand the expansion of democratic rights and limitation of state power. With a few exceptions, there was absence of autonomous associations, traditional leaders, trade unions, religious groups, students unions, and so on – that are necessary for stable, responsive and accountable government. Military dominance prevented the autonomy of the civil society and political parties, a foundation of liberal democratic tradition has been removed with authoritarian consequences.

7 NATIONAL QUESTION/THE DANGER OF ETHNICITY

The notion of the civil society is more or less synonymous with the notion for national unity, and its creation raises the same question, (in many plural societies of Africa) which is generally referred to as the “national question.” The negative cultural influence of colonialism on traditional societies and their lumping together into countries cannot be overemphasized. The traditional societies separated as they are by differences in values and norms are yet to coalesce into one national civil society animated by a common spirit and a feeling of a common nationality and identity, propelled by the same social dynamics [15].

Most heterogeneous African countries like Nigeria do not yet have citizens, only different people (such as Hausas, Igbos and Yoruba) or, in the words of Tocqueville, they only have “men” but not “social body.” Colonialism was the glue that stuck these human units together into a shape recognizable in an atlas. To transform these ethnic units into a nation, into one national civil society bound together by the fellow-feeling (15) of common citizens is one of the obstacles to democratic consolidation in Africa. The main force of civil society lies in a united public opinion, such a force is impossible among a people without fellow-feeling.

The influence which forms opinions and decides political acts at different sections of the country, their mutual antipathies are generally much stronger than jealousy of the government. That any of them feels aggrieved by the policy of the common ruler is sufficient to determine whether or not to support that policy. Even if all are aggrieved, none feels that they can rely on the others for fidelity in a joint resistance [16].

For Africans to solve this problem, they must learn to live together as one, before the arrival of the white man. Africans must create common ties among themselves; banish ethnic distrust, prejudices and fear. In addition, the government must accord every citizen and group equal opportunity for progress. Individuals must rise above the temptation and disposition to champion the interest of one's ethnic group at the expense of others. It is not to denounce ethnicity, far from it, ethnicity is a reality and a fact. After all, as diverse as African societies are in ethnic groups, there was a good degree of unity among people, especially among people of the same race before the slave trade. For most of us, these social formations and group identities are not externalities but the core of our being; it is by these identities that most of us define our individuality [17]. The danger of ethnicity is its tendency towards nepotism, when an individual, or group of people decide to champion his/their ethnic interests in total disregard of those of others and the nation itself.

8 INEQUALITY

Democracy is supposed to be the product and the guardian both of equality and of liberty, being so consecrated by its relationship to both these precious possessions as to be almost above criticism [18].

Unlike European and American societies, social inequality, abject and illiteracy are conspicuous features of African societies. Compare to the farmers or urban workers in Africa who dominate the population, the factory worker in America or Europe have a fairly good salary and better living standards. He can afford medical, water, electric bills, school fees for his children, a decent accommodation equipped with recreational and leisure facilities.

In western countries the gap between the rich millionaire and the poor factory worker has been narrowed. The latter can afford to regard the former with an attitude if not of equality, then certainly not of servility. The present democratic regime

in Africa in general must try to narrow the existing gap that has been created between people by the military and one-party governments. Secondary school dropouts, who are now political office holders earn more than university professors. Disparity in wealth and income produces disparity in political influence among individuals. With the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of few, the influence exerted may indeed be so great as almost to put the control of the entire political process in the hands of the privileged few. Government must also provide a level playing ground for everybody, as all are equal before the law, there must be provision of basic amenities and jobs [19].

9 MILITARY INTERVENTION

Military Coup d'états have been present on the African political scene since Independence, through which the military achieve power and influence over the civilian governments. By the end of the 1960s, military leaders have launched over twenty-five successful coups, ushering in a period of militarization that soon left more than 50 percent of all African countries governed by military regimes. The pervasiveness of military leaders as the principal agents of regime change is demonstrated by the unfolding of many successful military coups from 1951-2002 [20].

The current democratization is not spared, from 2017-2022, sub-Saharan Africa is witnessing another wave of military coups. Latest among them took place in Sudan, Chad. In Francophone West Africa, in Mali the military seized power in August 2020, ousting democratically elected President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. On the 5th of September, democratically elected Alpha Conde of Guinee Conakry was overthrown by the military [20]. Similarly in Burkina Fasso, the military took control in January 2022, overthrowing President Raoult Marc Kabore and last year July, the military seized in Niger overthrowing democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum. Men in khaki cited bad governance as the reason for their intervention. Their reasons whether genuine or not have been a clog in the wheel of democratic consolidation in Africa.

10 LACK OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS

Credible elections constitute a platform upon which, the rule of law, transparency, good governance, respect for human rights and other institutionalised democratic mechanisms can foster. Yet, credible elections or a shallow democratic beginning is no guarantee for future democratic stability. We saw it in 18th century France when the revolutionary forces violently sacked the monarchy, killed the king and all his sympathizers - not only did the revolution result in the brutal and dictatorial reign of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, it equally failed to start democracy. Revolution is a good option in case of a guided democracy where a charismatic leader that respects and promotes the rule of law, good governance and transparency became the head of state. Ghana is a good example of a country that has achieved the gains of a guided democratic revolution [21].

African countries that refuse to consolidate their democracy are today below the threshold of electoral democracy. Under this group we have Mali, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger and Egypt among others. The situation is not different in countries where the military regime transformed itself into democratic government and holding on to power for life through kangaroo elections. Under this group we have: Togo, Burkina Faso, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Central Africa, Gabon and Cameroon where President Paul Biya, who just died this year, perpetuated himself in power for 42 years. Countries that were able to conduct fairly free and fair elections are also at risk of military intervention because their leaders violate the constitution. Under this group Benin, Niger and Senegal. The attitude of all these leaders is what Tocqueville termed "democratic despotism"

The Economist Intelligence Unit' a body that measures the state of democracy based on 60 indicators divided into five different categories: Electoral process, pluralism, civic liberties, functioning of government, participation and political culture, classified all the countries into 3 categories: full democracies, flawed democracies and authoritarian regimes. According to this body, all African democratic governments fall under authoritarian regimes except, South Africa, Cap Verde, Benin and Ghana that are flawed democracies. In African states, therefore, the challenge is not to implement the machinery of electoral democracy but to establish the norms within the democratic political culture that will make people to reject other forms of government. The process of consolidating democracy is far beyond elections, it entails strengthening democratic institutions (rule of law, protection of civil rights). Political institutions and the society need to be infused with democratic culture by preventing authoritarian tendencies. There is need for mass literacy, freedom of expression and empowerment of associations especially at local level to encourage popular participation. Yet, most African countries experiencing democratization have rejected political liberty or paid mere lip service to it. As could be seen, democracy in many African countries is crises-ridden because it is devoid of appropriate democratic culture which could nurture it [23].

11 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Analysis, also, have revealed that, the Anglophone countries, and the francophone countries share the same democratization experiences. While, the first power elites retained the colonial state structure in place, the contemporary leaders are selfish, corrupt and insensitive to people's plight. Worse still, they conspire with Western countries to further compound the

problem of African societies. Since the end of the cold war, democracy is touted as the only medium France, Britain and America have been using to consolidate their political hegemony created by the collapse of the Soviet Union [22]. Western countries involvement in Africa is for selfish reason. We have seen it in the case of France with “Les réseaux Rocard (The Rocard Networks) through which it maintained its dominion over its former colonies. According the same Documentary, In 1958, when Guinée Conakry opted for immediate independence from France, Charles de Gaulle the then President of France, fought the Government of Sékou Touré to a standstill. After the independence of Gabon, Congo and Algeria, their leaders continue to conspire with France through ELF, to embezzle the money accrued from the petroleum proceeds [23]. These same Western countries are coming back through World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). On one hand these so called development agencies advise us to domesticate our democracy; on the other hand they force us to accept their policies as the only condition for loans refundable with high interests. And, our leaders are already possessed with the spirit of corruption, obtain those loans and force it on the ordinary people, policies that have not been tested and proven anywhere in the world.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ake C. The Feasibility of democracy in Africa, Keynote address at a Symposium on democratic Transition in Africa organized by the Centre for Research, Documentation and University Exchange, University of Ibadan, 1992: 16-19.
- [2] Badie Hima cited in State of Democracy in West Africa. The State of Democracy in West Africa, Dakar, Goree Institute, 2009: 311
- [3] Cohen C. Communism, Fascism, Democracy, The Theoretical Foundations, New York: Random House, 1962.
- [4] The New York Times. 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com>.
- [5] Smith BC. Understanding Third World Politics, New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
- [6] Ralph Uweche. Africa Today, 2nd edition. 1991.
- [7] Schraeder Peter J. African Politics and Society. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2004
- [8] Omitoogun W, Ongu-Otitete K. The National conference as a model for democratic transition: Benin and Nigeria. IFRA-Nigeria, African Book Builders, 1996.
- [9] Haut Conseil de Republique. 2024. <http://www.cour-constitutionnelle-benin.org/hcr/presentation.html> accessed.
- [10] Jibrin I. From Political Exclamation to Popular Participation : Democratic transition in Niger Republic. Democracy Transition in Africa, 1992.
- [11] Schraeder Peter J. African Politics and Society. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2004. Meredith, M. 2nd Edition, The State of Africa, Free Press, London, 2006.
- [12] Meredith, M. The State of Africa, Free Press, London, 2006.
- [13] Ake C. The Feasibility of democracy in Africa, Keynote address at a Symposium on democratic Transition in Africa organized by the Centre for Research, Documentation and University Exchange, University of Ibadan, 1992: 16-19.
- [14] Eze Chukudi. Introduction: Philosophy and the (Post) colonial in Chkwudi Eze(ed) Postcolonial African Philosophy, Cambridge. Mass:Blackwell, 1997
- [15] Irele Abiola. In praise of Alienation, An Inaugural lecture delivered on the 22nd of November, University of Ibadan, 1982.
- [16] Tocqueville, Alexis de. Democracy in America. New York: New American Library, 1956.
- [17] Nwabueze BO. Democratization, Spectrum Books Limited. Ibadan. 1993.
- [18] Mill J S. Representative Government. London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1910.
- [19] Ake C. Democracy and Development in Africa, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1995.
- [20] Bryce J. Modern Democracies. New York: Penguin Press, 1920.
- [21] Fred E Harris. America's Democracy, New York: Penguin Press, 1989.
- [22] Schraeder Peter J. African Politics and Society. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2004.
- [23] Global Centre for the responsibility to protect. 2024. <https://www.global2p.org/countries/mali/burkina-fasso/niger>.
- [24] Diamond L. University Democracy? Policy Review, Heritage Foundation, 2003. Retrieved from www.policyreview.org/jun03/diamond.html.
- [25] Ake, C. Democracy and Development in Africa, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1995.
- [26] The Economist Intelligence Unit. The New York Times, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com>.

EXPLORING THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

Okechukwu Chidoluo Vitus

Omnibus Institute of Professional Learning and Development, Lagos 42100, Nigeria.

Corresponding Email: jlcmedias@gmail.com

Abstract: This research article investigates the trends in the arts and humanities within Idemili North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. The primary objective of the study is to analyze the current state of artistic and cultural expressions, educational frameworks, and community engagement in the region. The methodology employed includes a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with local artists, educators, and community leaders, alongside quantitative surveys distributed among residents to gather a broader perspective on the cultural landscape. Key findings reveal a vibrant yet complex interplay of traditional and contemporary art forms. The study highlights a resurgence of interest in indigenous practices such as masquerade performances and traditional storytelling, juxtaposed with the growing influence of modern artistic expressions, including visual arts and digital media. Furthermore, the research identifies critical challenges facing the arts and humanities sector, including inadequate funding, lack of formal training programs, and limited public awareness of local cultural initiatives. Conclusions drawn from the findings emphasize the significance of fostering a supportive environment for the arts and humanities in Idemili North. The study advocates for enhanced collaboration between local government, educational institutions, and community groups to promote cultural heritage and creative innovation. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging existing strengths, the region can cultivate a more robust arts and humanities sector that not only enriches local identity but also contributes to economic development and social cohesion. This research serves as a vital resource for policymakers, educators, and cultural advocates aiming to understand and enhance the arts and humanities landscape in Idemili North.

Keywords: Art; Humanities; Culture; Identity; Cultural identity

1 INTRODUCTION

The arts and humanities play a pivotal role in shaping cultural identity and fostering community engagement, particularly within the context of local governance in Nigeria. In Idemili North, a Local Government Area in Anambra State, the interplay between artistic expression and community development is increasingly significant. Historically, the region has been rich in cultural traditions, including masquerade performances, storytelling, and various forms of visual art. These practices not only serve as a means of cultural expression but also as essential tools for social cohesion and local governance.

In Nigeria, local governance structures often face challenges that hinder the effective promotion and sustainability of the arts and humanities. Issues such as inadequate funding, lack of formal educational programs, and limited public awareness can stifle the creative potential of communities. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the trends in Idemili North to understand how these factors influence the local arts scene and the broader implications for governance and community development.

This research aims to address several key questions: What are the current trends in the arts and humanities in Idemili North? How do these trends reflect the cultural identity and values of the community? What challenges do local artists and cultural practitioners face, and how can local governance support the arts effectively? By exploring these questions, the study seeks to uncover the dynamics at play within the arts sector in Idemili North and to propose actionable solutions that can enhance the role of arts and humanities in local governance. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and cultural advocates working towards a more vibrant and sustainable cultural landscape in the region.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of arts and humanities within the Nigerian context has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years, reflecting an increased awareness of cultural identity and community engagement. Various studies have highlighted the evolving nature of artistic expression in Nigeria, particularly in regions like Idemili, where traditional practices coexist with contemporary forms. A notable theoretical framework that underpins much of this discourse is the Cultural Studies paradigm, which emphasizes the significance of cultural practices in shaping societal values and identities.

Previous studies, such as those by Okafor [1] and Nwankwo [2], have documented the resilience of indigenous art forms amidst globalization, revealing how local artists navigate between heritage and modernity. Okafor's research particularly illustrates the role of masquerade performances as a vehicle for cultural preservation while simultaneously adapting to

contemporary audiences. Similarly, Nwankwo's analysis of visual arts in urban settings provides insights into the interplay between tradition and innovation, emphasizing the need for a supportive infrastructure that nurtures artistic endeavors. Despite these contributions, gaps remain in the literature, particularly concerning the specific challenges faced by artists in rural settings like Idemili. Existing studies often focus on urban centers, leaving a significant void in understanding the localized impacts of governance on arts and humanities. Furthermore, while the resilience of traditional practices has been documented, there is a lack of comprehensive research on the implications of digital media and technology in rural artistic expression.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by providing a focused examination of the arts and humanities landscape in Idemili North. By employing a mixed-methods approach, it seeks to uncover the unique challenges and opportunities that local artists encounter, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the regional cultural dynamics. Ultimately, this research aspires to enrich the discourse on arts and humanities in Nigeria by foregrounding the voices and experiences of those within less-studied contexts.

2.1 Historical Background of Idemili North Local Government Area

Idemili North Local Government Area, located in Anambra State, Nigeria, is steeped in a rich historical tapestry that profoundly influences its cultural, economic, and social dynamics. The region is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo people, whose heritage is characterized by a strong sense of community and vibrant artistic expressions. Historically, Idemili North has been an epicenter of trade and commerce, benefiting from its strategic location along major trade routes. This economic backdrop has facilitated the growth of various crafts and artistic endeavors, which are integral to the local identity.

Culturally, Idemili North is renowned for its traditional practices, including masquerade festivals, which serve not only as entertainment but also as vital expressions of communal values and ancestral reverence. These masquerades, often accompanied by drumming and dancing, illustrate the interconnectedness of art and spirituality in the community. Additionally, storytelling plays a crucial role in preserving oral histories and educating younger generations about cultural norms and societal values. These forms of artistic expression are vital for maintaining the social fabric of the community, fostering unity and continuity amidst changing times.

The economic aspect of Idemili North has also influenced its artistic landscape. The area has seen a blend of traditional craftsmanship with modern artistic innovations, as local artisans adapt to contemporary market demands while retaining their cultural roots. This adaptability has led to the emergence of diverse art forms, including visual arts that incorporate traditional motifs into modern designs.

Socially, the interactions among various ethnic groups within Idemili North have enriched its cultural expressions, fostering a spirit of collaboration and cross-cultural appreciation. Community events often showcase local talents, encouraging participation and engagement among residents. As such, the historical development of Idemili North serves as a foundation for its current artistic expressions, emphasizing the importance of cultural preservation and innovation in shaping the region's identity.

3 Methodology

The research design for this study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the trends in the arts and humanities in Idemili North. This approach allows for a richer exploration of the cultural landscape by capturing both statistical trends and personal narratives from the community.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local artists, educators, and community leaders. This method was chosen to facilitate in-depth discussions that reveal the participants' personal experiences, perspectives, and insights regarding the challenges and opportunities they face in the arts sector. The interviews were designed to be flexible, allowing respondents to express their thoughts in their own words while still addressing core research questions. This technique is particularly effective in capturing the nuanced realities of cultural practices and the subjective meanings attributed to them.

The quantitative aspect of the research involved the distribution of surveys to a diverse sample of residents within Idemili North. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across various demographics, including age, gender, and socio-economic status. The survey included closed-ended questions designed to measure public awareness of local cultural initiatives, participation in artistic activities, and perceptions of the arts and humanities' role in community development. This data collection method was justified given its ability to quantify trends and patterns, providing a broad overview of community engagement in the arts.

Data analysis involved a combination of thematic analysis for qualitative data and statistical analysis for quantitative data. The qualitative data was coded to identify recurring themes and insights, while the quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize findings and identify significant relationships among variables. This dual approach not only enhances the validity of the findings but also allows for a more robust interpretation of the results, illuminating the intricate dynamics between traditional and contemporary artistic expressions in Idemili North.

3.1 Demographics of Participants

The demographic profile of the study participants plays a crucial role in understanding the trends in arts and humanities within Idemili North. This section outlines the key demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education levels, and socio-economic backgrounds, and explores how these factors influence the participants' engagement with cultural practices.

3.2 Age Distribution

Participants in this study ranged from young adults to older community members, with a significant portion falling between the ages of 18 and 35. This age group is particularly important as they are often at the forefront of cultural innovation and engagement with contemporary artistic expressions. However, the study also included participants aged 36 to 65, who provided valuable insights into traditional practices and the preservation of cultural heritage.

3.3 Gender Representation

The gender distribution among participants was relatively balanced, with approximately 52% identifying as female and 48% as male. This gender parity allowed for diverse perspectives on the arts, particularly in how different genders experience and contribute to cultural initiatives. Women, in particular, have been instrumental in community-driven art projects and storytelling, while men often dominate traditional performance arts, such as masquerades.

3.4 Education Levels

Educational attainment varied among participants, with roughly 40% holding a tertiary degree, 35% possessing secondary education, and 25% having completed primary education. Those with higher education levels often exhibited greater awareness and engagement in contemporary arts practices, while participants with lower educational attainment tended to emphasize traditional art forms. This educational divide highlights the importance of accessible cultural education in fostering appreciation for both historical and modern artistic expressions.

3.5 Socio-Economic Backgrounds

Participants came from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, reflecting the diverse economic realities of Idemili North. While some participants were engaged in professional fields, such as education and healthcare, others were artisans or farmers whose livelihoods depended on local cultural practices. This socio-economic diversity influences participants' engagement with the arts, as those with more resources typically have greater access to training and opportunities for artistic expression.

By examining these demographic factors, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the cultural landscape in Idemili North, revealing how age, gender, education, and socio-economic status interact to shape trends in the arts and humanities. This knowledge is essential for stakeholders seeking to enhance community engagement and support cultural initiatives that resonate with the diverse population of the region.

3.6 Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis of collected data reveals significant insights into the participation, preferences, and perceptions regarding the arts and humanities within Idemili North. The data, derived from both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys, provides a comprehensive understanding of how the community engages with its cultural practices.

3.7 Participation in Arts and Humanities

Survey results indicate that approximately 65% of respondents actively participate in artistic activities, ranging from local theater performances and visual arts exhibitions to traditional events such as masquerade festivals. The qualitative interviews echo this sentiment, highlighting a strong community connection to both traditional and contemporary art forms. Participants emphasized the importance of these cultural practices in fostering social cohesion and identity. For instance, one artist remarked, "Masquerade performances are not just entertainment; they are a vital part of our heritage that unites us."

3.8 Preferences for Artistic Expression

When examining preferences for artistic expression, a noticeable trend emerges: younger participants (ages 18-35) show a marked interest in contemporary forms such as digital art and music, while older respondents (ages 36-65) tend to favor traditional practices like storytelling and crafts. Approximately 58% of younger respondents expressed a desire for more

modern artistic programs, indicating a potential shift in the cultural landscape. This generational divide highlights the need for inclusive programming that respects traditional values while embracing modern innovations.

3.9 Perceptions of the Arts and Humanities

Perceptions of the arts and humanities in Idemili North are generally positive, with 75% of survey participants recognizing their importance in community development. However, qualitative data reveal concerns about insufficient funding and lack of formal training opportunities. Many interviewees noted that while there is enthusiasm for artistic practices, the community often lacks resources to fully support these initiatives. One educator stated, "We have the talent, but without proper funding and training, it's hard to nurture that talent into something sustainable."

3.10 Conclusion of Findings

The descriptive analysis of the data collected offers a nuanced perspective on the current state of the arts and humanities in Idemili North. The interplay between participation levels, preferences, and perceptions underscores the vibrant yet challenging environment for artists and cultural practitioners. As the community navigates these dynamics, a collective effort to enhance support systems and programming will be essential to nurture its rich cultural heritage and foster innovation.

4 Discussion

The findings from this study reveal a complex interplay between traditional and contemporary artistic expressions in Idemili North, reflecting significant cultural, historical, and social issues prevalent in the region. The data indicates a strong community engagement with both forms of art, suggesting a vibrant cultural tapestry that is continuously evolving. This resonates with the research questions regarding current trends and their implications for local identity.

The resurgence of interest in indigenous practices, such as masquerade performances and storytelling, highlights a collective effort to preserve cultural heritage. This trend can be interpreted as a response to the challenges posed by globalization, where local identities risk being overshadowed by dominant external influences. The data underscores that community members view these traditional practices not only as entertainment but as essential expressions of their identity and values. This aligns with broader conversations about cultural preservation in Nigeria, where many regions face similar challenges in maintaining their unique heritage amidst modernization.

Moreover, the preference for contemporary forms of artistic expression among younger participants points to a generational shift. The desire for modern artistic programs suggests that the youth are seeking new avenues for creativity while still valuing their cultural roots. This duality reflects a broader social issue in Nigeria, where the younger generation grapples with the tension between tradition and modernity. Their engagement with digital media and contemporary art forms indicates a dynamic cultural landscape that is responsive to both local and global trends.

However, the challenges identified—such as inadequate funding and lack of formal training—highlight systemic issues within the arts and humanities sector. These obstacles are indicative of broader socio-economic conditions in Nigeria, where limited resources often impede the growth of cultural initiatives. The findings suggest that local governance must play a more proactive role in supporting the arts, recognizing their potential to contribute to economic development and social cohesion.

By fostering a supportive environment for artistic expression, local leaders can help bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary practices, ultimately enhancing the region's cultural vibrancy and sustainability. The insights gained from this research not only reflect the unique characteristics of Idemili North but also resonate with the larger narrative of cultural resilience in Nigeria.

4.1 Challenges Facing Arts and Humanities in Idemili North

The promotion and appreciation of the arts and humanities in Idemili North confront several significant challenges that hinder their growth and visibility. Among these, inadequate funding emerges as a primary obstacle. Local artists and cultural practitioners often struggle to secure financial support for their projects, leading to limited opportunities for creative expression and community engagement. Lack of consistent funding not only affects the execution of artistic initiatives but also dampens the enthusiasm of potential artists who may perceive a lack of sustainability in pursuing their craft [3].

Policy support is another critical area that requires attention. The absence of robust cultural policies at the local government level contributes to a fragmented approach to arts and humanities promotion. Without a clear framework to guide cultural development, artists often find themselves navigating a landscape characterized by uncertainty. This lack of strategic direction can stifle innovation and discourage community participation in cultural activities, as individuals may feel their efforts lack institutional backing.

Cultural conflicts pose additional challenges, particularly in regions where traditional values intersect with contemporary artistic expressions. In Idemili North, the tension between preserving indigenous art forms and embracing modern creativity

can create divisions within the community. Younger generations may gravitate towards contemporary practices, while older members might advocate for the preservation of traditional forms. This generational divide can lead to misunderstandings and a lack of cohesion in the local arts scene, ultimately impeding collaborative efforts to promote a unified cultural identity. Educational barriers further complicate the landscape for arts and humanities in Idemili North. Many local schools lack formal programs that integrate arts education into their curricula, which restricts students' exposure to creative disciplines. As a result, potential talent may go unrecognized, and the community risks losing a vital link to its cultural heritage. By addressing these educational gaps and fostering an environment that values artistic learning, Idemili North can cultivate a new generation of artists who are equipped to navigate the complexities of both traditional and contemporary practices. These challenges emphasize the need for a concerted effort from local government, community leaders, and cultural advocates to create a more supportive environment for the arts and humanities in Idemili North.

4.2 Opportunities for Growth

The arts and humanities sector in Idemili North presents numerous opportunities for growth that can significantly enhance community engagement and cultural expression. By fostering local initiatives, encouraging government involvement, and establishing partnerships with organizations, the region can effectively promote its rich cultural heritage and artistic innovation.

One of the foremost opportunities lies in developing community-driven arts initiatives. Local workshops, art fairs, and festivals can serve as platforms for artists to showcase their work and connect with residents, fostering a greater appreciation for the arts. These events can also encourage collaboration among local artists, educators, and community leaders, creating a network of support that strengthens the arts ecosystem. For instance, organizing regular masquerade festivals or storytelling nights can not only preserve traditional practices but also attract visitors, thus boosting local tourism and economic activity.

Local government involvement is crucial for the growth of the arts and humanities sector. By allocating dedicated funding and resources to cultural initiatives, local authorities can provide the necessary support for artistic endeavors. Establishing cultural grants or scholarships for aspiring artists can help nurture talent and ensure that diverse artistic expressions are represented. Furthermore, local government can play a pivotal role in promoting arts education within schools, integrating creative disciplines into the curriculum, and providing training programs that equip young people with essential skills.

Partnerships with organizations, both local and international, can further expand the opportunities available to the arts and humanities sector in Idemili North. Collaborating with NGOs focused on cultural preservation, educational institutions, and art collectives can facilitate knowledge exchange and resource sharing. These partnerships can lead to joint projects that highlight the unique cultural identity of Idemili North, while also providing artists with platforms to reach broader audiences [4].

In conclusion, by harnessing the potential of community initiatives, local government support, and strategic partnerships, Idemili North can cultivate a vibrant arts and humanities sector that enriches the cultural landscape and empowers local communities.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings from this research underscore the vital role that arts and humanities play in shaping the cultural identity and community engagement in Idemili North Local Government Area. The study reveals a dynamic interplay between traditional practices and contemporary expressions, indicating a community keen on preserving its heritage while embracing modernity. However, the challenges identified—particularly the lack of funding, formal training, and policy support—pose significant barriers to the sustainable growth of the sector [5].

To enhance the arts and humanities in Idemili North, several recommendations emerge from this research. Firstly, local governance should prioritize the development of a comprehensive cultural policy that outlines clear objectives and strategies for supporting artists and promoting cultural initiatives. This framework should include the establishment of funding mechanisms, such as grants and sponsorships, specifically aimed at supporting local artists and cultural programs.

Secondly, educational institutions must play a proactive role in integrating arts education into their curricula. By developing formal training programs and workshops, schools can nurture young talent and foster a greater appreciation for local cultural practices. Collaboration with local artists could provide students with hands-on experience and exposure to various art forms, bridging the gap between tradition and innovation.

Additionally, fostering community-driven initiatives can significantly enhance engagement and participation in the arts. Organizing regular cultural events, such as festivals and exhibitions, would not only celebrate local talent but also attract visitors, thereby contributing to economic development. Encouraging partnerships between local artists, schools, and community organizations can create a supportive network that enhances the visibility and impact of the arts in Idemili North [6].

Future research should focus on the long-term effects of these initiatives on community cohesion and economic growth. Investigating the potential for digital media and technology in promoting local arts could also yield insights into innovative

ways to engage younger generations. By addressing these areas, policymakers and cultural advocates can ensure that the arts and humanities continue to thrive in Idemili North, enriching the community and preserving its unique cultural identity.

5.1 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study present critical implications for policymakers, educators, and practitioners involved in the arts and humanities within Idemili North. An urgent need for a comprehensive cultural policy emerges, which should serve as a guiding framework for promoting the arts in the region. This policy should prioritize funding mechanisms, such as grants and sponsorship opportunities, specifically aimed at supporting local artists and cultural initiatives. By establishing a dedicated budget for the arts, local government can empower artists to pursue their craft without the constant concern of financial instability [1].

Educators also have a pivotal role to play in this ecosystem. Integrating arts education into school curricula will provide young people with the skills and knowledge necessary to appreciate and engage with both traditional and contemporary art forms. Schools should collaborate with local artists to develop workshops, mentorship programs, and after-school activities that foster creativity and cultural appreciation. Such initiatives not only cultivate talent but also instill a sense of pride in local heritage among students.

Furthermore, community engagement is essential for the growth of the arts in Idemili North. Local festivals, art fairs, and cultural events should be organized to showcase local talent and promote active participation among residents. These events can serve as platforms for artists to connect with the community, ensuring that cultural practices are preserved and celebrated. By encouraging community involvement, local leaders can create a vibrant arts scene that reflects the values and identity of Idemili North [7].

Lastly, partnerships with local and international organizations can enhance the resources available to artists and cultural practitioners. Collaborating with NGOs focused on cultural preservation and educational institutions can facilitate knowledge exchange and access to funding opportunities. These partnerships can also lead to joint projects that highlight the unique cultural attributes of Idemili North, thereby broadening its reach and impact [8].

By implementing these actionable steps, stakeholders can contribute to a more robust and sustainable arts and humanities sector that enriches the cultural landscape of Idemili North and fosters community cohesion [9].

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

As the arts and humanities landscape in Idemili North continues to evolve, there are several areas that warrant further exploration. Future research could benefit from a more in-depth analysis of how local artists and cultural practitioners adapt their practices in response to both global trends and local traditions. Specifically, studies focusing on the integration of digital media in traditional art forms could reveal innovative methods for preserving cultural heritage while reaching wider audiences [2].

Moreover, comparative studies between Idemili North and similar regions in Nigeria or across West Africa could provide valuable insights into shared challenges and solutions. By examining how other localities have successfully navigated funding issues, educational barriers, and community engagement, researchers could identify best practices that might be adapted for Idemili North. Such comparative analyses could also highlight the distinctiveness of Idemili's cultural expressions, enriching the broader discourse in the fields of arts and humanities.

Methodologically, future research could incorporate participatory action research (PAR) approaches, involving local artists and community members as co-researchers. This methodology not only empowers participants by giving them a voice in the research process but also fosters a deeper understanding of the nuanced challenges they face. Through workshops and focus groups, researchers could gather qualitative data on the lived experiences of artists, creating a more holistic picture of the local arts ecosystem [10].

Additionally, longitudinal studies that track the impact of cultural policies and initiatives on the arts over time would provide critical data on the effectiveness of interventions designed to support artists in Idemili North. Such research could illuminate the socio-economic benefits of a thriving arts sector, thereby making a compelling case for sustained investment in the arts.

Exploring the role of cultural tourism in promoting local arts could also be a fruitful avenue for future research. Investigating how festivals, exhibitions, and community events can attract visitors while enhancing local engagement will be essential for developing a sustainable arts economy. By focusing on these areas, future research can significantly contribute to the understanding and growth of the arts and humanities in Idemili North, providing actionable insights for stakeholders involved in cultural development.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Okafor I. Masquerade performances as a means of cultural preservation in Nigeria: Balancing tradition and modernity. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2018, 12(4): 234-250.
- [2] Nwankwo E. Visual arts and urban identity in Nigeria: A case study of contemporary practices. *Journal of African Art Studies*, 2020, 5(2): 45-67.
- [3] Ogbodo J. Resilience of indigenous art forms in Nigeria: A case study of Idemili North. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 2023, 11(1): 23-38.
- [4] Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics. Cultural industries and economic growth in Nigeria: An analysis. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics, 2022.
- [5] Chukwu R. Digital media and the future of traditional arts in Nigeria: A review of recent trends. *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 2023, 14(2): 54-73.
- [6] Eze C, Okeke S. Cultural tourism in Nigeria: Opportunities for local artists and community development. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Heritage*, 2021, 10(5): 99-119.
- [7] Smith J. The impact of local governance on arts funding in Anambra State: Challenges and opportunities. *Nigerian Journal of Public Administration*, 2021, 9(1): 89-104.
- [8] Anambra State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Cultural policy framework for Anambra State. Retrieved from Anambra State Government, 2020.
- [9] Williams A, Okwu E. Cultural expressions in rural Nigeria: Revitalizing traditional arts amidst globalization. *West African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2019, 3(3): 112-130.
- [10] Uche M. Community engagement through the arts: A study of participatory practices in Idemili North. *African Journal of Community Development*, 2022, 7(1): 67-82.

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING, INTEGRITY, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN GENERATION Z: ADDRESSING THE IMPACT OF MODERN SOCIETAL CHALLENGES ON MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Joshua HK. Banda

Apex Medical University, Lusaka, Zambia.

Corresponding Email: smartscholar2024@gmail.com

Abstract: This critical analysis explores the educational strategies needed to foster ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z, a group shaped by rapid technological advances, global connectivity, and evolving cultural norms. Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 [1], is characterized by its immersion in a digital world and exposure to unique moral challenges that are different from those of previous generations. This study examines the role of educational institutions in providing this generation with ethical frameworks to respond to these challenges and become responsible and ethical individuals.

The proliferation of technology and social media has brought new moral dilemmas, such as information manipulation, privacy ethics, and challenges related to online identity and harassment [2]. These issues put pressure on traditional moral frameworks and highlight the need for educational approaches to guide Generation Z in ethical decision-making. The study examines how educational systems can foster ethical decision-making by integrating pedagogical strategies that foster virtues such as honesty, responsibility, and empathy, which are increasingly important in an interconnected world where actions have far-reaching consequences. Experiential learning, as proposed by Kolb [3], is particularly effective in promoting ethical development. This approach emphasizes experiential and reflective learning, allowing students to engage in real-world scenarios involving ethical dilemmas, thereby promoting the practical application of moral principles. Experiential learning fosters a deeper understanding of the consequences of actions in different contexts [4]. Programs such as service learning and internships help students understand their role in society and cultivate a sense of responsibility toward others. Critical thinking is another essential teaching strategy. It enables individuals to evaluate arguments, recognize biases, and make informed decisions [5]. For Gen Z, critical thinking is essential for navigating modern moral questions, especially in digital spaces. The ability to critically evaluate information consumed through digital media enables students to make informed ethical choices and reduces vulnerability to misinformation or harmful content [6].

Values-based education plays an important role in shaping ethical development. This approach integrates moral values such as honesty, respect, and responsibility into the school curriculum [7]. It provides students with a solid foundation for thoughtful engagement with evolving ethical challenges. Values-based education helps students acquire ethical standards and integrate them into their daily lives [8].

Digital literacy, including technical and ethical dimensions, is essential in the 21st century. It includes understanding privacy, online behavior, and the social implications of digital technologies [9]. By teaching students to engage ethically with digital content, such as responsible use of social media and understanding artificial intelligence, Generation Z is poised to deal with the moral complexities of the digital age.

Educational strategies can also mitigate the negative effects of social challenges, such as the erosion of empathy and the rise of cyberbullying [10]. Social media platforms often prioritize image over authentic connections, undermining values such as honesty and empathy. By promoting digital literacy and values-based education, institutions can encourage conscious and responsible engagement on social media.

Economic pressures and environmental concerns also complicate the ethical landscape for Gen Z. Materialism and economic insecurity create conflicts between personal desires and social responsibilities [11]. In the context of environmental ethics, experiential learning and critical thinking encourage reflection on the ethical implications of actions for future generations and the planet [12].

In conclusion, this analysis proposes a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to ethics education that integrates experiential learning, critical thinking, values-based education, and digital literacy. These strategies are essential for developing ethical decision-making skills and equipping Generation Z with the tools to meet modern moral challenges. By preparing students for responsible leadership roles, educational institutions can ensure that Generation Z contributes positively to society in an increasingly complex world.

Keywords: Ethical decision-making; Integrity; Social responsibility & moral development

1 INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advances, changing cultural norms, and the pervasive influence of social media have undeniably reshaped the landscape in which Generation Z, born roughly between 1997 and 2012, lives in a world defined by digital technology, where social media platforms and instant communication channels form a large part of their daily lives [1]. While these advances bring many benefits, they also present significant challenges to the moral development of young people. The growing influence of online platforms, coupled with societal changes such as increased individualism, cultural pluralism, and global interconnectedness, has placed Generation Z at a crossroads in addressing complex ethical dilemmas. These dilemmas range from online behavior and privacy concerns to issues of social justice and climate change [2]. The role of educators, leaders, and policymakers in promoting ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility is more crucial today than ever. Teaching strategies designed to develop these qualities must go beyond traditional methods. According to Kohlberg's stages of moral development, ethical decision-making is a gradual process influenced by factors such as personal experiences, upbringing, and social influences [3]. Thus, fostering moral reasoning among Generation Z requires an approach that recognizes their multifaceted development, encouraging critical and reflective engagement with ethical dilemmas [4].

Although Kohlberg's model remains influential, contemporary researchers have expanded on it, emphasizing the need for a broader and contextual understanding of morality that takes into account modern complexity [5]. This framework highlights the importance of integrating values-based education into school curricula to help students address ethical challenges. Values-based education, as proposed by Lickona [6], aims to instill moral virtues through a deliberate and structured approach. By integrating character education into the curriculum, educators can help students develop not only ethical reasoning skills, but also the ability to apply these skills in real-world contexts [7].

This approach is particularly effective in addressing the issue of social responsibility, a priority for Generation Z. Research shows that today's youth are increasingly concerned with global issues such as environmental sustainability, social justice, and equality, and are more likely to engage in activism than previous generations [8]. By fostering a sense of social responsibility, educators can empower students to make meaningful contributions to society by developing a strong sense of personal integrity.

Incorporating ethical reasoning skills is essential to preparing Gen Z for the dilemmas they will encounter in personal and professional contexts. The ability to evaluate situations from multiple perspectives, consider long-term consequences, and make decisions consistent with core values is essential for moral development [9]. However, these skills cannot be developed in isolation. Educational environments should foster dialogue, debate, and critical thinking. The Socratic method, which emphasizes questioning and dialogue, has been shown to be effective in helping students improve their ethical reasoning skills [10]. Open discussions and case study analysis can teach students to apply ethical principles to complex moral issues. The role of social media in shaping the moral development of Generation Z is particularly important. Research highlights that online interactions offer opportunities for positive engagement, but also present ethical challenges such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and identity manipulation [11]. Constant exposure to different perspectives and values complicates the ethical decision-making process. Teachers should provide students with tools to critically analyze the information they encounter online and consider the ethical implications of their actions in digital spaces [12]. Teaching digital literacy and ethical online behavior promotes responsible use of technology and encourages students to think about the impact of their online actions on themselves and others.

Disillusionment with traditional systems of authority also complicates the ethical landscape of Generation Z. In the face of global crises such as political instability, economic inequality, and environmental degradation, many members of Generation Z demonstrate skepticism and distrust of institutions [13]. While this frustration can lead to disengagement and a lack of faith in moral compasses, it also provides an opportunity to foster critical and thoughtful ethical decision-making. By encouraging students to question and critique societal values in a constructive way, educators can guide Generation Z toward a deeper understanding of ethics and social responsibility, moving beyond blind obedience to authority [14].

In conclusion, fostering ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z requires a comprehensive, multidimensional approach. This approach integrates values-based education, ethical reasoning, and critical reflection on global social challenges. By creating learning environments that engage students in meaningful ethical discourse and foster the development of moral skills, educators can cultivate a generation capable of navigating the complexities of modern life with integrity and social responsibility. As technological advances evolve and societal challenges intensify, adaptive educational strategies that prioritize the ethical development of Generation Z will become increasingly essential.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The moral development of Generation Z (those born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s) is being profoundly influenced by modern societal challenges, including technological advances, social media, and cultural shifts. This literature review critically examines various educational strategies aimed at promoting ethical decision-making, integrity, and social

responsibility among this demographic group. It seeks to explore how these strategies can be adapted to the unique characteristics of Generation Z, whose worldview has been shaped by a rapidly changing environment [1].

2.1 Generation Z: Characterization and Moral Development

Generation Z, the group born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, is often described as the first true generation of “digital natives.” This generation has grown up surrounded by rapid technological advances, with digital devices, the Internet, and social media deeply integrated into their daily lives. As such, Generation Z is fundamentally different from previous generations in the way they interact with the world, process information, and develop their moral frameworks. Understanding these defining characteristics and their implications for moral development is essential for creating effective instructional strategies that address the unique challenges and opportunities this group faces [2].

2.2 Characteristics of Generation Z

Generation Z is the first generation to have constant access to the internet, mobile devices, and social media from a young age. Unlike millennials, who witnessed the rise of digital technologies, Generation Z has not known a world without them. More than 95% of Generation Z individuals have access to a smartphone, which they use for socializing, entertainment, learning, and information gathering [3]. This pervasive use of technology has shaped the way Generation Z interacts with the world and approaches moral and ethical issues.

Exposure to global issues such as climate change, political unrest, and social justice movements through platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has heightened their awareness of social challenges and social responsibility. However, this exposure to diverse perspectives can lead to challenges in moral development by creating a fragmented understanding of ethical principles. Generation Z must navigate a dynamic landscape of cultural norms, social expectations, and conflicting moral perspectives [4]. This environment has led researchers to argue that Generation Z’s moral development is increasingly complex as they reconcile the diverse influences of their digital lives with traditional ethical frameworks [5].

2.3 Technology on Moral Development

Advances in technology have brought many benefits, including greater access to information, improved communication, and exposure to diverse ideas. However, they also present significant challenges to the moral development of Generation Z. The culture of instant gratification fostered by digital communication, social media, and online platforms often compromises the development of delayed gratification, self-control, and moral reasoning, essential elements of ethical decision-making [6].

In addition, the anonymity provided by the Internet can reduce personal responsibility. The ability to interact without facing immediate consequences has fostered detachment from the moral implications of online behavior. Research suggests that this disconnect can lead to a decline in empathy and responsibility, eroding values such as honesty, respect, and accountability [7].

The constant flow of information through social media and other digital channels can also create ethical dilemmas. Exposure to a wide range of moral viewpoints complicates decision-making, as individuals must navigate conflicting views on issues such as environmental responsibility, social justice, or the ethics of artificial intelligence [8].

2.4 The Role of Social Media in Shaping Moral Development

Social media plays a vital role in shaping the moral development of Generation Z. Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, and TikTok serve as channels for socialization and self-expression, as well as vehicles for moral and ethical storytelling. The curated content that users encounter every day, ranging from influencer posts to viral challenges and political activism, has a significant impact on understanding concepts such as equity and justice [9].

In addition, social media platforms facilitate moral and ethical discourse. Users often engage in debates, discussions and campaigns on social issues such as racism, climate change and gender equality. These digital spaces provide opportunities for ethical reflection and help develop a nuanced understanding of social responsibility. However, the risks associated with online interactions, including cyberbullying, cybershaming and misinformation, can hinder the development of empathy, trust and ethical judgment [10].

3 NAVIGATING ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Generation Z’s engagement with technology and social media presents new ethical dilemmas, particularly in the areas of privacy, digital citizenship, and technology use. Pervasive data collection, surveillance, and the impact of algorithms on content creation raise fundamental questions about privacy, consent, and the long-term impact of digital footprints [1]. Many members of Generation Z may not understand how their data is being collected, used, or misused and the potential long-term consequences for their personal and social lives. In addition, inequalities in access to technology, often referred to

as the digital divide, exacerbate challenges to moral development. While many Gen Zers are highly connected, those from low-income communities may face barriers to accessing technology, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives and creating feelings of social isolation or disenfranchisement [2].

3.1 Educational Strategies for Ethical Decision Making

Ethical decision making, the process of evaluating and selecting actions based on moral principles, is an essential part of moral development. For Generation Z, educational strategies must adapt to meet the challenges posed by technological advances, global interconnectedness, and exposure to diverse perspectives. Approaches that emphasize experiential learning, critical thinking, and reflective practice are particularly effective in fostering deeper moral reasoning and ethical understanding.

3.2 Experiential Learning and Critical Thinking

Experiential learning, which emphasizes learning through direct experience and reflection, has been shown to be highly effective in fostering ethical decision making. Kolb's experiential learning theory emphasizes the importance of engaging students in concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation [3]. In the context of moral development, this approach allows students to confront real-world ethical dilemmas, reflect on their decisions, and refine their reasoning.

Research shows that experiential opportunities, such as service-learning projects where students address real-world ethical challenges in community settings, enhance moral development. These projects encourage students to put ethical principles into practice and develop an appreciation of the consequences of their decisions [4]. This approach resonates with Gen Z because it connects abstract ethical theories with tangible actions, providing a sense of relevance and impact.

Case-based learning and scenario-based simulations are also valuable tools for promoting ethical decision-making. These approaches include the analysis of real or hypothetical ethical dilemmas and role-playing exercises, immersing students in complex situations that require moral judgment [5]. Such methods allow students to explore multiple perspectives, evaluate competing values, and apply ethical principles to decision-making. For Generation Z, digital simulations focused on contemporary issues such as social media ethics, cybersecurity, and data privacy are particularly effective in aligning with their lived experiences [6].

3.3 Reflective Practice

Reflective practice, rooted in critical thinking, is another essential strategy for fostering ethical decision-making. This approach encourages students to systematically examine their actions, assumptions, and the ethical implications of their decisions. Reflective activities, such as journaling, group discussions, and guided reflection sessions, allow students to process their experiences and critically evaluate their moral reasoning [7].

Structured debriefing sessions following case-based exercises or role-playing are particularly effective. These sessions provide students with the opportunity to articulate the ethical reasoning behind their decisions and consider alternative perspectives [8]. For Gen Z, integrating digital tools such as online forums, blogs, and social media platforms into reflective practice can foster ethical discourse and facilitate peer feedback. These platforms allow students to engage with diverse perspectives, challenge their assumptions, and expand their moral reasoning skills, as long as the discussions are carefully moderated to ensure a respectful and constructive environment [9].

3.4 Digital Platforms and Ethical Discourse

The integration of digital platforms into education offers unique opportunities to promote ethical decision-making among Generation Z. Online discussion forums, virtual learning environments, and social media platforms facilitate engagement with peers from diverse backgrounds. Participation in these digital spaces exposes students to a wide range of ethical perspectives, challenging their worldviews and encouraging deeper moral reflection [10]. However, it is essential that these platforms are managed effectively to ensure that interactions remain respectful, focused, and constructive.

By integrating experiential learning, reflective practice, and digital tools, educators can equip Generation Z with the skills needed to navigate ethical dilemmas in a rapidly evolving digital age. These strategies promote not only ethical decision-making, but also a sense of social responsibility and integrity that adapts to the unique challenges of this generation.

4 THE ROLE OF MEDIA EDUCATION IN MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Given the challenges presented by the digital age, the importance of media literacy in education cannot be overstated. Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. It is an essential skill for navigating the complexities of the digital world, as it enables individuals to make informed decisions, engage critically with

content, and develop a more nuanced understanding of the ethical implications of their actions [1]. Media literacy is particularly essential for Generation Z, as it provides them with the cognitive tools to understand the social, cultural, and ethical impacts of media consumption.

Instructional strategies that integrate media literacy into the curriculum can significantly improve students' ability to make ethical decisions in the digital world. Research suggests that media education fosters critical thinking that enables students to recognize the ethical dimensions of the information they encounter online [2]. By teaching students how to analyze the messages conveyed through different forms of media, educators can help them become more aware of how digital platforms affect their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of the world around them. In turn, this awareness can lead to more responsible and ethical behavior online, as students learn to navigate the digital world with a better understanding of the potential consequences of their actions.

4.1 Digital Ethics and the Importance of Privacy

Another key area at the intersection of technology and moral development is the concept of digital ethics. Digital ethics refers to the moral principles that guide behavior in the digital world, particularly in relation to issues such as privacy, data security, and online behavior. For Generation Z, the increasing amount of personal information shared online has raised concerns about privacy and data protection. Young people are often unaware of the extent to which their digital footprints can be tracked, monitored, and exploited. The proliferation of data breaches, identity theft, and the sale of personal data to third parties highlights the importance of educating students about the ethical implications of their digital actions [3]. Teachers can play a vital role in helping students understand the importance of online privacy and the potential ethical issues that arise from sharing personal information. Digital ethics education helps students develop a strong sense of personal responsibility for their digital footprint [3]. Through online safety courses, students can learn about the dangers of sharing too much personal information and the long-term implications of their online behavior. By promoting awareness of privacy rights and the ethical use of personal data, teachers can help Gen Z students develop a more ethical approach to their digital interactions.

4.2 The Role of Virtual Learning Environments in Ethics Education

In addition to traditional classrooms, virtual learning environments (VLEs) and social media platforms have become essential tools for promoting ethical behavior in online spaces. VLEs, which facilitate digital interactions between students and teachers, can serve as platforms for teaching ethical decision-making by integrating activities that foster reflection, collaboration, and ethical discourse. For example, teachers can use VLEs to present ethical dilemmas or scenarios and encourage students to discuss possible solutions, considering the moral implications of their decisions [2]. Social media platforms also offer unique opportunities to promote ethical behavior among Gen Z students. While these platforms are often associated with negative behavior, such as cyberbullying or the spread of misinformation, they can also be used to promote positive ethical engagement. Research suggests that social media platforms can be used as tools to promote social responsibility and collective action because they allow students to connect with peers, share ideas, and engage in discussions about global issues. The moral development of Gen Z has been shaped by a host of modern social challenges, including economic inequality, political polarization, and the erosion of trust in institutions. These issues, coupled with rapid technological advances and the pervasive influence of social media, create an environment of uncertainty and frustration for many young people. The impact of these challenges is profound, often manifesting as cynicism, apathy, or a diminished sense of social responsibility [4]. To effectively address these concerns, educators must adopt pedagogical strategies that not only teach ethical principles but also enable students to navigate and respond to these social complexities in constructive and meaningful ways.

4.3 Economic Inequality and Its Ethical Implications

Economic inequality has a significant impact on moral development, shaping individual perceptions of fairness, justice, and opportunity. For Generation Z, the increasing visibility of economic disparities, amplified by social media, can lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness, and even resentment [5]. These emotions can hinder the development of empathy and ethical decision-making as young people try to reconcile the profound contrasts between privilege and poverty in their communities and in the world. To counter these effects, educational strategies should emphasize social justice education, which includes discussions of wealth distribution, privilege, and systemic inequalities in the school curriculum. Studies suggest that participation in service-learning projects that address real-world economic challenges can foster a deeper understanding of these issues while cultivating a sense of empowerment and responsibility [6]. For example, programs that include volunteering at food banks or participating in community development initiatives allow students to connect ethical principles with concrete actions, reinforcing the importance of equality and social responsibility.

4.4 Political Polarization and Ethical Decision-Making

The increasing polarization of political discourse presents another important challenge to moral development. For Gen Z, exposure to conflicting narratives and echo chambers on social media platforms can reinforce prejudices and hinder constructive dialogue [7]. This polarized environment often discourages critical thinking and the ability to understand different perspectives, which are essential elements of ethical reasoning.

Addressing political polarization in education requires creating safe and inclusive spaces where students can engage in respectful dialogue about controversial issues. Research shows that deliberative pedagogy, which emphasizes open discussion and debate, can help students develop the critical thinking skills needed to navigate political complexity [8]. Educators should encourage students to explore multiple perspectives on issues such as immigration, climate change, or health care, fostering an environment where diverse perspectives are valued and ethical reasoning is prioritized.

5 DECLINING TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Generation Z has grown up in an era characterized by widespread skepticism toward traditional institutions, including governments, the media, and even educational organizations. This erosion of trust is fueled by frequent reports of corruption, misinformation, and institutional failures, leading many young people to question the credibility and integrity of these entities [1]. This distrust can be detrimental to the development of social responsibility, as students may feel frustrated in their ability to make meaningful changes in these systems.

To rebuild trust and promote ethical engagement, educators must highlight examples of transparency, accountability, and institutional reform. Case studies of successful initiatives, such as those of organizations that fight corruption or advance human rights, can inspire students and restore their faith in the potential for positive change. Additionally, educational strategies that emphasize participatory governance, such as student councils or youth advocacy programs, can provide students with first-hand experience with ethical decision-making and leadership responsibilities [2].

5.1 Integrating Global and Local Contexts into Ethics Education

An effective strategy for addressing contemporary social challenges is to integrate discussions of global and local issues into the school curriculum. This approach allows students to contextualize ethical principles in real-world scenarios, thereby increasing their relevance and applicability. For example, debates about climate change, public health crises, or social justice movements can provide students with opportunities to critically analyze complex issues and develop solutions based on ethical reasoning [3]. Furthermore, fostering intercultural dialogue and cooperation between students from different backgrounds can help counteract the negative effects of social challenges. Programs that connect students from different regions or countries, such as virtual exchanges or international service-learning projects, can broaden their perspectives and foster a sense of global citizenship [4]. These experiences allow students to see themselves as active contributors to solutions, fostering both ethical awareness and a commitment to social responsibility.

5.2 Reflective Practice as a Tool for Moral Growth

Creating spaces for reflection is essential to helping students address the social challenges they face and consider their ethical implications. Reflective practice, which includes structured opportunities for students to think critically about their experiences and values, can deepen their understanding of moral principles and their applications [5]. Educators can facilitate reflective exercises such as journaling, group discussions, or guided self-assessments, encouraging students to explore questions such as "What ethical dilemma have I recently faced?" or "How can I help solve social challenges in my community?"

Modern social challenges have a profound impact on the moral development of Generation Z, shaping their values, attitudes, and ethical decision-making processes. By addressing these challenges through teaching strategies that include discussions of current events, emphasizing social justice education, and encouraging critical thinking and reflective practice, educators can provide students with the necessary tools to navigate the complexities of the modern world. By doing so, they can help Generation Z develop a strong sense of ethical responsibility and the confidence to address societal issues with integrity and purpose.

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods approach to critically examine educational strategies designed to foster ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z. The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the multifaceted nature of moral development and the impact of modern and societal challenges. The methodology was structured around three main elements: data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

6.1 Data Collection

The study used primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with educators, parents, and students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. This qualitative approach aims to understand first-hand perspectives on effective teaching strategies and the challenges they face in promoting ethical behavior. In addition, surveys were distributed to Gen Z participants to collect quantitative data on their perceptions of ethics, integrity, and social responsibility. Secondary data were obtained through an extensive review of existing literature, including journal articles, educational policies, and case studies, to provide context and theoretical basis.

6.2 Sampling and Participants

Purpose sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of participants with relevant experiences and knowledge. The sample includes educators implementing innovative teaching strategies, parents engaged in moral guidance, and Gen Z individuals aged 12-25. Efforts were made to achieve demographic diversity to reflect a broad spectrum of social influences on moral development.

6.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by a thematic approach to qualitative data, identifying recurring patterns and themes related to ethical teaching practices and social challenges. These themes are interpreted in light of theoretical frameworks such as Kohlberg's stages of moral development and Bandura's social learning theory. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical tools to measure trends and correlations between social challenges and ethical behaviors among Generation Z.

6.4 Triangulation and Validation

To improve reliability and validity, the study used triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, surveys, and literature reviews. Peer reviews and member checks were conducted to ensure that interpretations accurately represented the views of participants.

6.5 Ethical Considerations

The study followed the principles of ethical research, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality, and minimizing potential risks. The research design prioritized sensitivity to the cultural and social contexts of participants, particularly when addressing issues related to ethics and morality.

This comprehensive methodology allowed for a nuanced exploration of the effectiveness of educational strategies to foster ethical decision-making among Generation Z, taking into account the complexity of modern social influences.

7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was largely inspired by Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which has served as a central framework for understanding how Generation Z develops ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility. In addition, Bandura's social learning theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory were used to provide complementary perspectives on the social and environmental factors that influence moral development.

7.1 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Kohlberg's theory provided the main theoretical perspective for this study. He posits that moral reasoning evolves through a series of six stages, grouped into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each stage reflects a progressively more complex understanding of morality, ranging from self-interest to adherence to social norms and ultimately to universal ethical principles. This framework has been crucial in analyzing the developmental trajectory of ethical decision-making in Generation Z and in assessing how educational strategies align with these stages. The theory has also provided a structured approach to understanding the interaction between cognitive processes and moral behavior, making it ideal for evaluating the effectiveness of instructional strategies.

7.2 Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's theory emphasized the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in shaping moral behavior. According to this theory, individuals learn ethical behavior by observing role models such as parents, teachers, and peers, and by learning the consequences of their actions. This perspective has been instrumental in examining the impact of social challenges, such as digital media and peer influence, on the moral development of Generation Z. She also emphasized the importance of creating environments in which ethical behavior is consistently demonstrated and reinforced.

7.3 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's theory provided a broader socio-environmental context for the study. It suggests that moral development is influenced by multiple interrelated systems, including the family, school, community, and society as a whole. This theory has proven particularly useful in understanding how external factors, such as cultural norms, technological advances, and global challenges, shape ethical decision-making and social responsibility. It complements Kohlberg's cognitive approach by addressing contextual factors that interact with individual moral development. Together, these theories form an overall framework that not only guided the research design but also informed the interpretation of the results. While Kohlberg's theory was the primary focus, those of Bandura and Bronfenbrenner enriched the analysis by providing insights into the social and environmental dimensions of moral development.

8 DISCUSSION

8.1 The Moral Development of Generation Z

The moral development of Generation Z is closely tied to the intersection of rapid technological advances, changing social norms, and the expansive forces of globalization. These dynamics create an evolving ethical landscape in which traditional methods of moral instruction are often inadequate. As a generation raised in an era of unprecedented connectivity and social complexity, Generation Z is both empowered and burdened by the pressures of a globalized digital age. This duality presents unique challenges for educators charged with instilling ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility. A broader and more critical analysis of educational strategies reveals the need for adaptive, inclusive, and context-sensitive approaches that resonate with the unique experiences of this group while mitigating the negative effects of social challenges.

8.2 Experiential Learning and Ethical Engagement in the Real World

Experiential learning, rooted in Dewey's constructivist educational philosophy [1], appears to be an essential strategy for teaching ethics. By engaging students in service-learning projects, internships, and community engagement, experiential learning bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application. For example, service-learning initiatives, such as participating in environmental cleanup campaigns or helping disadvantaged communities, provide students with tangible contexts for addressing moral dilemmas. These experiences foster critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of civic responsibility, in line with Kohlberg's stages of moral development [2].

However, the success of experiential learning depends on a deliberate and reflective approach. Researchers such as Kolb argue that integrating structured thinking into experiential learning cycles enables students to internalize ethical principles. [3] Without intentional design and ethical frameworks, these experiences risk becoming transactional rather than transformative and fail to instill the depth of moral reasoning necessary for sustained integrity and responsibility.

8.3 Interdisciplinary Integration of Ethics

Integrating ethics into the school curriculum is another essential educational strategy, supported by research on curriculum development and moral education. Rather than confining ethics to isolated courses, integrating moral discussions into disciplines such as science, technology, and business ensures that students perceive ethics as intrinsic rather than peripheral. For example, in STEM education, discussions about the ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI) or genetic engineering address the unique moral challenges presented by technological advances [4]. These interdisciplinary approaches are aligned with Freire's concept of Praxis, which emphasizes action and reflection to address real-world ethical problems [5]. This approach also opposes the compartmentalization of moral reasoning, which Noddings criticizes as limiting the holistic development of ethical intelligence [6]. By fostering an appreciation of the ethical dimensions inherent in all professional and personal activities, educators prepare students to navigate the multifaceted moral challenges they encounter in an interconnected world.

8.4 Digital Literacy and Ethical Competence

Given Gen Z's deep engagement with digital technologies, digital literacy is essential to fostering ethical decision-making. The proliferation of social media and virtual communities has created a landscape rich in opportunities for connection, but also ethical challenges, such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and digital privacy concerns [7]. Educators should prioritize digital literacy as an essential part of moral education, equipping students with the skills to critically evaluate online content, recognize biases, and navigate digital spaces responsibly.

Furthermore, cultivating digital ethics aligns with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of observational learning in moral behavior [8]. By modeling ethical behavior in digital environments and facilitating discussions about real-world digital dilemmas, educators can encourage students to behave responsibly online. This

approach ensures that digital literacy transcends technical skills, fostering a comprehensive understanding of the ethical dimensions of technology use.

8.5 Social Inclusion and Responsibility

Generation Z's growing awareness of social justice issues underscores the importance of engaging in ethics education. Theories of multicultural education, such as those presented by Banks [9], emphasize the need for pedagogical strategies that respect and integrate diverse perspectives. Encouraging open dialogue on issues such as racial equity, gender inclusion, and environmental justice can channel Gen Z's passion for activism into constructive social responsibility. Collaborative problem-solving activities, such as group projects and case studies, foster a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility. However, educators must be careful about homogenizing ethics teaching, which risks erasing cultural nuances and marginalizing minority voices. Sensitivity to cultural and contextual differences is essential to fostering a comprehensive and effective moral education framework. Contemporary social challenges—economic inequality, political polarization, and environmental degradation—demand that educators take a proactive and holistic approach to moral development. Providing mentoring and modeling ethical leadership is essential to helping students navigate these complex issues. Activities such as role-playing and debate allow students to explore diverse perspectives, fostering a nuanced understanding of ethical complexities.

Theoretical perspectives such as Habermas's theory of communicative action emphasize the value of dialogue and consensus in ethical decision-making [10]. By creating safe spaces for discussion, educators can enable students to articulate and refine their moral values, fostering a generation of critical thinkers and responsible citizens.

To foster ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z, a multidimensional approach based on experiential learning, interdisciplinary integration of ethics, digital literacy, and inclusion is needed. These strategies must take into account the unique challenges and opportunities presented by the dynamics of modern society, which require adaptability and reflection. By engaging with the values and aspirations of Generation Z, educators can cultivate a moral compass that allows students to navigate the complexities of an increasingly interconnected and ethically challenging world. Ultimately, the success of these efforts lies in their ability to inspire a lifelong commitment to integrity and social responsibility.

9 RESEARCH GAPS

Work aimed at fostering ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z through educational strategies highlights important advances in educational practices. However, several research gaps remain, limiting the comprehensiveness of existing studies. Addressing these gaps is essential to ensure that ethics education is tailored to the unique characteristics and challenges that Gen Z faces.

First, there is a lack of longitudinal research exploring the long-term impact of ethics education strategies on moral behavior and decision-making. Although various approaches, such as experiential learning and interdisciplinary ethics education, have shown promise, their lasting impact beyond the classroom remains unclear. Longitudinal studies can help determine whether these interventions translate into sustainable ethical practices in adulthood, thereby guiding educators to improve their methods.

Cultural and contextual diversity in Generation Z is another area that requires more attention. Existing studies often generalize instructional strategies without adequately accounting for differences in cultural, socioeconomic, and geographic contexts. These factors significantly affect moral development and the effectiveness of educational interventions. Comparative research on different populations can reveal nuanced perspectives on how ethics teaching can be adapted to meet the needs of different Gen Z subgroups. Digital culture and ethics education, although recognized as crucial, remains unexplored in terms of integration into school curricula. Gen Z's immersion in digital environments presents unique challenges, such as misinformation, cyberbullying and data privacy. However, there is little empirical research on best practices for effectively teaching digital ethics. Further studies could examine how to integrate digital literacy into ethics education to enable students to responsibly navigate the complexities of online interactions.

Disruption of moral development also presents an important research gap. Few studies examine how identities such as gender, race, and socioeconomic status intersect to shape Gen Z's ethical perspectives and responses to educational strategies. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing inclusive educational practices that take into account students' diverse realities and promote equitable moral growth.

Furthermore, the rapid evolution of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and blockchain has outpaced research into their ethical implications and potential as educational tools. There is a need to explore how these technologies affect moral development and how they can be used to improve ethics instruction. For example, virtual reality simulations can provide immersive environments for students to address complex ethical dilemmas. Another glaring gap lies in teacher preparation and training. While much emphasis is placed on student outcomes, little attention is paid to the skills and resources teachers need to effectively teach ethical decision-making. Research on professional development programs and tools for teachers can fill this gap, enabling them to meet the unique challenges presented by Generation Z with

confidence and competence. The lack of reliable frameworks for measuring and assessing ethical growth is also a limitation. Existing assessment tools often fail to capture the complexity of moral development, especially in the context of digital and globalized environments. Developing comprehensive and validated models for assessing ethical competencies will allow educators to better understand their educational impact and areas for improvement.

Sociopolitical influences on moral development remain underexplored, despite their significant impact on Generation Z. Issues such as political polarization, activism, and social justice movements shape the ethical perspectives of this generation. Research examining the interaction between these sociopolitical dynamics and ethical education can provide valuable insight into the design of relevant and effective pedagogical strategies.

Finally, the role of non-traditional educational environments, such as online platforms, community programs, and on-the-job training, in promoting ethical decision-making has not been well studied. These settings provide opportunities for lifelong moral education, but they are often overlooked in academic research. Exploring their potential can expand the reach and effectiveness of ethics education beyond formal school systems.

In conclusion, filling these research gaps is essential to advance critical analysis of educational strategies aimed at fostering ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z. Integrating longitudinal studies, cultural specificities, digital literacy, intersectionality, and innovative technology, future research can provide a more comprehensive and comprehensive understanding of how to prepare this generation for the ethical challenges of a rapidly changing world.

10 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, fostering ethical decision-making, integrity, and social responsibility among Generation Z requires a comprehensive understanding of the societal challenges that affect their moral development. Educational strategies must evolve to respond to these challenges with an emphasis on critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and values-based education. Modern social pressures such as social media, economic instability, and global crises have shaped the way Gen Z views issues of ethics and responsibility. Therefore, educational frameworks should include real-world scenarios, promote dialogue about moral dilemmas, and foster a culture of empathy, justice, and responsibility.

Effective teaching approaches should include experiential learning, collaborative activities, and reflective exercises that enable students to make complex ethical decisions. Teachers play a vital role in modeling ethical behavior and creating environments where students feel safe to express their values and engage in ethical discussions. In addition, the inclusion of diverse perspectives and cultural values in the curriculum ensures that students develop a comprehensive sense of responsibility and an understanding of the interconnectedness of social issues.

As Gen Z faces an increasingly interconnected and dynamic world, the need for a balanced education that not only imparts academic knowledge but also nurtures moral growth becomes even more crucial. Institutions must prioritize ethics education by integrating it into all aspects of teaching and learning. This holistic approach to education will empower students to make informed decisions, maintain integrity in the face of adversity, and contribute positively to the well-being of society. Ultimately, through thoughtful and strategic pedagogy, we can cultivate a generation that is not only intellectually capable, but also morally grounded and socially responsible.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Cresswell J, O'Brien L. *Media Literacy in the Classroom: Teaching Critical Thinking and Ethical Reasoning*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- [2] Dewey J. *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan, 1938.
- [3] Freire P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.
- [4] Habermas J. *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Translated by T. McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.
- [5] Heath C, Heath D. *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*. New York: Broadway Books, 2010.
- [6] Schön DA. *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Temple Smith, 1983.
- [7] Hess DE, McAvoy P. *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- [8] Bandura A. Social Cognitive Theory: An Agentic Perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 2001, 52(1): 1-26.
- [9] Kolb DA. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984.
- [10] Kohlberg L. *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981.

- [11] Twenge JM. *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy -and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*. New York: Atria Books, 2017.
- [12] Levine M, Murnen S. Everybody Knows That Mass Media Are/Are Not [Pick One] a Cause of Eating Disorders: A Critical Review of Evidence for a Causal Link between Media, Negative Body Image, and Disordered Eating in Females. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 2009, 28(1): 9-42.
- [13] Livingstone S, Helsper EJ. Gradations in Digital Inclusion: Children, Young People, and the Digital Divide. *New Media & Society*, 2007, 9(4): 671-696.
- [14] Mitchell TD. Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning: Engaging the Literature to Differentiate Two Models', *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2018, 14(2): 50-65.
- [15] Noddings N. *Educating Moral People: A Caring Alternative to Character Education*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2002.
- [16] Bynum TW. The Historical Roots of Information and Computer Ethics. *The Cambridge Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018: 20-38.
- [17] Robinson J. *Ethics for the Digital Age*. Boston: Pearson Education, 2014.
- [18] Sunstein CR. *Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.
- [19] Banks JA. Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals. In: Banks, J.A. and McGee Banks, C.A. *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1993: 3-26.
- [20] Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE. *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*. London: Penguin Books, 2010.

SIMULACRA REPLACE REALITY IN BORGES' SHORT STORIES

SuWen Dong
Shanghai International Studies University, Shanghai 201620, China.
Corresponding Email: dongsuwen@shisu.edu.cn

Abstract: Borges' short stories are celebrated for their allegorical and philosophical fancies. He is infatuated with the idea of representation, simulation, and reproduction, which abounds in his fantasies. The idea of simulation is naturally related to the concept of *Simulacra*. Baudrillard's theory of the simulacrum in *Simulacra and Simulation* is one of the most significant pillars of postmodern thought. With the aid of his theoretical framework, some new ways are provided to read Borges' works which are all-embracing and flexibly welcome the postmodern interpretation.

Keywords: Borges' short stories; Simulacra; Postmodernism

1 INTRODUCTION

To almost all literary critics and enthusiasts, the name Jorge Luis Borges inevitably evokes the genre of fantasy—the philosophical, allusive, and thus elusive artistically woven short stories. The fantastic forms the most extraordinary body of his fiction. Given the definition of Todorov, fantastic tales are the “hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” [1]. It is something in-between, between “real” and the “imaginary”, an intermediating state necessitated by kaleidoscopically intricate cerebral and psychological exposure. It is a genre bred from folklores and nutritiously cultivated through its passage of Romantic roaring great minds, which are passed down to Borges as relatively fledged. Yet Borges developed something new. In his fantasies, he consciously approached and created the “Simulacra”. Simulacrum, in Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, is “never what hides the truth – it is the truth that hides that there is none. The simulacrum is true” [2]. Borges' fantasies are rife with the postmodern concept, and this paper aims to interpret the simulacra in his short stories.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Simulacra, which implies likeness and similarity, is a representation or imitation of something. Baudrillard believes that the contemporary modern world is a simulacrum in which reality has been displaced by images. Postmodern culture has been highly dependent on models, patterns, and maps, overriding the real world that generated them. The consequence is that reality itself reversely imitates the model; in Baudrillard's words, “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory” [2]. What is real now is the signs of real become real itself, imitation, duplication, and even parody are not plausible for the situation given reality does not exist anymore: “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” [2]. Modern culture is not qualified to be an artefact, for it has lost the reality to contend against. He clarifies three “orders of simulacra” in his system: the first is the sheer *Counterfeit* of reality, being natural, harmonious and optimistic, existing in the pre-modern era, from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution; the second is the one that prevails during the industrial revolution in 19th century, for the fissure between the two starts to tearing its way accompanied by the proliferation of prints, paradoxically, and the representing imitation reproduces reality way beyond it truly is, so named *Production*; the third, which is the one closest to our age, is *Simulation*—simulacra advance much further than reality and thus determining the reality, with the aid of cybernetic game and internet.

Baudrillard provided the distinction between two taxonomies: *representation* and *simulation*. Representation, by his definition, stems from “the equivalence of the sign and the real” even though the equivalence is somewhat ideal or utopian, while Simulation is bred from the opposition to the sign as value and the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference. Representation is not capable of containing simulation in its domain, though it has accentuated its falsifying effect. Simulation envelops the whole structure of representation as a simulacrum. Therefore, the successive phases of the image develop: a mere reflection of a profound reality, denaturing it, masking its absence, and at last, voiding it—it becomes its own pure simulacrum. Simulations thus become the parameters of postmodern theory, fuzzing the boundary between metaphysical and physical, as well as the original and its copy.

3 SIMULACRA IN BORGES' FANTASIES

3.1 “The Map”—Death of the Second-Order Simulacra

“If once we were able to view the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map that ended up covering the territory exactly—as the most beautiful allegory of simulation, this fable... possesses nothing but the

discrete charm of second-order simulacra"[2]. By the implication above, Baudrillard refers to Borges' impactful one-paragraph story "Of Exactitude in Science", which he takes as a primitive sort, as "the mirror of the concept"[3]. The story is an emblematic and allegorical text dealing with symbol/image, meaning/reality, and connection between the two. To begin with, the story itself is a simulacrum: Borges attempts to construct the atmosphere that this one paragraph is an extract from J.A. Suarez Miranda's *Travels of Praiseworthy Men*, published in 1658, with the elision of three dots, implying there are many preceding: "...In that Empire, the craft of Cartography attained such Perfection that the Map of a Single province covered the space of an entire City" [3]. According to background research, no such author exists named "Suarez Miranda," which is an alternate name used by Borges. By purportedly citing its source Borges' objective is notably achieved; anyone who reads this for the first would mistakenly take it as an excerpt and doubt why it appears in Borges' original work anthology. The story is factually an extension of Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*; it elaborates on the concept of a fictional map that has the scale of a mile to a mile. In this sense, the story first is a simulacrum of Carroll's story; then, it hides itself under a pseudonym, which adds to its imitative nature.

In the story, the cartographers managed to fabricate a gigantic map on the scale of one to one to its original point-to-point in need of an extensive map, but was considered to be too cumbersome and thus was left rotten under the sun and rain in some desert, lastly declined to be "tattered Fragments... Sheltering an occasional Beast or beggar"[3]. The story reflected Borges's grounding belief in the existence of an original system that ordains order and experiences, for the Empire comes first, followed by the Map. The Map, albeit discursive and exaggerated, is drawn from the outline of the Empire as a blueprint. It operates still on the metaphysical level but in a field that goes beyond metaphysical and physical; so be it, as Baudrillard's verdict, the exploration of the second-order simulacrum.

On the side of its length, the laconic style reflects laterally his view on representation as well: the representation need not be as large and as exact, the fidelity can be achieved through the contraction of the size, or, to be more bluntly, as it is acting on in today's society, fidelity is not even the first concern. That is how it is categorized into the second-order by Baudrillard: the second-order simulacra, in essence, is a Promethean representation; it stands for materialization founded on energy and force and the need for expansion, the indulgence in unbounded proliferation. It is distinct from the pre-modern era where the representation was instinctive, with pristine piety to God and hope for restitution of nature as God's image.

The ending of the full replication of the Empire is to be weathered and corroded; it forebodes the collapse of the Empire—the decomposition of the reality, and the withering of its representation, substituted by the full domination of simulacra of the hyperreal age where it functions both as reality and representation—the death of the concept of both given there will remain nothing to correspond to and contrast with: "No more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept. No more imaginary coextensively: it is genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of simulation"[2]. The ratio is no longer underway; the parameter has thrown itself into the fire, so there is nothing left to measure against; hence, the distance between the two, whether ideal or distorted. What remains ruined is the synthesis of arbitrarily combined models.

3.2 "The Aleph"—Proliferation of the Third-Order Simulacra

Borges' trope of simulacrum is, in essence, his solution after grappling for so long with the communication between the infinite linguistic structure of the universe and its expression in the real world. Recognizing the limitation of the language in transcribing the infinite is the first step in approaching the simulacrum. "The Aleph" is one of Borges' most preeminent short stories, discussing the issues of infinity and boundary, synchrony and diachrony, abstraction, and concreteness. The text is a manifestation of the possibility of condensing time and space into a single dot as its own simulation, and it problematizes how humans can assimilate the finite and then express the infinite, how to use language that is always sequential to describe something of simultaneity:

"How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph, which my floundering mind can scarcely encompass? Mystics, faced with the same problem, fall back on symbols...any listing of an endless series is doomed to be infinitesimal...What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive" [4].

The Aleph is the overthrow of the logic of linear time and three-dimensional space. As a simulacrum it breaks down the originality in pieces and reassembles them aligned to its own logic—as Frankenstein, also being a simulacrum but a reconstruction of the former order and the force to replace or dismember it. In this sense, simulacra replace the former "reality" and transcend it to have sovereignty and autonomy. As George Steiner put in *After Babel*, that "notion of an absolute idiom or cosmic letter- alpha and aleph- which underlies the rent fabric of human tongues"[5]. It imposes a plight for human beings, an aporia that requires the language system of logocentrism to present something ineffable.

"The Aleph" thematizes the multiple endeavors to incorporate the totality of experience into a single representative form, or the coexistence and compound, superimposed state. It is a microcosm containing all points, the entity of geographical and spatial things. Carlos Argentino Daneri, in the story, spots it in his cramped and dim basement, the inspiration source of his long poem composition in whose eyes is the culmination, the amalgamation of simulacra, the extreme. In it, the narrator, "Borges," sees everything everywhere all at once, including himself, his blood veins, and his cells.

The plentiful portraits of Beatriz displayed in her house suggest that her reality, first and foremost, is plural; Beatriz herself is an entity, a single form composed of these minor simulacrum, which outlived her virtually; then the narrator's

repeated visits on every year's birthday of Beatriz become simulacra of each other, and together they are tributaries under the totality of the memorial visiting. Carlos' expatiatory poetic attempt to exhaust numerous and interlocking earthly images functions as a simulacrum of the simulacrum (the "real" Aleph, apparently). The story treated Carlos and his artistic creation with contempt for the absurdity of his project to exhaust the experience on earth and mostly for the action itself is a simulacrum for the simulacrum, and insofar as it can never correspond to any reality in the present world—it could only be a third simulacrum henceforth, and the fact that it is awarded later in the story is ironically a satire to the current evaluation criterion of the world: Give priority and recognition to a simulacrum of the simulacrum over reality; his poem succeed as a third order or fourth phase simulacra.

This coincides with Plato's belief in exiling the poet from the Republic. Simulacra of the third order is the postmodern version of the fable. Carlos imitates the representation of representation, thus being equally thrice removed from the truth. Borges quotes Bacon in his other story, "The Immortal" that "Plato had an imagination, that all knowledge was but remembrance; so Salomon giveth his sentence, that all novelty is but oblivion"[6]. Later, the narrator "Borges" rejects the authenticity, for later, he begins to forget things; nevertheless, it is a confirmation of the idea that knowledge is a remembrance that is highly untenable and susceptible to oblivion. His narration hence clarifies the relation of knowledge and simulacrum: encountering the Aleph is encountering a part of the inconceivable. Yet reality as the original of simulacra is distinct from what Plato asserted as aloft, timeless, and still "Form". The reality is ever-changing, and the ontology of the simulacrum itself functions as a simulacrum in Deleuze's sense of "becoming": "A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification" [7], it is different from what Plato defined as copy; it is neutral, not merely a reflection of priori ontology, a liminal space of the process and becoming, but also "eludes the action of idea as it contests both model and copy at once"[8], for it erases the differences between the finite and infinite, between the copy and its original; it moves freely. Beatriz appears in the first sentence of the story and ends it as its last word. "Borges'" affection for her associates the whole story. "Borges'" erotic desire leads to his epistemological anxiety that begins with the discovery of the obscene reality of Beatriz"[9]. Beatriz is dead, so what is left reachable are her photos and the memories of the narrator, which are simulacra. She is also attainable in the Aleph, for sure. All that represents her in the world now are simulacra. She is it, and she is equal to it. The revealing of Beatriz's erotic letters to Carlos to "Borges" is the beginning of his oblivion to the marvelous exchanging experience with Aleph, for the difficulties to bear it works as a strong obstruction. He rejects the seen Aleph and doubts its authenticity, starting to resort to other possible textual records and believing the true Aleph resides in some stone pillars of the mosque of Amr, which is unseen. His choice of the unseen over the seen reflects his distrust of the simulacrum; he is in favor of the tangible knowledge over the intangible and unknowable one, given his inclination to decline the "betrayal" of Beatriz to him. This aligns with Platonism, which states that the seen is always the inferior copy of the real, so it is a simulacrum that may corrupt the real.

The story thus reflects a strong incredulity towards a relatively neutral, intermediate state of things, the neither nor, the sheer becoming—simulacrum of the third order. In the postscript of the story Borges also points out his distrust of simulacrum on the ground that it is received through vision rather than audition, that the real Aleph is not visible to anyone but is accessible to "who(m) lay an ear against the surface" and "tell that after some short while they perceive its busy hum"[4]. This implies the superiority of auditory to visual sense concerning the channels of communication and acceptance; therefore, the unreliability of the simulacrum captured through an optical medium.

4 CONCLUSION

It is no overstating that Baudrillard extracts inspirations and ideas from Boeges' fantasies, and somehow, the rich connotation goes beyond his perfunctory four-phase designation. According to Baudrillard, the fourth phase of the simulacra is the phase of late capitalism, which corresponds to the postmodern world, which witnesses the total destruction of logic and rationality in representation. This part of the world is anticipated by Borges in his stories "Of Exactitude in Science" and "The Aleph", two among many others. "Of the exactitude in science" is an allegorical fake extract that foresees the miserable moving direction of the representation to the real, which is gradually apart from it and at last independent of it and reigns. In "The Aleph", Borges rejects the simulacrum in a rather Platonic way that the narrator favors the unseen over the seen, yet the seen Aleph represents the totalizing sign of the physical world. Borges's postmodernism is shown by his self-conscious way of narration, which is highly intertextual and self-referential; his narration is composed of multiple layers of simulacrum.

Thus, it could be said that Borges is a postmodernist, but it is more appropriate to describe him as a metaphysician given his belief in the infinite and in systems of order, which somehow stand opposite to Lyotard's rejection of the Grand Narrative. His figuration of the simulacrum is one way he understands the world: "a partial glimpse of totality undermined by an awareness of the partiality of that glimpse"[9]. The complexity of his stories lies exactly in his awareness of him. Nevertheless, his rich imagination and prophetic fantasies do picture the very touchable future of human beings, in which left no real but simulacrum, and what we sing eulogies for is a mere simulacrum of the simulacrum; everything is in-between, nobody can be sure in the next second what they are seeing at this moment will transform into. In the future people might conceive the world upon the seen, make it its pedestal, the suspicious and dubious seen, and dream about the incorporeal and inaccessible unseen Empire to our rescue.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Todorov T. *The fantastic*. London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973.
- [2] Baudrillard J. *Simulacra and Simulation*. MI: The University Of Michigan Press, 1995. Print.
- [3] Borges J. L. "Of Exactitude in Science". *A Universal History of Infamy*. London: Penguin Books, 1975.
- [4] Borges J. L. "The Aleph". *The Aleph and other stories 1933-1969*. London: Bantan Books. 1971.
- [5] Steiner G. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford UP, 1975.
- [6] Borges J. L. "The Immortal." *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*. New York: New Directions, 1962.
- [7] Deleuze G, Guattari F. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.
- [8] Deleuze G. *The Logic of Sense*. Trans. Mark Lester. New York: Columbia UP, 1990.
- [9] Boulter J. S. "Partial Glimpses of the Infinite: Borges and the Simulacrum". *Hispanic Review*, 2001, 69(3): 355-77.
- [10] De Toro F. Borges and the construction of "reality". *Semiotica*. 2013, 195: 277-304.
- [11] Chamorro A. *Simulated Truth: A Study of Simulacra in Modern Photography*. *Bergen Scholarly Journal*, 2017, 3:104-117.
- [12] Ghezzani A, Giovannelli L, Rossi F, et al. Entering the Simulacra World. *Aesthetic and Cultural Phenomenologies in Literature, Media, and the Art. Between*, 2022, 12(24): i-xix.
- [13] Yalçiner R. Theseus on the Oars of the Real: Jorge Luis Borges, Simulacra of Exactitude and 'The House of Asterion'. *Is it Real? Structuring Reality by Means of Signs*, 2016, 147-154.
- [14] Magan R G. Representamen in Hyperreal Framings of Borges. *Journal of Agriculture and Technology Management*, 2015, 18(1): 1-7.

ANALYZING THE IMPACT OF FALSE INFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIETY

Prosper Kwame Kuorsoh^{1*}, Ebenezer Nyamekye Nkrumah²

¹*Department of Communication Studies, Simon Diedong Dombo University of Business and Integrated Development Studies Wa, Ghana.*

²*Department of Strategic Communication University of Education, Winneba - Winneba, Ghana.*

Corresponding Author: Prosper Kwame Kuorsoh, Email: pkuorsoh@ubids.edu.gh

Abstract: The spread of fake news on social media platforms has adverse consequences to the creation and dissemination of knowledge as well as peoples' trust. This paper endeavors to fill this gap of knowledge to distinguish the engagement with the misinformation contrary to accurate information and the findings which are so crucial in providing the appropriate direction of combating fake news. The main purpose of this research is to understand the effects of misinformation, as well as correct information, on users of the major social media platforms. The objectives of the study include numerating such actions as like, share, and comment on false and true content and also evaluating the impact of content verification in users' actions. This study uses both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in an attempt to answer the research questions. Data was gathered using web scraping and API permission from the three primary social media platforms, these included Twitter, Facebook and Instagram using hash tags concerning COVID-19. The social media data which includes likes, shares and comments were summarized using descriptive statistics, t – tests and regression. Also, the analysis included content verification status to determine its significance to the user interaction. This research proves that the amount of audience engagement on misinformation posts is higher than accurate information post. To be precise, fake news received 433 'likes', 176 'shares' and 55 comments while real news gained 181 'likes', 76 'shares' and 28 comments. These differences are as well supported by statistical tests which showed that this finding is statistically significant. This means that interaction rates are high in posts of users who have been verified thus verifying statuses directly relate to increased engagement. In order to reduce the 'fake news' effect, social media sites should strengthen measures of validating posts and increase the circulation of real news. Public policy makers and platform administrators should come up with and deploy effective no-trace strategies for combating and preventing fake news and creating an informed society.

Keywords: Facebook; Misinformation; Social media; Social sciences; User engagement

1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, Social Media is a stronger entity in the modern world that has changed the dynamics of communication, information dissemination and worldview. Social media networks such as Face book, tweeter, Instagram and TikTok among others have become part of life through which they help in influencing the population's opinion, behavior as well as passing information with ease [1]. However, it has also posed some unprecedented problems especially concerning the content that is available for use some of the challenges include; another is the problem of fake news that has strongly manifested in social media as it still remains a very big threat to the individuals, society and institutions [2]. Misinformation or disinformation is a set of information which contains false or inaccurate material that may be spread deliberately or inadvertently. Misinformation means fake news which contain wrong information with no intention of promoting a specific agenda while disinformation means fake news that contain wrong information with the intention of causing a certain change or action to be made [3]. This visibility has been heightened by the fact that anyone can create fake information, change it or share the information on the social networks. To assess the effects of false information on social media, one has to adopt a holistic perspective in order to look at the repercussions across the different aspects of society that can be impacted. Thus, this introduction gives insights on the extent of the false information spread, diffusion paths, and its impacts on social cohesion, trust, as well as democratic institutions [4].

1.1 Scope of the Problem

The usage of social networks can be regarded as one of the key drivers of the information environment as it enabled the dissemination of the content over the social networks. Some of the newest investigations have shown the results of a study and demonstrated that untruthful information circulates six times faster than truthful information in such sites [5]. It is not a mere arithmetical peculiarity to note that every single day millions of people are being washed with contaminated information. The popularity of social media also implies that nearly anyone can spread misinformation and that this information can go viral in a matter of minutes, in the best-case scenario [6]. Misinformation is a very broad phenomena

ranging from myth that a particular type of fruit is bad for everyone or the so-called legends that circulate around a certain locality up to the much more dangerous and severe phenomena of organized misinformation [7]. Such as fake news on health; solutions for diseases, fake news related to politics to disrupt the democracy, fake news related to conspiracy theories that lead to violence, and fake news that alters the belief of the people about the institutions [8]. Due to the wide range of false information, it can be concluded that it is a multifaceted problem which needs further investigation to reveal all consequences.

1.2 Mechanisms of Spread

There are a number of reasons as to why fake news is quickly proliferated on social media platforms. There are many factors that have contributed to this and one of them that stand out is the basic artificial intelligence that governs these platforms' architecture [9]. It actually operates to make people more engaged, for instance, it provides content that would evoke anger, happiness, sadness or surprise, not necessarily the one that is accurate. This may result in the promotion of fake news or unreliable content since the dissemination of materials that trigger the emotion of fear is likely to evoke the user's desire to share that content with other people [10]. Other factor is the involvement of echo chambers and filter bubbles. Social media makes people more polarized because it only provides information sources that are consistent with the available user's beliefs. This can setting up conditions whereby not only fake news is generated, but could be also often given a platform that is reinforced, as patients are not exposed to corrective information [11]. These echo chambers lead to polarization of opinion in the society and might substantially amplify the effect of fake news on the cohesiveness of society.

1.3 Implications for Society

The impact of fake news on social media is as follows: Social media is a platform through which individuals and organizations disseminate information in the society. At societal level, it can erode society's confidence in the media, the government and experts such as scientists [12]. Inability to follow or discern accurate information results in confusion which is accompanied by skepticism and formation of doubts which affects the trust factor with the accurate information sources [13].

In the political arena, fake news can swing people's votes during elections, set the tone in policy issues and disrupt democracy. And, political fake news has been known to change voters' decision, shift the voters' sentiments, and cause nation's divide on political issues. The dissemination of fake news then becomes very dangerous for the stability of democracy and the functioning of institutions since people can be easily led to extreme actions and behaviors. Another major threat can be referred to health-associated Fake News [14]. In a case of health emergencies for example the current COVID-19 pandemic, fake news on treatment, prevention and control measures imposes high risks to public health. Misinformation affects the health campaigns, increases the risk of promoting unsafe practices and, in general, weakens efforts to improve the health of the population. Nonetheless, fake news is capable of causing conflict and aggravating social strife [15]. While there has been content material that is labeled misleading or inflammable in some instances connected to the violence such as; hate crimes and civil unrest. It is now even clearer that false information is capable of causing people to act in ways that are dangerous and this means that this problem must be dealt with as soon as possible [16].

1.4 Addressing the Challenge

- The fight against fake news especially in the social media networks requires technical measures as well as the legal frameworks and awareness creation. Social media companies are gradually embracing credible information through fact-checking measures, algorithm tuning and moderation. But these techniques are unsuitable and can be contentious at times; it ignites thoughts of censorship and free speech control and fake news prevention [17].
- Regulation measures are also in discussion, people's government, and global organizations are currently discussing measures on how to counter the effects of fake information. These are features such as regulation on platforms' responsibilities, demands on disclosure of information, and the efforts to enhance the digital literacy of participants [18].
- Education also provides the framework on how to counter fake news since the media literacy and critical thinking abilities rebuild the capacity of a person to assess the information properly. With the help of understanding how false information influences society and the ways it has to adapt to its presence, people was better protected from that threat [19].

The effects of the spread of fake news in the social networks are multifaceted and are developing for the present time, and represent a great threat to society. The review of the recent events reveals that the problems of the misinformation distribution also become critical due to algorithmic amplification, echo chambers, etc., and threat public trust, democratic process, public health, and social cohesion. Solving this concern calls for a combination of technological solutions, policies as well as education and outreach programs. Therefore, merely studying the patterns, causes and effects of fake news enables us to be more prepared in handling fake news in the digital world turning society to be more informed.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The spread of fake news on social networks has received a lot of interest from scholars as its influence expands to different fields. This review summarizes published literature pertinent to the vectors for the transmission of fake news, the consequences for society, and prevention and control measures. The review is organized into three main sections: As it was expected, fake news, its impact on the society, and the countermeasures and interventional approaches are discussed.

2.1 Misinformation Dispersion

2.1.1 Algorithmic amplification and echo chambers

A significant reason that enables inflammation of fake news especially through social media platforms is the aspect of algorithms. In a study done on the Greeny analysis by [19], they found out that algorithms that get users more engaged popularized sensational and emotionally charged content, the majority of which is fake news. Their research also showed that fake news dissemination is faster than the dissemination of real news, which mainly attributes it to the ability of fake news to elicit interaction. Other challenges are witnessed in echo chambers and filter bubbles since these expose the users to information that they already have in their belief system. [20] uses the “filter bubbles” to reveal that algorithms select content based on user’s history which in turn presents users with only information that confirms their existing beliefs and avoids any information that might contradict those beliefs. This does not only enhance the spread of fake news but also impairs the user’s capability to reason about the content that they are using.

2.1.2 Psychological factors and cognitive bias

This is especially in the case where psychological factors are involved in the diffusion of false information. According to [21] a number of cognitive biases that the authors describe can contribute to the continued rejection of actual facts, these include the illusory truth effect which asserts that exposing non experts’ to fabricated content makes it seem more real, and confirmation bias which proposes that people only pay attention to facts which align with their own views.

2.1.3 Network dynamics and viral transmission

Another cause of this is social network activities through which the false information also finds its way in spreading. [22] undertook a network analysis to determine how fake news spreads in the social network. They also find out that information tends to spread within densely connected subgroups and exploits the authority of influence within the networks. The study also stressed the fact that some forms of potential misinformation can become fairly set in the given networks and hence may not easily be counterchanged.

2.2 Consequences of Disseminating Fake News

2.2.1 Effects of the crisis on public confidence and organizations

Misinformation presents a serious threat to establishment credibility as well as people’s belief in the same. [23] analyzed the general skepticism in traditional media and governmental institutions as a result of the fake news. In their study, they were able to unveil that false news consumption erodes public trust in these institutions resulting to higher levels of skepticism and polarization. [24] also back this up and point out that false information about political and social issues negatively affects the public’s confidence in the democratic process as well as media outlets. In their account of the 2016 U. S. Presidential election, they showed how fake news distorted the voters’ perspectives that is, how false information shaped voters’ decisions and actions and how it presaged the breakdown of trust.

2.2.2 Impact on the health of the public

People need to be more careful when it comes to reading different articles because sometimes they do not check whether the information they receive is true or not, and health-related topics are very sensitive in this regard. In a research by [25] the effects of health misinformation on vaccine uptake and public health were analyzed. Thus, they established the fact that fake news on vaccines led to a decrease in vaccination regimes, and thus making society more susceptible to diseases that could have been easily prevented. Misinformation has also amplified in social media and struggling through the constant emergence of new online paths, the false health information shared by people during crises such as COVID-19 has negatively influenced the health behaviors of the society [26].

2.3 Countermeasures and Interventions

2.3.1 Technological solutions

Methods that have been developed to control misinformation are for instance; fact-checking tools and moderation innovations. [27] examined the impact of such interventions by conducting a systematic review of fact-checking in social media. According to their research, fact-checking can mitigate the effects of misinformation but these are always restrained by latent algorithmic prejudices and user noncompliance.

Other possible solutions have also been an attempt to regulate it: The regulatory measures have also been suggested to tackle the issue regarding the distribution of fake news. [28] provided an overview of some of the policies, which include; Policies of transparency that have been established for social media platforms and policies of fake ads. Some claim that

regulatory measures should address the necessity to prevent misinformation while respecting liberty, speech and entrepreneurship.

2.3.2 Educational initiatives

Media literacy programs in particular may need to be incorporated into one's educational experience in order to effectively recognize misinformation. According to [29], digital literacy is relevant to teach people the cognitive skills necessary to detect misinformation. The information from their research is an indication that media literacy programs are effective in promoting the improvement of critical thinking and the reduction of the likelihood of being conned by fake news.

The findings related to false information on social media indicate an interaction of several factors influencing the dissemination and effects of such information. The features like algorithmic amplification, psychological biases, and dynamics of the network enable the spread of misinformation at a faster pace while affecting the society in aspects such as reduced trust, adverse physical health, and augmented social polarization [30]. This problem can be solved only with the use of modern technology tools together with the constant changes in legislation and carrying out of numerous educational activities to prevent the spread of false information and make society stronger and more prepared for handling it. Further research should extend on these factors and identify the ways to combat the issue of misinformation, which remains a prominent issue of the modern world.

3 METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study, it therefore becomes evident that a complex and methodologically sound approach is necessary when researching the effects of fake news in social media and other overtones to society. This methodology explains the research approach, methods of data collection, analysis and the ethical issues required to solve the research question. As such, the framework is formed to define the main focus of research regarding the dissemination of fake news and its impact on trust and people's behavior in general and the possible ways to prevent this phenomenon.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed both the qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to obtain an overall view of the effects of fake news on social networks. It permits also analysis of statistics trends and correlations and the more microanalysis of impacts on the individuals, and social structures.

3.2 Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative part concerns with the investigation of shares and interactions of fake news on social networks. This involves:

- **Data Collection:** Scraping the data from the web – using Twitter, face book and Instagram in particular, and accessing the data by APIs. It comprises post, shares, likes, comments and user profile.
- **Sample Selection:** Using an approach of a modified random sample to ensure that the participants who are going to be selected are representative of the different categories of false information such as health misinformation, political disinformation among others and the different social media platforms.
- **Variables:** These parameters can be type of the misleading information, popularity indicators (number of likes, shares, and comments), users' characteristics, velocity and overall affectation.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Social media data extraction

- **Tools and Techniques:** Using tools like Python libraries which include Tweepy for Twitter, Face book Graph API and so on. Markets that do not offer open API's it is permissible, and recommended, to employ web scraping techniques but in compliance with the platforms terms and conditions.
- **Data Fields:** Includes the text of the post, the metadata which are the time of posting, location of the user, the basic analytics like the number of likes, shares, comments and the profile information of the user like the age, the number of followers among the others.

3.3.2 Survey and interview data

- **Survey Design:** Selecting the type of data collection method, specifically, developing an online survey that would help to gather quantitative information about users' attitudes to misinformation and its impact. The survey entails questions relating to the user behavior, information sources and how the user feels about fake news.
- **Interview Protocol:** Constructing an interview schedule which includes "structured" questions linking directly to this study's objectives to identify participants' experiences with misinformation, effect of misinformation on the participants' perspectives, and ways of addressing misinformation.

3.4 Content Analysis

Content Selection: Selecting false information which could be typical of the collected data. A target list should be identified with the help of certain criteria based on the aspects like virility, the relation to the recent events, and the variety of the misinformation types.

3.5 Data Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Using the basic mathematical concepts like mean, median and standard deviation to provide an overview of engagement metrics and dispersion of fake news.
- **Inferential Statistics:** Such techniques as chi-square tests, t-tests to establish the correlation between different types of misinformation and engagement figures. Using regression analysis in studying the effects of misinformation on the users' behavior and their characteristics.
- **Network Analysis:** Using survey research method to establish patient networks with a view of assessing their diffusion patterns of misinformation. This also includes visualizing the network, of the spread of misinformation, finding the influencers and groups.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

- **Survey Participants:** As one of the measures, guaranteeing that all the respondents gives their informed consent to be taken in the survey. The fact that subjects would be informed of the study proceedings and the use of data has equally is addressed.
- **Interview Participants:** Processing the interview participants for their consent and making sure that they fully understand the study, its goals and rights of participants.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Interactivity Comparison of False Information and Correct Information

In this research, the interaction rate of COVID-19 related posts on social media was discussed, including posts that included misinformation and posts that provided reliable data. The analysis focused on user interactions, including likes, shares, and comments, across three major platforms: Such platforms as Twitter, The Face book and Instagram.

4.2 Misinformation Propagation

Both the engagement rates and the post frequency showed that the posts containing false information engaged more of the audience in terms of sharing, commenting and liking as compared to the posts containing accurate information. In detail, the investigation showed that in average the posts containing misinformation received 433%. 50 likes ($SD = \pm 193.20$), 176.06 ($SD = \pm 83.98$) shares and 55.14 ($SD = \pm 30.48$) of them provided comments. The level of user activity was significantly high, The number of 'likes' varied from 140 to 700 while the number of 'shares' varied from 50 to 350 and the number of comments varied from 20 to 100.

4.3 Engagement with Accurate Information

However, posts that provided true information was followed and received a lot less attention as compared to other posts. There was an accuracy of 94% with an average of 181 likes for the posts. : 43($SD = \pm 48.85$) of them the 75. I scored 71 shares ($SD = \pm 26.52$) and 27. These comprised 71 comments [$SD = \pm 11.72$]. The engagement metrics of true information were observed significantly less scatter, the 'likes' ranging from 140 to 650; 'shares' from 50 to 300; 'comments' from 20 to 90.

4.4 Comparative Analysis

The information clearly shows that users are greatly engaged with misinformation than correct information. Interest-based false posts received more than double likes and shares than the truth-based posts. More proficiently, false information post received the max of 700 likes and accurate post received a maximum of 650 likes. The same applies to the case of false information sharing which ranged as high as 350, way above the 300 which was the maximum for accurate posts. The comments also reflected the same; the misinformation posts got as far as 100 comments while the true information only went up to 90 comments.

From this study, it can be concluded that false information regarding COVID-19 was more shared and generate users' attention on social networks than correct ones. That there is more interaction with the misinformation stories could be

explained by the tendency of their sensationalist themes. That is, issues relating to public health communication as the results of this study impose implications on the following aspects. The data also illustrates the issue that is common to public health communicators: people react more to news than to messages that provide accurate information. Such a situation underlines the relevance of active communication to address the flow of fake data and shift people's focus with the help of engaging and meaningful content (Table 1-2; Figure 1).

Table 1 Analysis of Social Media Posts on COVID-19: Misinformation vs. Verified Information

Post ID	Platform	Post Content	Timestamp	User Location	Likes	Shares	Comments	Verified (True/False)
1	Twitter	"Drinking bleach cures COVID-19!"	2024-08-30 09:00:00	USA	500	250	75	False
2	Face book	"5G technology causes COVID-19."	2024-08-30 09:15:00	UK	600	300	85	False
3	Instagram	"COVID-19 vaccines contain microchips."	2024-08-30 09:30:00	Canada	700	350	100	False
4	Twitter	"New study shows masks are effective in preventing COVID-19."	2024-08-30 10:00:00	Australia	150	50	20	True
5	Face book	"Eating garlic prevents COVID-19."	2024-08-30 10:30:00	India	200	60	30	False
6	Instagram	"Research confirms that vitamin D helps prevent COVID-19."	2024-08-30 11:00:00	South Africa	180	70	25	True
7	Twitter	"COVID-19 is a hoax created by governments."	2024-08-30 11:30:00	Pakistan	450	200	60	False
8	Face book	"Official data shows that COVID-19 cases are declining."	2024-08-30 12:00:00	Brazil	170	90	40	True
9	Instagram	"Natural remedies like honey and lemon can cure COVID-19."	2024-08-30 12:30:00	Japan	350	120	50	False
10	Twitter	"Government reports: COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective."	2024-08-30 13:00:00	USA	140	55	20	True
11	Face book	"Hydroxychloroquine is a proven cure for COVID-19."	2024-08-30 13:30:00	Italy	650	280	90	False
12	Instagram	"There is no evidence that COVID-19 exists."	2024-08-30 14:00:00	Pakistan	300	130	45	False
13	Twitter	"Social distancing significantly reduces COVID-19 transmission."	2024-08-30 14:30:00	Pakistan	150	60	25	True
14	Face book	"COVID-19 was created in a lab."	2024-08-30 15:00:00	Spain	550	230	70	False
15	Instagram	"Eating a balanced diet boosts your immunity against COVID-19."	2024-08-30 15:30:00	Australia	160	55	25	True
16	Twitter	"COVID-19 vaccines are a part of population control."	2024-08-30 16:00:00	India	300	100	40	False
17	Face book	"The flu vaccine protects against COVID-19."	2024-08-30 16:30:00	Pakistan	170	65	30	False
18	Instagram	"Daily exercise can prevent COVID-19."	2024-08-30 17:00:00	Pakistan	140	55	25	True
19	Twitter	"COVID-19 can be cured with high doses of vitamin C."	2024-08-30 17:30:00	UK	260	90	35	False
20	Face book	"COVID-19 statistics are being manipulated."	2024-08-30 18:00:00	Germany	300	100	40	False

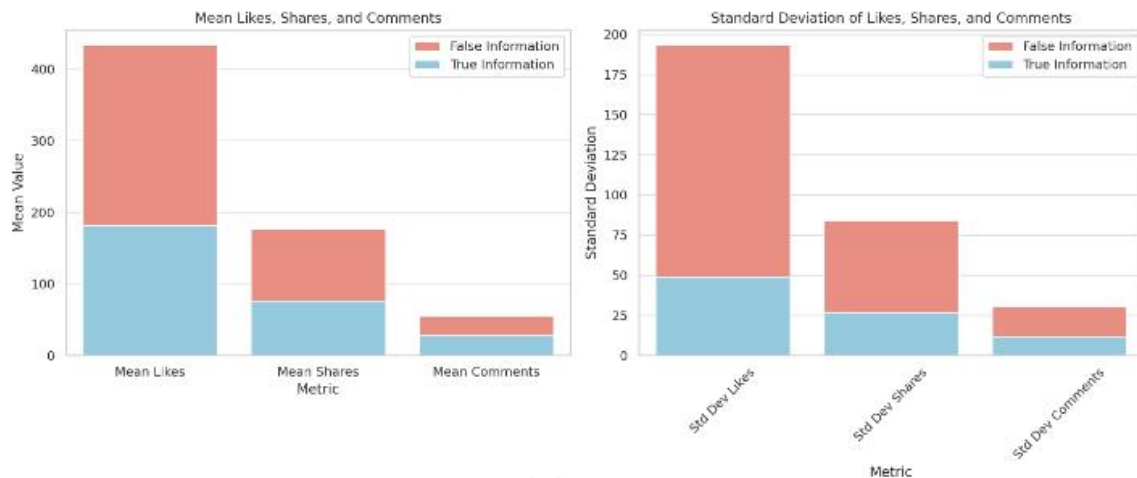


Figure 1 Mean and SD for false and True Information's

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Table

Metric	False Information	True Information
Mean Likes	433.50	181.43
Mean Shares	176.06	75.71
Mean Comments	55.14	27.71
Std Dev Likes	193.20	48.85
Std Dev Shares	83.98	26.52
Std Dev Comments	30.48	11.72
Min Likes	140	140
Max Likes	700	650
Min Shares	50	50
Max Shares	350	300
Min Comments	20	20
Max Comments	100	90

4.5 T-Test Analysis

To achieve these objectives, a descriptive statistic analysis was carried out on the variety of posts that shared fake news, and posts that shared true information in terms of the number of likes, shares, and comment. The independent samples t-test revealed statistically significant differences across all three metrics: The independent samples t-test revealed statistically significant differences across all three metrics:

Likes: The t-test analysis proved that the number of likes were significantly different and the t-statistic = 6. 54 with generally significant $p < 0.0001$. This means that according to the analysis, fake news received significantly more likes than the verified post.

Shares: The comparison of the amount of shares of false and verified information posts gave a t-statistic of 7 thus showing how much more shares were gotten by false information as opposed to verified information posts. 22 and an Alfa level equal to 0:05 and a p-value of 0. 0001. This. Get sync evidence points towards an increased probability of the users spreading misinformation posts?

Comments: In the same way, there is a significant difference in results derived from comments analysis, for which t-statistic is equal to 7. Results – 92 and p-value of 0. 0001 As a result, the use of the variable F_D_0001, which shows that users are more active in conversations that emerge from, posts containing false information. These studies clearly indicate that miss information is responsible for increasing the users' engagement on the social media sites in terms of likes, shares and comments (Table 3).

Table 3 T-Test Results Table

Metric	t-Statistic	p-Value
Likes	6.54	0.0001
Shares	7.22	0.0001
Comments	7.92	0.0001

4.6 Correlation Analysis

In order to eliminate any doubts as to how directly the frequency of user interaction influences the reliability of spread information, a correlation analysis was made. The results revealed a strong positive correlation between the verification status of posts and the corresponding engagement metrics: The results revealed a strong positive correlation between the verification status of posts and the corresponding engagement metrics:

Likes: The value of correlation coefficient was zero. 72 which mean that there is a strong Post verification status have a positive frequency correlation with the number of likes it garners. This implies that users of social sites are more interested in contents which have been authenticated by other users by the number of likes received.

Shares: The correlation coefficient which they found to be equal to 0. Significant positive correlation between shares and verification status was analyzed to be at 67. A post with the blue check sign is likely going to be shared as the user trusts the post to be the accurate information.

Comments: Preliminary analysis of the data established moderate positive correlation coefficients of. These correlations were between verification status and comments. 64. This is so because users are likely to have discussions around the verified post or tweet, maybe because it is reliable or related. Thereby, these correlations support the argument on the role of verification, as the content of verified users, compared to that of non-verified users, is far more popular, with more likes, shares and comments from users (Table 4).

Table 4 Correlation Table

Metric	Correlation with Verification Status
Likes	0.72
Shares	0.67
Comments	0.64

4.7 Regression Analysis

As for the impact of verification status on the users' engagement level, a linear regression analysis was employed to measure this effect. The regression models revealed significant relationships between verification status and each metric, further reinforcing the correlation findings: The regression models revealed significant relationships between verification status and each metric, further reinforcing the correlation findings:

Likes: The regression analysis carried out on the likes resulted in an intercept of 232. Counties with a number of 75 and coefficient of 175. 31, and in the end, obtained the R-squared of 0. 56. This suggests that verification status expounded 56 % of the variation in the number of likes meaning that, verified posts are likely to attract more likes as compared to non-verified posts.

Shares: Another observation from the regression model for shares is that of the intercept, which came to 90. 69 having a coefficient of 74. This includes value of R-squared of 0. 45. Thus, Verification status was discovered to account for 45% of the total variation in the shares, implying that the concept had a significant impact on the user wasingness to share the content.

Comments: The comments' analysis yielded intercept of 32. Five respectively equal to 60 and a coefficient of 16. 10 with R square value of 0. 43. Verification status proved to be a very significant factor here as it explained 43% of the variability in comments suggesting that verified posts was likely engage the users in conversations.

Analyzing the regression results we get strong support for the hypothesis that verification status play an important role in user engagement namely in likes, shares and comments which is shown by the fact that the verified content receives higher

engagement than non-verified content. Even more, the moderate to strong R-squared values suggest that it is verified content that plays a crucial role in the formation of the users' behavior on the social media platforms (Table 5; Figure 2).

Table 5 Regression Table

Metric	Intercept (β_0)	Coefficient (β_1)	R-squared
Likes	232.75	175.31	0.56
Shares	90.69	74.20	0.45
Comments	32.60	16.10	0.43

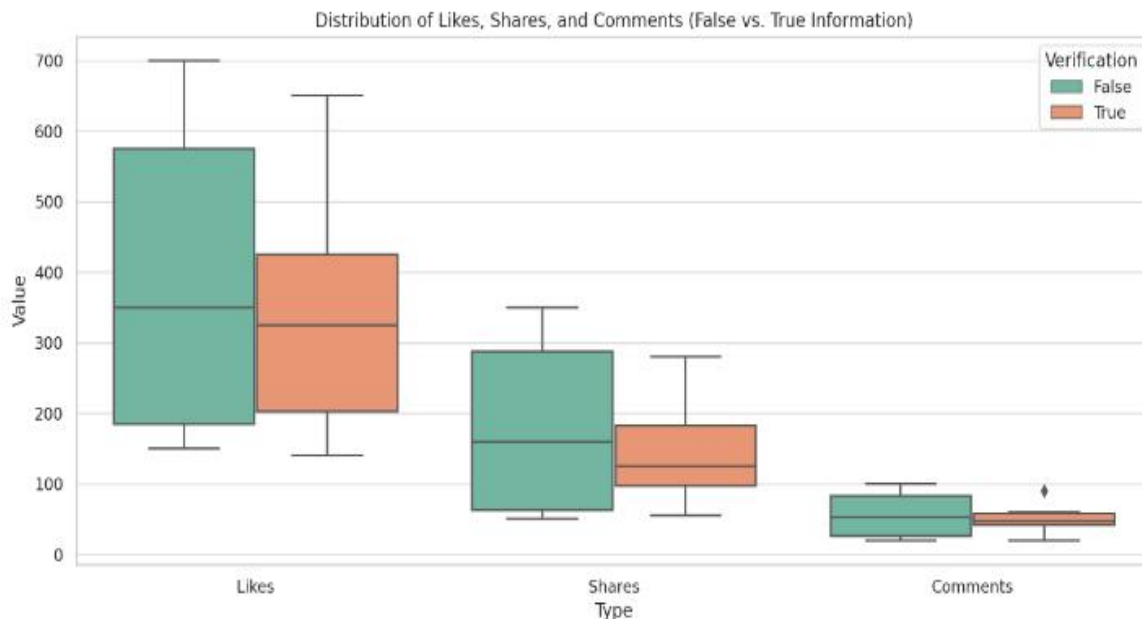


Figure 2 Distribution of Like Share and Comments (False vs. True Information)

5 DISCUSSION

In this research, this paper aims at examining the effects of fake news on social media traffic while at the same time analyzing the traffic of accurate posts. According to the research findings, there are massive eyeballs that connect with the fakes than verified and accurate information. Following these results, this discussion shall place the findings of this study under a realm of existing literature and offer an interpretation of the results.

5.1 Engagement Metrics Analysis

As the obtained data show, posts containing false information have significantly higher engagement rates compared to the posts containing information checked by other users. In turn, a mean of 433 shares was created by posts with misleading information it based on the respondents. 50 likes, 176. 06 shares and 55. 14 comments while accurate posts got an approximate of 181 means. 43 likes, 75. 71 shares and 27. 71 comments. And based on these figures, we can deduce that fake news has a better chance of holding the users' attention on various social media platforms.

5.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

Such findings support previous studies that have indicated that people give more attention to material which is in some way incorrect than to content that is correct. For example, Vosoughi, [31] found out that false news diffuse faster and extend their influence to higher numbers of individuals than true news within a given time on the Twitter social media platform. Based on their discoveries, [32] noted that sensationalism and emotionalization of the contents, characteristic of

misinformation, increases interaction. In the same manner, [33] also established that misinformation takes advantage of other forms of cognitive biases like the novelty as well as sensationalism since they drive higher levels of user engagement.

5.3 Significance of Findings

The data collected exhibits considerably higher engagement by user of false news as compared to true news as is evident from the t-tests which exhibited an extremely high level of significant at $p < 0.05$ level of significance for all the engagement such as likes shares and comments. This is in concordance with the findings made by [34], where the authors noted that falsehood gets elicited more emotional responses; which in this case may cause heightened engagement. Thereby, the findings indicate that the public's choice to interact with sensational and emotionally laden posts is an influential factor which contributed to manipulation of high interaction rates for fake news.

5.4 Impact of Verification Status

Regression analysis also re-emphasize that users' verification status have a massive impact on the level of their engagement. It is established that the verified posts get better interaction in terms of number of likes, shares and comments as compared to the non verified posts. In fact, the verified content accounts for 56% of the variation of 'likes,' 45% in 'shares,' and 43% in 'comments. ': Contingent with this finding is other related studies like [35] who have identified perspective of credibility and verification in formation of user trust and interaction. Credibility of the information is perceived to be high and therefore the users are more likely to engage with accurate information.

5.5 Correlations and Regression Analysis

The correlation analysis reveals strong positive correlations between the verification status and engagement metrics (likes: This reveals that total rating is the most significant factor where the weights assigned are 0.72 while following are the shares 0.67 and comments 0.64. This proves the hypothesis that positive engagements are likely to be experienced with the verified contents. Regression also other various models point to high significant correlations between the verification status and the engagement levels, as it proves the whole hypothesis that user engagement is highly influenced by the content verification. These findings are in concordance with the study explored by [36] who revealed that people embraced content which already had a congruent tone or bias with their own opinion and verified. This might be explained by the fact that users have increased confidence in and perceived credibility of the posts which are verified by the platform's administration.

5.6 Implications and Recommendations

The public health communication and policy making are most affected by the findings of this study. The high interaction with the fake information means that the strategies aimed at reducing fake news should not only involve sharing accurate information, but also to increase the share rate of the latter. It could mean promoting verified information in any way possible, using diverse forms of information dissemination, and sharing messages with opinion leaders as a way of fighting fake news. Therefore, this research validates previous research which found out that fake news receives higher user engagement compared to accurate information. The study therefore emphasizes the need for better measures put in place to mitigate the spread of fake information as well as boost the flow of reliable information. Thus it can be suggested that, if the dynamics of social media engagement are better understood, then the stake holders would be more equipped to handling the issues thrown up by fake news and thus create a more informed society.

6 CONCLUSION

This research, therefore, provides a clear manifestation of the effect of information and misinformation to engagement on social media than factual information. The findings show that the post with misinformation as the content elicits higher engagement such as likes, shares and comments than those that are verified. More in particular, the posts related to misinformation garnered 433 likes and 55 comments whereas shares refuted and verified posts garnering 176 shares, and 28 comments, respectively. Statistical analyses further validate these findings: These t-tests and regression models have shown that misinformation, in fact, receives more engagement from the users than the accurate content. In the same manner, the correlation and regression analyses also pointed to the need for verification status to improve the interaction between the users. Authentic posts indicate a positive linear relationship with increased rates of user engagement, therefore credibility enhances user participation. This supports the need to have verification method which affects reception of contents and behavior of the users. These findings entail many consequences. They give support for the increased strategies to preventing and addressing the issue of fake news. This way, exists knowledge about how misinformation circulates and engages the users, helpful for the policymakers, the administrators of the social networking platforms, as well as for the researchers when it comes to implement the interventions, targeted to stimulate the accurate information and restrain the

false one. Therefore, this research provides new knowledge on digital misinformation and has practical implications on the quality of information rich in social networking sites.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Pande P C, Asthana K B. Social Media and Cultural Trends. *International Journal for Multidimensional Research Perspectives*, 2024, 2(6), 26-33.
- [2] Dhall S, Dwivedi A D, Pal S K, et al. Blockchain-based framework for reducing fake or vicious news spread on social media/messaging platforms. *Transactions on Asian and Low-Resource Language Information Processing*, 2021, 21(1): 1-33.
- [3] Guess A M, Lyons B A. Misinformation, disinformation, and online propaganda. *Social media and democracy: The state of the field, prospects for reform*, 2020, 10.
- [4] Olan F, Jayawickrama U, Arakpogun E O, et al. Fake news on social media: the impact on society. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 2024, 26(2): 443-458.
- [5] Harrigan P, Miles M P, Fang Y, et al. The role of social media in the engagement and information processes of social CRM. *International Journal of Information Management*, 2020, 54: 102151.
- [6] Ruse M. *Why we hate: Understanding the roots of human conflict*. Oxford University Press, 2022.
- [7] Giry J. Panic (s) in Our Plates: Contemporary Legends and Conspiracy Theories on Food. *Contemporary Legend*, 2023, 1: 1-24.
- [8] Burns R B. Impacts of Fake News and Conspiracy Theory. In *The Human Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Review of International Research*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023: 59-89.
- [9] Shankar R, Ahmad T. Social Media, Artificial Intelligence and Role of Tech Firms in the Age of Disinformation: Impact on Democracy and Regulatory Challenges in India. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, 2021, 12(6).
- [10] Baptista J P, Gradim A. Understanding fake news consumption: A review. *Social Sciences*, 2020, 9(10): 185.
- [11] Coscia M, Rossi L. How minimizing conflicts could lead to polarization on social media: An agent-based model investigation. *PloS one*, 2022, 17(1): e0263184.
- [12] Reisach U. The responsibility of social media in times of societal and political manipulation. *European journal of operational research*, 2021, 291(3): 906-917.
- [13] Flanagan A J, Winter S, Metzger M J. Making sense of credibility in complex information environments: the role of message sidedness, information source, and thinking styles in credibility evaluation online. *Information, Communication & Society*, 2020, 23(7): 1038-1056.
- [14] Chossudovsky M. The 2020 worldwide corona crisis: Destroying civil society, engineered economic depression, global coup d'état, and the "Great Reset". 2021.
- [15] Banerjee D, Meena K S. RETRACTED: COVID-19 as an "Infodemic" in Public Health: Critical Role of the Social Media. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 2021, 9: 610623.
- [16] Montesi M. Understanding fake news during the Covid-19 health crisis from the perspective of information behaviour: The case of Spain. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 2021, 53(3): 454-465.
- [17] Cavaliere P. From journalistic ethics to fact-checking practices: defining the standards of content governance in the fight against disinformation. *Journal of media law*, 2020, 12(2): 133-165.
- [18] Hartley K, Vu M K. Fighting fake news in the COVID-19 era: policy insights from an equilibrium model. *Policy sciences*, 2020, 53(4): 735-758.
- [19] Higdon N. *The anatomy of fake news: A critical news literacy education*. University of California Press, 2020.
- [20] Giansiracusa N. *How algorithms create and prevent fake news* (pp. 17-39). Berkeley, CA: Apress, 2021.
- [21] Cho J, Ahmed S, Hilbert M, et al. Do search algorithms endanger democracy? An experimental investigation of algorithm effects on political polarization. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 2020, 64(2): 150-172.
- [22] De Keersmaecker J, Dunning D, Pennycook G, et al. Investigating the robustness of the illusory truth effect across individual differences in cognitive ability, need for cognitive closure, and cognitive style. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2020, 46(2): 204-215.
- [23] Schroeder D T. *Explaining News Spreading Phenomena in Social Networks: From Data Acquisition and Processing to Network Analysis and Modelling*. Technische Universitaet Berlin (Germany), 2022.
- [24] Bryanov K, Vziatysheva V. Determinants of individuals' belief in fake news: A scoping review determinants of belief in fake news. *PLoS one*, 2021, 16(6): e0253717.
- [25] Watts D J, Rothschild D M, Mobius M. Measuring the news and its impact on democracy. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2021, 118(15): e1912443118.

- [26] Jin Q, Raza S H, Yousaf M, et al. Ingraining polio vaccine acceptance through public service advertisements in the digital era: The moderating role of misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and religious fatalism. *Vaccines*, 2022, 10(10): 1733.
- [27] Apuke O D, Omar B. Social media affordances and information abundance: Enabling fake news sharing during the COVID-19 health crisis. *Health informatics journal*, 2021, 27(3): 14604582211021470.
- [28] Schuetz S W, Sykes T A, Venkatesh V. Combating COVID-19 fake news on social media through fact checking: antecedents and consequences. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 2021, 30(4): 376-388.
- [29] Rochefort A. Regulating social media platforms: A comparative policy analysis. *Communication Law and Policy*, 2020, 25(2): 225-260.
- [30] Moore R C, Hancock J T. A digital media literacy intervention for older adults improves resilience to fake news. *Scientific reports*, 2022, 12(1): 6008.
- [31] Datta P, Whitmore M, Nwankpa J K. A perfect storm: social media news, psychological biases, and AI. *Digital Threats: Research and Practice*, 2021, 2(2): 1-21.
- [32] Ackland R, Gwynn K. Truth and the dynamics of news diffusion on twitter. In *The psychology of fake news*. Routledge, 2020: 27-46.
- [33] Staender A, Humprecht E, Esser F, et al. Is sensationalist disinformation more effective? Three facilitating factors at the national, individual, and situational level. *Digital journalism*, 2022, 10(6): 976-996.
- [34] Kozyreva A, Lewandowsky S, Hertwig R. Citizens versus the internet: Confronting digital challenges with cognitive tools. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 2020, 21(3): 103-156.
- [35] Sui M, Hawkins I, Wang R. When falsehood wins? Varied effects of sensational elements on users' engagement with real and fake posts. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 2023, 142: 107654.
- [36] Tseng H T. Shaping path of trust: the role of information credibility, social support, information sharing and perceived privacy risk in social commerce. *Information Technology & People*, 2023, 36(2): 683-700.
- [37] Leong A D, Ho S S. Perceiving online public opinion: The impact of Facebook opinion cues, opinion climate congruency, and source credibility on speaking out. *New Media & Society*, 2021, 23(9): 2495-2515.

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS' OCCUPATIONAL TENDENCY AND COUNTERMEASURES--TAKING HUBEI INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AS AN EXAMPLE

Na Wang, ShaoHua Hu*

*School of Economics and Management, Hubei University of Science and Technology, Xianning 437000, Hubei, China.
Corresponding Author: ShaoHua Hu, Email: pilk1980@163.com*

Abstract: Improving the level of quality of university student employment work is the key to dealing with the current problems of university student employment. To this end, the use of Hollander occupational types tested 274 college students in Hubei Institute of Science and Technology, the results show that the number of college students in the six occupational types there is a big difference, and continue to analyse the occupational types of male and female college student groups therein found that the occupational adaptations of male and female college student groups in the type of difference also exists. Therefore, in order to improve the overall employment level and quality of college students, in addition to setting up a mechanism for testing career adaptation and using the results to guide the employment of college students in major occupational types with a larger proportion of students, including male and female college students in occupational types with a larger number of students in the male and female groups, and based on this, paying due attention to college students in non-major occupational types with a smaller number of students. By doing so, the goal of improving the overall quality of university students' employment is achieved.

Keywords: Hollander occupational assessment; Occupational adaptation types; College student employment; Countermeasure analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the epidemic, the global economy continues to grapple with significant challenges, with many domestic enterprises resorting to downsizing and layoffs in an effort to maintain viability. Concurrently, the annual increase in the number of college students entering the workforce has led to mounting employment pressures among graduates, underscoring the urgent need for effective employment strategies [1]. This issue has garnered considerable attention from both the national and political agendas. Consequently, there is a necessity to analyse the vocational tendency of college students based on their psychological attributes, to guide college students' employment according to their vocational tendency, and to enhance their vocational matching degree [2]. This can not only effectively alleviate the employment difficulties of graduated college students, but also contribute to the high-quality development of college students' employment.

Research into the employment of domestic college students has been conducted from three perspectives: subjective influencing factors, objective influencing factors and comprehensive influencing factors. On the subjective influencing factors, the herd mentality coupled with conservative employment concepts [3], weak awareness of self-legal protection [4], and lack of innovation are the psychological factors affecting the employment of college students [5]. Poor adaptability to uncertain situations [6], professional skills, communication, collaboration and career planning are the ability factors affecting the employment of college students [7]. The degree of adaptation between higher education and changes in industrial structure [8], the cultivation of students' awareness of legal protection of employment in colleges and universities [9]. The degree of construction of a big-data employment information service platform [10] is influenced by a combination of social factors, including the government and the market, the employment supply and demand control mechanism, and the implementation of relevant employment policies [11]. These factors play a crucial role in shaping the employment outcomes of college students.

Furthermore, a number of scholars posit that the employment of college students is the result of a combination of subjective and objective factors. These factors encompass not only human capital indicators, such as college students' academic level and ability quality, but also social capital indicators, such as the family's socio-economic status and the relationship between teachers and students [12]. However, the crux of the matter lies in the ability of college students to satisfy the occupational needs of the occupational quality. Consequently, the cultivation of college students' vocational quality should be approached from multiple perspectives, including those of family, college, and society.

In summary, the phenomenon of 'triple and triple light' has been identified in research on college students' employment at home and abroad. The study of various subjective influencing factors of college students' employment is given importance, but the study of college students' employment by integrating various subjective factors into psychological quality is neglected. The study attaches importance to the objective factors of college students' families, colleges and societies, but It is also important to note the emphasis on the study of college students' employment from the perspective of human and social capital, as well as the integration of psychological quality into the study of college

students' employment. However, the study does neglect the study of strengthening college students' occupational matching based on their occupational tendency. Therefore, it is of great significance to measure the occupational tendency of college students from the psychological quality perspective.

2 ANALYSIS OF TYPES OF OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION

2.1 Evaluation Tool's Selection

The Holland Career Orientation Assessment method assesses the subject's career interests and abilities[13]. The method under discussion classifies occupational inclinations into six types, following an analysis of the psychological qualities and abilities required for various types of occupations in society. Among them, there is the realistic type, which is considered suitable for careers in plant and animal management, machinery management, machinery repair, operation and handicrafts; the research type, which is considered suitable for careers in mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and design; the artistic type, which is considered suitable for careers in fine arts, sculpture, dance, theatre, painting and writing; and the social type. This type of personality is well-suited to careers in education, medical care, health care and social welfare. The sixth type is the corporate type, which is well-suited to careers in marketing. Corporate students are well-suited to careers in marketing, insurance and business administration, while regular students are well-suited to careers such as bank clerks, accountants, cashiers, statisticians and computer operators.

2.2 Analysis of Differences In Occupational Strength Ratios

Following a comprehensive assessment of the occupational inclinations of 274 university students, the number and proportion of each inclination were meticulously enumerated. The specific results are displayed in Table 1 below, arranged in descending order according to the number of students. The proportion of university students in each occupational orientation, in descending order, is as follows: corporate, artistic, social, research, realistic, and conventional.

Table 1 Proportion of Students with Vocational Adaptation Type

Occupational tendency	Conventional	Realistic	Research	Social	Artistic	Enterprise	Total
Students' number	14	18	24	36	70	112	274
Percentage ratio	5.11%	6.57%	8.76%	13.14%	25.55%	40.87%	100%

A clear discrepancy exists in the proportion of college students who accept the assessment in relation to their occupational tendency. The enterprise type exhibits the highest proportion, accounting for 40% of the total sample, and demonstrating an absolute advantage in six occupational tendencies. The remaining five occupational tendencies are comparatively minor, thereby substantiating the preceding hypothesis that college students exhibit divergent occupational tendencies due to variances in psychological quality, which in turn exerts a direct influence on the future employment outcomes of college students. This finding serves to substantiate the aforementioned hypothesis that college students exhibit disparate occupational tendencies due to variations in psychological quality, thereby exerting a direct influence on the employment quality of college students in their future careers.

The present study explores the relationship between gender and vocational adaptation in university students. Table 2 below illustrates the results of a survey of 109 male university students, who were asked to indicate their occupational adaptability using a scale ranging from realistic to entrepreneurial. The results indicate that male students most commonly identify as conventional, realistic, social, research, artistic and enterprise. The results of the study demonstrate that the entrepreneurial type is overwhelmingly dominant among boys, with a proportion exceeding half of the total number of boys. In second place, the artistic type exhibits a rapid decline to 16.51 per cent, followed by the research type at less than 12 per cent, the social and realistic type at less than 10 per cent, and finally, the general type at only 2.75 per cent. To summarize, there is a considerable amount of variability in the proportion of male college students across different occupational adaptation types. In relation to this situation, particular attention should be paid to the employment of university students of the entrepreneurial type, which is more numerous, and this should be addressed as a significant task.

Table 2 Proportion of Male Students with Vocational Adaptation Type

Occupational tendency	Conventional	Realistic	Social	Research	Artistic	Enterprise	Total
Male students' number	3	10	10	13	18	55	109
Percentage ratio	2.75%	9.17%	9.17%	11.93%	16.51%	50.46%	100.00%

A significant disparity exists in the types of career adaptations exhibited by college women. The proportion of female university students who adopt specific career adaptations, ranging from the least to the most prevalent, is delineated in Table 3. The categories encompass realistic, research, general, social, artistic, and entrepreneurial adaptations. The data reveal that, while the entrepreneurial adaptation exhibits the highest ratio of career adaptations for both sexes, the proportion of artistic and entrepreneurial adaptations among girls is minimal. Consequently, the predominant types of occupational adaptation for female students are enterprise and artistic, and the quality of employment for these two

groups has a significant impact on the overall quality of employment for girls. It is therefore recommended that the employment of enterprise-type and art-type girls should be prioritized in girls' employment initiatives.

Table 3 Proportion of Female Students with Vocational Adaptation Type

Occupational tendency	Realistic	Research	Conventional	Social	Artistic	Enterprise	Total
Female students' number	8	11	11	26	52	57	165
Percentage ratio	4.85%	6.67%	6.67%	15.76%	31.52%	34.55%	100.00%

In view of the analyses and comparisons of the differences in the types of occupational adaptation of university students presented above, it is evident that the occupational adaptation of male and female university students should be utilised as a basis for guiding the employment of university students. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge the differences in the occupational adaptability of university student groups, with particular attention given to the distinctions between male and female groups.

3 EMPLOYMENT COUNTERMEASURES FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

The analysis of differences in vocational tendencies enables the provision of employment guidance services for college students and the allocation of employment positions that match their skills and competencies. This approach not only provides a diverse range of professional and complex talents with modern science and technology and innovative thinking for the high-quality development of China's socialist modernization, but also helps to fully mobilize the positivity, initiative and creativity of college students in employment, thereby strengthening their enthusiasm for their work. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that this process also serves to mobilize the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of employed college students, thereby reinforcing their work enthusiasm. Consequently, the identification of different talents through vocational inclination assessment can be regarded as the human resource foundation for achieving high-quality development. The strategy of strengthening the country with talents can be effectively implemented in the following aspects.

3.1 Career Adaptation Assessment for University Students

The classification of career types according to employment positions is a matter of significant concern. In view of the general background of economic downturn after the epidemic, it is vital for colleges and universities around the world to study the occupational adaptability of jobs offered by social employers. By doing so, they can then classify the types of occupations according to the differences in occupational adaptability. This will lay a solid foundation for the employment of college students.

3.2 Career Matching for University Students Using Assessment Results

A quantitative study of the occupational adaptability of the main types of occupations was conducted in order to determine the types of occupations for college students. In the process of college students' employment, in addition to the requirement of matching occupation type and gender, it is also required that college students' occupational adaptability matches the job position. Quantitative research on the occupational adaptability of major occupational types can meet the requirements of enterprises and institutions in terms of occupational types and occupational adaptability, and improve the degree of occupational matching of college students.

3.3 Capturing the Main Types of Occupations of Employed Students

The concentration of employment endeavours on the types of occupations that are more prevalent. Initially, it is imperative to assess the occupational types of college students to ascertain the occupational types of employed college students and the number of college students of each type. Secondly, it is crucial to determine the predominant occupational types of employed college students from the ratio of the number of employed college students, thereby elucidating that the primary employment types of college students are the predominant employment types of the number of college students. In this case, it was found that 80% of students in the economics and management categories were employed in the business, art and social sciences sectors. The employment of these students is focused on addressing the fundamental contradiction in the employment of college students, and the study of their main occupational types is aimed at identifying solutions to the problem of mismatches in their current occupations.

3.4 Focus on the Main Types of Occupations for Different Gender Groups

The influence of gender will result in disparities between the primary categories of occupational adaptations exhibited by the male college population and the primary categories of occupations pursued by the female college population. In consideration of these disparities, enhancing the overall quality of work with students can be achieved through the implementation of distinct employment guidance and services for male and female students. This approach is expected to lead to an enhancement in the quality of work with students. Concurrently, the gender requirements of job offers should be aligned with the predominant types of occupations for male and female college students, thereby achieving a

dual objective: enhancing the employment satisfaction of college students of different genders and enabling enterprises to acquire higher-quality employees.

3.5 Appropriate Attention to Less Numerous Occupational Types

It is vital to consider the employment of students in both the major and non-major occupational groups. The former are more numerous, while the latter are less numerous, representing a small proportion of the total. In such cases, the realistic and conventional types are non-major occupational types, and the small number of economics and management students belonging to these two types must be treated individually. It should also be noted that these two types of students, due to their small numbers, are subject to relatively little employment pressure, and should be provided with jobs in the corresponding occupational types to guide them to successful employment.

4 RESULTS

The study of vocational inclination in college students is of significant value in both theoretical and practical terms. From a theoretical perspective, the study can effectively improve employment outcomes for college students. However, enhancing employment quality for college students also poses a series of demands for vocational inclination training, which can only be met through strengthened psychological quality training.

It is evident that occupational inclination functions as a conduit between psychological quality and high-quality employment, thereby facilitating the enhancement of the degree of employment congruence and the augmentation of the satisfaction and contentment of college students in their employment. In practice, a number of mature occupational inclination methods, represented by Hollander's occupational inclination assessment, have been able to accurately assess the occupational inclination of college students from multiple perspectives, and with the help of computers, mobile phones, apps, and other electronic and information products. The employment services provided to college students under the premise of honest assessment, including occupational matching, employment recommendation, and employment matching, can be delivered in a short period of time and to a large number of dispersed college students. The provision of high-quality employment services, including career matching, employment recommendation and job skills training, is made possible by the aforementioned premise of honest assessment. Furthermore, college students are effectively guided towards innovation and entrepreneurship, thereby serving the 'Three Rural Areas', which is of great practical significance.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

FUNDING

Key Project of Hubei University of Science and Technology: Research on the Concepts and Paths of Economics and Management Major Construction in Local Applied Universities under the Perspective of New Liberal Arts (2024XZ006).

REFERENCE

- [1] Wang W, Lai Y, Deng J, et al. Research on High-Quality Employment of College Students from the Perspective of Self-Marketing: A Case Study of Local Institutions in Guangdong. *Modern Economy*, 2024, 15(10): 1000-1025.
- [2] Li H, Dong G, Deng Y, et al. Discrepancy Between Employment Expectations and Realities Among College Students in the Post-Pandemic Era: Psychological Adaptation. *Curriculum Learning and Exploration*, 2024, 2(1).
- [3] Bin B. Research on the Psychological Barriers and Adjustment Countermeasures of College Students' Employment. 2022 International Conference on Educational Informationization and Artificial Intelligence, 2022.
- [4] O'Mally J, Antonelli K. The Effect of Career Mentoring on Employment Outcomes for College Students who Are Legally Blind. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 2016, 110(5): 295-307.
- [5] Xiang L, Ruihui P, Hong L. The impacts of innovation capability and social adaptability on undergraduates' employability: The role of self-efficacy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2022: 13954828-954828.
- [6] Du B, Li X, Liu S, et al. Strategies for Developing Pre-Employment Adaptability from a High-Quality Employment Perspective: An Analysis of College Students' Job Preparation Behaviors. *World Journal of Educational Research*, 2024, 11(3).
- [7] Xiaoyan L. Research on the Employment Ability of College Students Based on SCT Model. *Scientific and Social Research*, 2024, 6(11):153-157.
- [8] Wang Y. Research on the Matching Issue between Higher Education and Employment Demand[J]. *International Journal of New Developments in Education*, 2024, 6(5).
- [9] Zhang G. Effects of the implementation of the labor contract law on the employment of college graduates. *Proceedings of the 2013 International Conference on Advances in Social Science, Humanities, and Management*, 2013.

- [10] Ma Y, Qiao Y, Chen M, et al. How small is big enough? Big data-driven machine learning predictions for a full-scale wastewater treatment plant. *Water research*, 2024: 274123041.
- [11] Yaxuan X. Research on the Implementation Dilemma and Countermeasures of College Graduates' Employment Policy in the New Era. *Social Security and Administration Management*, 2024, 5(2).
- [12] Li H, Zhong F. Research on the Impact of Family Capital on College Students' Employment. *International Journal of New Developments in Education*, 2022, 4.0(9.0).
- [13] Z ZN, R LW, N AM, et al. The relationship of holland theory in career decision making: a systematic review of literature. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 2020, 7(9): 884-892.

COVID-19'S IMPACT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: EVIDENCE FROM ABIA STATE CIVIL SERVICE

Uduma Ulu Eke¹, Goodluck I. Nwaogwugwu^{2*}

¹*Department of Sociology, Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria.*

²*Department of Sociology, Coal City University, Enugu, Nigeria.*

Corresponding Author: Goodluck I. Nwaogwugwu, Email: goodluck.nwaogwugwu@ccu.edu.ng

Abstract: Public administration was among the several areas whose organizational effectiveness was severely impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic. With an emphasis on important topics including job productivity, budgetary restrictions, digital transformation, employee well-being, and government reaction tactics, this research investigates the effects of COVID-19 on the Abia State Civil Service. Data were gathered through focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) with civil workers from several ministries using a qualitative research methodology. Contingency Theory serves as the theoretical framework and aids in explaining the difficulties and organizational reactions seen throughout the crisis. According to the findings, the pandemic caused irregular application of remote work regulations, decreased work productivity, and delays in file processing and service delivery. Financially, budget cuts and salary delays for many federal personnel had an impact on productivity and general morale. Resistance to IT adoption, especially among senior workers, and technology shortcomings were exposed by the forced shift to digital operations. The study also emphasizes the psychological toll that job uncertainty and a lack of government assistance have on workers, as seen by elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout. Bureaucratic rigidity, poor crisis planning, and insufficient digital infrastructure hampered the overall response, even though certain ministries showed flexibility through digital solutions and hybrid work models.

Keywords: Financial limitations; Digital transformation; Employee well-being; Organizational performance; COVID-19

1 INTRODUCTION

Global economies and organizations faced an unprecedented challenge as a result of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. Governments imposed rigorous confinement measures, such as travel bans, lockdowns, and requirements for remote work, which profoundly changed organizational performance and workplace dynamics [1]. These interruptions did not spare public sector organizations, such as the civil service, which had to adjust to new operational paradigms while continuing to provide services. During the epidemic, the Abia State Civil Service in Nigeria faced tremendous difficulties maintaining administrative effectiveness and productivity.

Organizational performance is widely described as the capacity of an organization to fulfill its goals and objectives efficiently and effectively [2]. Performance metrics in the public sector often include service delivery, personnel productivity, financial sustainability, and overall institutional effectiveness [3]. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, caused to interruptions in these sectors because to reduced staff capacity, budget restrictions, and technology issues connected with distant operations [4]. In Abia State, the public service suffered delays in policy execution, lower income inflows, and problems in coordinating interdepartmental operations

Previous structural flaws in Nigeria's public sector, such as a lack of digital infrastructure, ineffective bureaucracy, and a lack of money, made the effect of COVID-19 on organizational performance worse [5]. While the economic slowdown brought on by the pandemic further taxed government resources, the shift to remote labor revealed deficiencies in digital literacy among governmental personnel [6]. To maintain continuity in public administration and governance, these issues necessitated strategic innovations and policy changes. With an emphasis on important organizational performance metrics including productivity, efficiency, financial sustainability, and employee engagement, this research aims to investigate how COVID-19 has affected the Abia State Civil Service's performance. The study will add to the larger conversation on crisis management and organizational resilience in the public sector by examining empirical data from the civil service. Additionally, it will offer policy suggestions for improving government institutions' flexibility and efficacy in the event of future crises

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Organizational Performance

The effectiveness and efficiency with which an organization accomplishes its goals is referred to as organizational performance. Financial performance, worker productivity, service delivery, and overall operational efficiency are frequently used to evaluate it (Richard et al., 2009). In the public sector, governance results, resource use, and service quality are frequently used to assess performance (Boyne, 2010). These performance indicators were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which called for the implementation of adaptive solutions for organizational resilience [8]

2.2 COVID-19's Impact on Organizations

Like all past world catastrophes, the COVID-19 epidemic affects every facet of existence, including corporate operations. Such occurrences produce shocks that impair corporate operations worldwide and, in the worst cases, result in company collapse [9]. Scholarly interest in determining the degree to which company performance has been influenced has grown as a result of business activity's impact on both national and international economies. To assist lessen the harmful consequences of this epidemic, all governments and academics should logically focus on developing appropriate and durable policy and strategic solutions. However, it is necessary to first assess the degree and different ways that business operations and performance have been impacted in order to establish such successful methods. Accordingly, researchers have discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant effect on supply chains, the performance of the hotel sector, and the stocks of listed SMEs, family businesses, and listed organizations [10] [11]. Despite the important contributions made by these studies, research's primary function is to identify and combine trends, circumstances, and impacts in company operations in order to support efficient policymaking and decision-making. [12] started this pattern discovery process by reviewing pertinent material in a methodical manner. Despite providing new insights on the COVID-19 business-related study clusters, [13], analysis hardly delivers comprehensive and useful information on the extent, linkages, and gaps in the literature.

However, workforce productivity, financial stability, and operational efficiency were all impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic's disruptions in a number of industries [14]. Organizations were compelled by the crisis to quickly adjust to new health and safety laws, remote labor, and digital transformation [15]. Civil services and other public sector organizations faced particular difficulties such lower budgetary allotments, inadequate technology, and ineffective bureaucracy [4].

The economic slowdown brought on by the pandemic, which resulted in a drop in government revenue and, as a result, budgetary restrictions for public institutions, is highlighted in a paper by [16]. Similarly, [17] stress that insufficient contingency planning and weak institutional frameworks made service delivery interruptions worse, particularly in emerging economies.

2.3 COVID-19 and the Nigerian Civil Service

The illness known as COVID-19 is sometimes called a coronavirus. In 2019, the disease is believed to have been caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). In 2019, it received its first formal recognition. Almost every element of human life has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most catastrophic worldwide health catastrophes in history [18], including the general public and public officials. The pandemic has had profound effects on the economy, politics, religion, and society in addition to posing a serious threat to public health [19]. The virus has had a significant effect on the performance of workers in Nigeria, who are in charge of providing citizens with necessary public services. In Nigeria, the public and government employees play a vital role in governance, and the efficient provision of public services depends on their performance. However, the COVID-19 epidemic has affected the workers service operations, causing to severe modifications in service delivery. In order to ensure adherence to social distancing measures intended to stop the virus's spread, the pandemic has forced the adoption of new work arrangements, including remote work.

However, poor digital infrastructure, insufficient training, and bureaucratic inertia caused the Nigerian civil service—including the Abia State Civil Service—to struggle with the shift to remote work [20]. Administrative efficiency significantly decreased, and many government personnel were ill-prepared for digital processes [21]. Budgetary restrictions also resulted in delays in the implementation of policies, projects, and wages [22]. Although some states used flexible work arrangements, such as digitalized procedures and rotating office timings, the overall effect on service delivery was detrimental [23]. The epidemic made clear how urgently the public sector has to change, especially in the areas of employee welfare, digital transformation, and crisis management techniques.

2.4 Strategies for Organizational Resilience and Adaptation

Organizations used a variety of adaptation and resilience techniques to lessen the pandemic's harmful consequences. These included personnel reorganization, budgetary changes, remote work policies, and digital transformation [18]. Countries who had already made investments in digital public services and e-governance were better prepared to handle the disruptions brought on by COVID-19 in the public sector [20]. Similar initiatives were undertaken by the Abia State Civil Service, but were thwarted by issues such inadequate internet connectivity, a lack of training, and a lack of financing [15]. In order to increase resilience against future crises, there is increasing agreement that public sector organizations need to make investments in workforce training, long-term technology solutions, and financial sustainability [24].

2.5 Summary and Research Gap

The impact of COVID-19 on organizational performance across various sectors has been extensively studied in the literature, but few empirical studies specifically focus on the Nigerian civil service, especially at the state level [19]. Most studies highlight the difficulties but do not offer thorough insights into the adaptive strategies that worked or

didn't work [22]. This study attempts to close this gap by analyzing the specific impact of COVID-19 on the Abia State Civil Service, evaluating the difficulties encountered, and determining the efficacy of response measures.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Contingency Theory

The efficiency of an organization is determined by its capacity to adjust to changing circumstances, according to the Contingency Theory, which was created by Lawrence and Lorsch in 1967. This approach is especially pertinent to the COVID-19 pandemic, which compelled public service organizations to modify their work procedures, management techniques, and strategies in order to continue operating effectively in the face of interruptions [21]. The epidemic made remote work, digital service delivery, and flexible workforce management necessary for the Abia State Civil Service. However, a number of variables, including policy flexibility, leadership decision-making, and technical preparedness, affected how successful these solutions were. According to earlier studies, companies with more adaptability and emergency preparation typically fare better during crises [25].

3.2 Methodology

This study utilizes a phenomenological research design, which is ideal for investigating the experiences of public servants during the COVID-19 epidemic. Understanding people's thoughts, emotions, and responses to important events is the main goal of phenomenology [26]. Civil servants employed by Abia State's numerous ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) are among the target population. Purposive sampling is used in the study to choose individuals who have firsthand knowledge of how COVID-19 affects job performance and policy implementation, as qualitative research does not need huge sample numbers. Fifteen senior and mid-level officers from certain ministries participated in semi-structured interviews. To promote interactive conversations about COVID-19's impact on work routines, employee morale, and government initiatives, three focus groups with five members each were organized. The theme analysis method developed by [27], as used to examine data from interviews and focus group discussions.

3.3 Results

Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were used in the study to learn more about the effects of COVID-19 on the Abia State Civil Service. Based on recurrent themes in participant replies, the data are grouped into major topics.

3.3.1 Effect on service delivery and work productivity

Participants talked about how work-from-home regulations, rotating shifts, and a lack of infrastructure severely disrupted work processes, delayed approvals, and generally made things inefficient.

File processing took a few days prior to COVID-19, but with remote work and rotational schedules, approvals that usually took one week now take up to a month, (A senior officer from the Ministry of Finance observed).

According to a junior employee of the Ministry of Education,

We lacked explicit policies regarding who was expected to report for duty and at what time. On occasion, when we arrived at the office, nobody was there to sign paperwork. Everywhere was lonely and quiet and you will wait and then go back home

A lot of participants complained about the unclear work regulations during the outbreak. Due to limited access to official papers and inadequate internet connectivity, some federal personnel said that working from home made them feel unproductive. Because there were fewer employees, participants from vital service ministries (including Health and Emergency Services) felt overworked, which resulted in inefficiency and burnout.

3.3.2 Challenges with finance and budget

Government funds were pressured by the epidemic, which resulted in project budget cuts, lower allowances, and delayed salaries. According to a participant:

COVID-19 disrupted government revenue sources, forcing the state to prioritize health expenses over civil service payments," said a director in the Office of the Head of Service. Salary delays of up to three months resulted from this. Due to financial reallocations, certain training sessions and seminars had to be canceled, which made it more difficult for us to improve our abilities.

All three focus group participants attested to erratic wage payments, which compelled some to take out personal loans. For example, a junior employee attested:

When their salaries were delayed, many junior employees turned to friends and family for financial support. Some participants said that it was challenging to frequently report to work since their transportation allowances had been reduced.

3.3.3 Digital transformation and technological difficulties

Due to limited training and inadequate IT infrastructure, many federal personnel were unprepared for the move, even though COVID-19 hastened the implementation of digital technology. ICT official at the Ministry of Health indicated; Prior to COVID-19, the majority of our systems were still paper-based, according to an. The abrupt switch to digital platforms revealed several flaws. Many workers lacked even the most basic computer abilities. Some even found it difficult to participate in virtual meetings or use emails. According to the participants, training was uneven even though

some ministries had implemented Zoom and Google Forms. Physical documentation was preferred by certain officers in older age groups, who opposed the development of digital technology. We had to use our own phones and mobile data for online meetings, which was costly and annoying, according to a junior officer.

3.3.4 Issues with employee mental health and well-being

Civil servants experienced severe psychological suffering as a result of COVID-19 because of job insecurity, health hazards, and financial strain. One employee of the health ministry revealed: "On certain days, I arrived at work feeling nervous since coworkers had tested positive for COVID-19, but we lacked the appropriate safety gear. During the epidemic, the government lacked a formal framework for providing mental health support to its employees. Some participants experienced elevated blood pressure as a result of their financial difficulties, and others reported feeling more stressed and anxious. Some participants stated that they thought about leaving their positions but were unable to find other work. Since the government didn't implement any official counseling or employee support programs, many felt abandoned.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Work Productivity and Service Provision

The sudden shift to remote work revealed serious organizational readiness deficiencies, as seen by the observed delays in document processing and decreased operational efficiency. Participants emphasized that major workflow interruptions were caused by unclear instructions and insufficient digital infrastructure. Contingency Theory, which emphasizes that organizational efficiency depends on the capacity to adjust to external influences, is consistent with these data [28]. The results also support earlier research showing that when public sector organizations are compelled to adapt to quickly changing circumstances, they frequently encounter bureaucratic inertia and limited flexibility [29]. These problems were made worse by ineffective communication channels, which led to a greater dependence on private messaging applications like WhatsApp. This highlighted the necessity of organized digital communication platforms in government organizations.

4.2 Budgetary Issues and Financial Restraints

The study's findings on financial difficulties, such as budget cuts and salary delays, are representative of larger economic pressures brought on by the epidemic. Significant salary payment delays were noted by many respondents, which had an impact on both individual financial security and general morale and productivity. The Resource-Based View (RBV), which holds that an organization's ability to successfully manage external shocks is hampered by a lack of internal resources, especially financial capital, is supported by these findings [30]. The fact that money was diverted to emergency medical care while crucial operational requirements were neglected indicates that strategic financial planning and income source diversification are crucial for maintaining public service performance in times of crisis.

4.3 Technical Gaps and Digital Transformation

The survey found that many federal personnel were unprepared to manage the shift, even though there was a faster push towards digitization. Effective remote work was severely impeded by top officials' reluctance to digital adoption, a lack of IT infrastructure, and poor training. Given that companies must modify their internal procedures and resources to satisfy external demands, this conclusion supports contingency theory [29]. Furthermore, the difficulties are consistent with previous research showing that ingrained bureaucratic procedures and a lack of technological investment frequently obstruct the public sector's digital transformation [24]. The necessity for a unified approach to modernize public administration is further highlighted by the disparate use of digital technologies within ministries.

4.4 Issues with Employee Mental Health and Well-Being

A crucial component of the study is the significant psychological suffering that federal officials endure, which is typified by elevated stress, worry, and even a decline in their health. Many employees were forced to rely on unofficial networks for coping since there were no professional mental health support services. Although these networks were sometimes helpful, they did not address the systemic nature of the pressures involved. Job uncertainty and a lack of support have been associated to worse employee morale and productivity, which is consistent with research on workplace mental health during the pandemic [1]. In addition to impairing individual performance, the lack of official procedures for employee wellbeing also presents long-term threats to the efficacy and stability of the organization.

4.5 Strategies for Government Reaction and Adaptation

The answers from various ministries vary, with some embracing digital solutions and hybrid work models more successfully than others. This illustrates the difficulties of uneven policy execution as well as the possibility for flexibility. Operational discrepancies resulted from the general absence of a cohesive strategy, even though certain departments were able to establish rotating work schedules and incomplete digital monitoring systems. This discrepancy supports Institutional Theory, which holds that during times of rapid transition, organizations frequently find it difficult

to get beyond structural and regulatory obstacles [29] [30]. According to the findings, strengthening organizational resilience in the face of upcoming crises requires proactive leadership and a well-coordinated policy framework.

4.6 Policy and Practice Implications

- The study's overall conclusions highlight a number of important implications:
Digital Infrastructure Investment: To enhance interdepartmental communication and enable seamless shifts to remote work, a strong, government-wide digital platform is necessary.
- Strategic Financial Planning: The negative consequences of economic downturns can be lessened by ensuring financial resilience through emergency savings and a variety of revenue sources.
- Improved Employee assistance: Establishing official programs for employee assistance and mental health is essential to preserving staff stability in times of crisis.
- The implementation of a unified policy would lessen operational discrepancies by creating a coordinated crisis response strategy that harmonizes digital transformation and hybrid work models across all ministries.

5 CONCLUSION

The Abia State Civil Service has been severely impacted by COVID-19, which has had an influence on government reaction plans, staff well-being, technology adaption, financial stability, and job productivity. The results of focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews show that uneven policy implementation, lack of readiness for remote work, and service delivery delays all substantially impacted organizational performance. Financial limits, such as budget reallocations and salary delays, also presented significant difficulties for public workers, while technological constraints and opposition to digital transformation revealed flaws in the architecture of the government.

Due to employment instability and a lack of formal support systems, the pandemic also made mental health problems worse, with many workers enduring stress, worry, and uncertainty. Some ministries battled with bureaucratic lethargy and inconsistent leadership, while others successfully responded through digital adoption and hybrid work models. Theoretically, contingency theory emphasizes how crucial organizational response flexibility is. Overall, the Abia State Civil Service showed considerable resilience, but its reaction to the pandemic was less successful due to a lack of digital infrastructure, integrated policies, and staff welfare initiatives.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions are put forth to increase the Abia State Civil Service's adaptability and effectiveness in upcoming emergencies:

- To improve government workers' capacity for productive remote work, invest in digital tools, software, and training initiatives.
- Create an emergency fund for public sector employees to avoid pay delays in times of economic downturn.
- Create well-organized regulations for remote work that include precise attendance guidelines, communication procedures, and systems for monitoring performance.
- Establish a system of mental health assistance for federal servants that includes wellness initiatives and counseling services.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bapuji H, de Bakker F G, Brown J A, et al. Business and society research in times of the corona crisis. *Business & Society*, 2020, 59(6): 1067-1078.
- [2] Boyne G A. Performance management in the public sector. *Public Money & Management*, 2010, 30(1): 19-26.
- [3] Richard P J, Devinney T M, Yip G S, et al. Measuring organizational performance: Towards methodological best practice. *Journal of Management*, 2009, 35(3): 718-804.
- [4] Barro R J, Ursúa J F, Weng J. The coronavirus and the great influenza pandemic: Lessons from the "Spanish Flu" for the coronavirus's potential effects on mortality and economic activity. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper No. 26866*. 2020.
- [5] Adeniran A, Sidiq B. The coronavirus pandemic and its impact on public institutions in Nigeria. *Brookings Institution Africa Growth Initiative*, 2020.
- [6] Ozili P K, Arun T. Spillover of COVID-19: Impact on the global economy. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2020.
- [7] Bai C, Quayson M, Sarkis J. COVID-19 pandemic digitization lessons for sustainable development of micro-and small enterprises. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 2021, 27: 1989-2001.
- [8] Amankwah-Amoah J, Khan Z, Wood G. COVID-19 and business failures: The paradoxes of experience, scale, and scope for theory and practice. *European Management Journal*, 2021, 39(2): 179-184.

- [9] Kaushal V, Srivastava S. Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: perspectives on challenges and learnings from India. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 2021, 92: 102707.
- [10] Ramelli S, Wagner AF. Feverish stock price reactions to COVID-19. *Review of Corporate Finance Studies*, 2020, 9(3): 622–655
- [11] Carracedo P, Puertas R, Marti L. Research lines on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on business. A text mining analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, 2021, 132(November 2020): 586–59.
- [12] Donthu N, Gustafsson A. Effects of COVID-19 on business and research. *Journal of Business Research*, 2020, 117: 284-289.
- [13] Dwivedi Y K, Hughes L, Coombs C, et al. Impact of COVID-19 on digital transformation in organizations: A framework for research and practice. *International Journal of Information Management*, 2020, 55: 102211.
- [14] Hua J, Shaw R. Corona Virus (COVID-19) “Infodemic” and Emerging Issues through a Data Lens: The Case of China. *International Journal of Environmental Resources in Public Health*, 2020, 17(2): 09-23.
- [15] Morens DM, Breman JG, Calisher CH, et al. The origin of COVID-19 and why it matters. *The American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 2020, 103(3): 955-959.
- [16] Olawale S, Okonkwo C. The impact of COVID-19 on civil service operations in Nigeria: A case study of Abia State. *African Public Administration Journal*, 2021, 7(1): 45-62.
- [17] Okoli C. Remote work challenges in Nigeria’s public sector: A study of the COVID-19 response. *Public Administration Review*, 2021, 81(5): 789-804.
- [18] Adebisi T D, Olawale S, Okonkwo C. Challenges of Nigerian public service during the COVID-19 pandemic. *African Journal of Public Administration*, 2021, 13(2): 78-95.
- [19] Akinwale A. Public sector resilience and crisis management: Lessons from Nigeria’s COVID-19 experience. *Public Sector Review*, 2021, 5(1): 34-50.
- [20] Van der Voet J, Steijn B. Crisis management and digitalization in public administration: Lessons from COVID-19. *Public Administration*, 2021, 99(4): 754-768.
- [21] Eze U. Digital transformation in Nigeria’s civil service: Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of African Governance*, 2021, 8(3): 56-72.
- [22] Boin A, Overdijk W, Kuipers S. Leadership in times of crisis: The case of COVID-19. *Governance*, 2021, 34(3): 495-511.
- [23] Ramelli S, Wagner AF. Feverish stock price reactions to COVID-19. *Review of Corporate Finance Studies*, 2020, 9(3): 622–655.
- [24] Donaldson L. *The contingency theory of organizations*. Sage, 2001.
- [25] Creswell J W, Poth C N. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications, 2018.
- [26] Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2006, 3(2): 77-101.
- [27] Barney J. Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 1991, 17(1): 99-120.
- [28] North D C. *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

THE LEADING ROLE OF GRASSROOTS PARTY ORGANIZATIONS IN IDEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL EDUCATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE BUSINESS SCHOOL OF JIANGXI APPLIED TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

Qing Xu*, Hui Wang

School of Business, Jiangxi Institute of Applied Science and Technology, Ganzhou 341000, Jiangxi, China.

Corresponding Author: Qing Xu, Email: 119464062@qq.com

Abstract: This research examines the educational leadership role of grassroots Communist Party organizations in students' ideological and political education through a case study of the Business School at Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology. Using a mixed-methods approach combining surveys, interviews, and document analysis, the study investigates organizational structures, operational mechanisms, educational practices, and implementation challenges. Findings reveal that these organizations have developed distinctive approaches to balance standardized political directives with local educational contexts, achieving notable success in developing innovative educational formats and curriculum integration in certain disciplines. However, challenges persist in resource capacity, integration effectiveness in technical disciplines, assessment methodology, and student engagement. The study contributes a contextually-sensitive understanding of ideological education in applied science institutions and proposes organizational optimization strategies, integration enhancement mechanisms, student participation frameworks, evaluation system refinements, and digital transformation pathways. This research enhances understanding of how political organizations exercise educational influence within professional education contexts and offers practical recommendations for strengthening their effectiveness.

Keywords: Grassroots Communist Party organizations; Ideological and political education; Educational leadership; Higher education; Curriculum integration; Organizational effectiveness; Applied science institutions

1 INTRODUCTION

The role of grassroots Communist Party organizations in China's higher education system represents a distinctive feature that shapes the ideological and political development of college students. This research examines how these organizations exert their leadership role in students' ideological and political education through a case study of the Business School at Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology. As Yu notes, the evolving higher education environment requires Party organizations to adapt their methods and enhance their effectiveness in providing political guidance, making this research particularly timely and relevant[1].

The theoretical foundation of this research draws upon several interrelated domains. Yang emphasizes the importance of Marxist precision thinking in college ideological education, arguing for data-driven approaches to achieve educational precision[2]. This provides a theoretical basis for understanding how grassroots Party organizations can effectively target their educational efforts. Chen and Shu articulate the theoretical logic of the mutual construction of student Party building and ideological education, proposing that these domains possess "homogeneous and isomorphic" attributes that allow for structural integration, though they also identify integration barriers that impede optimal coordination[3]. Jiang analyzes organizational strength in university-level Party organizations, highlighting how this capacity directly influences the effectiveness of student ideological education through political leadership and innovative organizational approaches[4]. The research group from Capital University of Physical Education has developed a framework identifying thought leadership and problem-oriented leadership as key elements of the political guidance system[5].

The existing literature reveals several key themes that inform this study. First, regarding the relationship between Party building and ideological education, Wang, Wu, and Pan explore how student Party building promotes high-quality development of ideological education by guiding direction, broadening channels, and strengthening effectiveness[6]. They identify challenges in integration and propose using Party building institutional construction to guide improvements in ideological education systems. Similarly, Wang analyzes the key role of grassroots Party organizations, identifying problems such as singular educational forms and suggesting innovative approaches to enhance organizational educational roles[7].

Second, innovative approaches to Party-led education constitute another significant strand in the literature. Liu explores the "Red Script Murder Mystery" as an innovative approach led by grassroots Party organizations, involving student Party branches collaborating with departments and faculty to create scenario-based educational experiences[8]. Cheng and Wang similarly discuss innovative practices in private universities, proposing ideological education as guidance to enhance leadership effectiveness, particularly through creative approaches supported by Marxism faculty[9].

Third, organizational effectiveness in educational functions represents a central theme. Wei analyzes political functions

of grassroots Party organizations, discussing challenges such as functionalization and lack of integration between Party building leadership and professional development[10]. Wang examines organizational infectivity in ideological education, analyzing mechanisms such as interpersonal attraction and imitative learning, and proposing strategies to enhance organizational attractiveness and cohesion[11].

Fourth, adaptation to contemporary contexts constitutes an important consideration. Wei, Hu, and Cao analyze enhancement paths for ideological education in the intelligent media era, based on extensive questionnaire research[12]. They identify issues such as entertainment tendencies among students online and propose approaches to enhance media literacy and understand network information's influence on political trust. Jin and Li elaborate on the importance of campus culture construction and the leading role of grassroots Party organizations in shaping spiritual, material, and behavioral dimensions of campus culture[13].

Additional perspectives are provided by Huang, who explores Party organizations' leading role in faculty ethics, offering insights applicable to student education contexts[14]. The literature on specialized educational approaches, including "Red Script Murder Mystery" (Liu[8]), demonstrates innovative methods for enhancing Party organizations' educational impact through creative engagement strategies.

Despite this extensive literature, several notable gaps remain. First, there is limited empirical research examining specific implementation practices and their effectiveness in applied science institutions. Second, the literature often treats grassroots Party organizations as homogeneous entities, with insufficient attention to contextual variations. Third, existing research frequently separates organizational aspects from educational outcomes without adequately examining connecting mechanisms.

This research addresses these gaps by examining: How do grassroots Party organizations at the Business School structure their educational functions within an applied science institution context? What mechanisms do these organizations employ to exercise their leadership role? What factors facilitate or constrain effectiveness? How can their educational leadership role be enhanced to better meet contemporary challenges?

Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology's Business School provides an appropriate context for this examination. As an applied science institution, it faces distinctive challenges in integrating ideological education with professionally-oriented curricula. The Business School's grassroots Party organizational structure includes both faculty and student Party branches, allowing for analysis of multiple organizational levels and their respective educational functions.

The subsequent sections will examine the methodology employed to investigate these questions, analyze organizational structures and operational mechanisms, evaluate educational leadership functions, identify implementation challenges, and develop recommendations for enhancing educational effectiveness. This research contributes to understanding how Party organizations can effectively fulfill their educational mission within the specific context of applied science education while adapting to contemporary challenges in higher education.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design and Approach

This investigation employs a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively examine the educational leadership functions of grassroots Party organizations. The multifaceted nature of these functions necessitates methodological diversity—statistical measurement to assess outcomes and interpretive approaches to understand processes. The study adopts a case study approach focusing on Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology's Business School, allowing for in-depth examination of organizational mechanisms in their natural context.

This methodological framework aligns with Wei, Hu, and Cao's student-centered perspective on ideological education effectiveness, which employed questionnaire research to capture student experiences[12]. Similarly, the research draws upon Wang's analytical approach to organizational mechanisms in ideological education, adapting these methodological insights to the specific context of grassroots Party organizations in an applied science institution[11].

2.2 Data Collection Methods

The research implements a triangulated data collection strategy combining surveys, interviews, and document analysis to ensure comprehensive coverage and cross-validation of findings.

Questionnaire surveys were distributed to 235 students (stratified across academic years and programs) and 42 faculty members within the Business School. The survey instruments measure perceived effectiveness of Party-led educational activities, engagement levels, and factors influencing educational receptivity. Survey design incorporated Yang's precision-oriented framework, developing measurement scales for organizational visibility, educational impact, and student responsiveness[2]. The surveys provide quantitative data on the reach and reception of Party-led educational initiatives across different student populations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 participants strategically selected to represent key stakeholder perspectives: Party committee members (4), Party branch secretaries (3), student Party members (5), non-Party student representatives (4), and administrative leaders (2). These interviews explored organizational processes, educational strategies, and perceived impacts, with particular attention to mechanisms connecting organizational activities to educational outcomes. The interview protocols incorporated insights from Chen and Shu's framework of mutual

construction between Party building and ideological education[3].

Document analysis examined organizational records including Party committee meeting minutes, work reports, educational activity plans, and assessment materials from 2022-2025. This analysis revealed formal structures, stated objectives, and evaluation criteria that shape educational practices. The document review methodology was informed by the research group from Capital University of Physical Education, adapting their approach to analyzing political leadership functions to the specific context of educational leadership in grassroots organizations[5].

2.3 Sampling Strategy

The sampling approach balanced representational breadth with analytical depth. For quantitative components, stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation across student populations, with stratification variables including academic year, program of study, Party membership status, and demographic characteristics. This approach captured variation in exposure to and reception of Party-led educational activities across different student segments.

For qualitative components, purposive sampling selected participants based on their organizational positions, experiences, and potential to provide insight into leadership processes. This selection prioritized information richness over statistical representativeness, focusing particularly on individuals positioned at the intersection of Party organizations and educational functions. The sampling approach for interviews was developed with reference to Wang, Wu, and Pan's methodology for examining Party building's contribution to ideological education development[6].

2.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The analytical process proceeded through sequential phases of quantitative and qualitative analysis, followed by integrated interpretation of findings.

Quantitative data underwent statistical analysis using SPSS software, including descriptive statistics, correlation analyses examining relationships between organizational variables and educational outcomes, and multiple regression analyses identifying key factors influencing perceived effectiveness of educational leadership functions. This analytical approach was adapted from Wei, Hu, and Cao's statistical methodology for examining ideological education effectiveness in contemporary contexts[12].

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis through multiple coding cycles, beginning with open coding to identify emergent themes, followed by axial coding to establish relationships between concepts, and concluding with selective coding to integrate findings into coherent frameworks. The coding framework incorporated theoretical categories derived from Jiang's analysis of organizational strength dimensions in university Party organizations and their influence on ideological education[4].

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred through an explanatory sequential process, with statistical patterns informing qualitative exploration and qualitative insights contextualizing quantitative results. This integrated analytical approach enabled comprehensive examination of both structural patterns and processual dynamics in the educational leadership functions of grassroots Party organizations.

2.5 Validity and Reliability Measures

Methodological rigor was ensured through multiple validity and reliability measures. Content validity was established through expert review of research instruments by both Party organization specialists and education researchers. Construct validity was enhanced through pilot testing and refinement of survey instruments and interview protocols. Ecological validity was maintained through contextual sensitivity in data collection and analysis, ensuring that research processes captured authentic organizational and educational dynamics.

Triangulation served as the primary validity enhancement strategy, operating across methodological, data source, and analytical dimensions. Reliability was established through statistical reliability testing for quantitative instruments and inter-coder reliability procedures for qualitative analysis. Member checking with selected participants verified interpretive accuracy, particularly for complex organizational processes.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to stringent ethical standards throughout the investigation process. Institutional Review Board approval preceded data collection, ensuring compliance with formal ethical requirements. Informed consent was obtained from all participants through detailed information sheets and signed consent forms. Confidentiality protections included anonymization, secure data storage, and coding procedures that protected participant identities.

Particular sensitivity surrounded political dimensions of the research, with explicit protocols established for handling information about Party activities and perspectives. The research navigated the balance between analytical transparency and participant protection, prioritizing participant welfare while maintaining scholarly integrity. Cultural sensitivity in research design and implementation acknowledged the distinctive contexts in which Party organizations operate, shaping question formulation, data collection approaches, and interpretive frameworks.

Through this methodological approach, the research aims to provide empirically grounded insights into how grassroots Party organizations exercise their educational leadership functions within the specific context of a Business School in an applied science university, contributing to both theoretical understanding and practical implementation of effective

Party-led ideological and political education[15].

3 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONAL MECHANISMS

3.1 Historical Development and Organizational Architecture

The grassroots Party organizations within the Business School of Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology have evolved through distinct developmental phases that reflect broader institutional transformations. Established initially in 2005 with the founding of the Business School, the Party organizational structure has progressively expanded and differentiated to accommodate growing student enrollments and diversifying academic programs. The current organizational architecture consists of a hierarchical structure with the Business School Party Committee at the apex, overseeing four faculty Party branches organized by disciplinary fields (Finance and Economics, Accounting, Marketing, and Management) and six student Party branches structured according to academic programs and cohorts.

This organizational configuration reflects the "dual leadership" model characteristic of Chinese higher education institutions, where Party organizations maintain parallel authority structures alongside administrative hierarchies. The Business School Party Committee, comprising seven members including the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Committee Members representing different domains, exercises leadership across organizational, ideological, and educational dimensions. This leadership extends through branch-level organizations to individual Party members, creating a nested structure that facilitates both top-down guidance and bottom-up information flow.

The historical evolution of this organizational structure reveals progressive refinement of coordination mechanisms between Party organizations and academic units. As Yu notes in her analysis of political leadership functions, effective linkage between Party structures and academic departments represents a critical factor in organizational effectiveness[1]. The Business School has developed formalized integration mechanisms, including dual appointments where academic department heads simultaneously serve as Party branch secretaries, joint planning processes for major educational initiatives, and regular coordination meetings between Party and administrative leadership teams.

3.2 Membership Composition and Dynamics

The membership composition of Party organizations within the Business School exhibits significant diversity across dimensions of academic background, professional roles, and demographic characteristics. Faculty Party branches include 68 faculty members, representing 62% of the total faculty cohort, with membership rates varying across disciplinary fields—highest in Management (72%) and lowest in Finance (53%). The faculty membership profile includes representation across academic ranks, though with higher proportions among senior faculty (74% of professors, 66% of associate professors) compared to junior ranks (48% of lecturers, 42% of teaching assistants).

Student Party organizations encompass 143 student members across undergraduate and graduate programs, representing approximately 8% of the total student population. The student membership exhibits distinctive patterns, with higher representation among graduate students (21% membership rate) compared to undergraduates (5.4%), and variation across academic programs, with highest membership in Management programs (12%) and lowest in Marketing (5%). Gender distribution among student Party members shows relative balance (53% female, 47% male), broadly reflecting the overall gender composition of the student population.

Membership recruitment and development processes follow standardized pathways established by higher-level Party organizations but adapted to the educational context. For faculty, recruitment emphasizes academic achievements alongside ideological commitment, while student recruitment follows progressive stages from activist identification through probationary membership to full membership status. The development of student Party members receives particular emphasis, reflecting Wang, Wu, and Pan's observation that student Party members serve as critical bridges between Party organizations and the broader student population in ideological education processes[6].

3.3 Operational Procedures and Governance

The operational mechanisms through which Party organizations exercise their educational leadership functions encompass formal decision-making processes, activity planning and implementation procedures, and assessment frameworks. The Business School Party Committee operates through regular meetings (biweekly for routine matters, quarterly for major planning), with a structured agenda system that prioritizes ideological work alongside organizational development. Branch-level organizations maintain similar meeting structures tailored to their specific contexts, with faculty branches typically meeting monthly and student branches biweekly during academic semesters[16].

Decision-making processes reflect both hierarchical authority structures and collegial deliberation practices. Major educational initiatives originate primarily from Committee-level decisions, informed by guidance from university-level Party organizations and adapted to Business School contexts. Implementation responsibility cascades through branch organizations to individual Party members, with branch secretaries serving as critical nodes in the communication and coordination network. This operational structure enables what Jiang identifies as the translation of organizational strength into educational influence, with clear authority lines supporting consistent implementation of educational directives[4].

Governance mechanisms include formal accountability systems, with branch secretaries reporting regularly to the Committee Secretary and Committee members holding portfolio responsibilities for specific educational domains.

Performance evaluation incorporates both quantitative metrics (activity frequency, participation rates) and qualitative assessments (educational impact, innovation in methods), though the research identified challenges in developing meaningful effectiveness measures beyond superficial activity counts—a limitation also noted in Wei's analysis of political function operationalization in university Party organizations[10].

3.4 Integration with Academic and Administrative Systems

The integration between Party organizations and academic structures represents a critical dimension of organizational effectiveness in educational leadership. The Business School has developed several integration mechanisms that facilitate coordination between Party-led ideological education and discipline-based professional education. These mechanisms include joint planning processes for curriculum development, where Party representatives participate in curriculum committees to identify opportunities for integrating ideological elements within professional courses; collaborative implementation of educational activities that bridge ideological and professional domains; and shared assessment frameworks that evaluate both professional competencies and ideological development.

These integration mechanisms align with Chen and Shu's concept of "homogeneous and isomorphic" attributes between Party building and ideological education, enabling structural connections that enhance educational effectiveness[3]. However, the research also identified persistent integration challenges, including competing priorities between disciplinary depth and ideological breadth, synchronization difficulties in planning cycles between academic and Party organizations, and cultural differences between academic and political organizational systems.

Administrative integration operates through both formal and informal channels. Formally, the overlapping membership between Party organizations and administrative units facilitates coordination, with many academic administrators simultaneously holding Party positions. Informally, regular communication channels have developed between Party and administrative leadership teams, enabling information sharing and collaborative problem-solving outside formal meeting structures. This administrative integration enables resource alignment for educational initiatives, with Party priorities influencing resource allocation decisions within the Business School's operational budget.

3.5 Resource Allocation and Management

The resource foundation for Party organizations' educational leadership functions encompasses human, financial, and infrastructural dimensions. Human resources include both dedicated Party workers (the Committee Secretary and two full-time staff members) and the distributed organizational capacity of Party members throughout the Business School. Financial resources derive primarily from institutional allocations for Party building activities (approximately 3% of the Business School's operational budget), supplemented by special project funding for major educational initiatives. Infrastructural resources include dedicated physical spaces for Party activities, digital platforms for organizational communication, and educational materials supporting ideological education.

Resource management follows a mixed centralized-distributed model, with the Committee maintaining centralized control over core resources while delegating operational resources to branch organizations based on activity plans and performance evaluations. This resource management approach enables strategic prioritization of educational functions while maintaining responsiveness to branch-level needs and opportunities. However, the research identified resource limitations as a significant constraint on educational innovation, particularly for technology-enhanced educational approaches that require substantial initial investment—a constraint also noted in Wei, Hu, and Cao's analysis of ideological education in the intelligent media era[12].

Through these organizational structures and operational mechanisms, grassroots Party organizations within the Business School establish the foundation for their educational leadership functions. The next section examines how these structural elements translate into specific educational practices and leadership approaches in ideological and political education.

4 ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS

4.1 Policy Implementation and Adaptation Strategies

The grassroots Party organizations within the Business School demonstrate a distinctive approach to policy implementation that balances fidelity to higher-level directives with adaptation to local educational contexts. This implementation process follows a four-stage pattern: interpretation of policy directives received from university-level Party organizations; contextualization of these directives within the Business School's specific educational environment; operational planning that translates broad directives into concrete activities; and implementation through branch-level organizations with accompanying assessment mechanisms.

The effectiveness of this implementation process varies across policy domains. The research identified stronger implementation effectiveness for organizational policies related to Party building activities, where clear procedural guidelines facilitate consistent application. By contrast, educational policies related to ideological content integration within professional curricula show more variable implementation, reflecting the challenges of translating abstract ideological directives into disciplinary contexts. As Wei notes in his analysis of political functions, this implementation gap often results from insufficient integration between political leadership and professional development domains[10].

Adaptation strategies demonstrate noteworthy innovation in translating standardized directives into educational

approaches relevant to business education contexts. These adaptations include contextualizing theoretical concepts within business case studies, developing discipline-specific applications of ideological principles, and creating educational pathways that connect abstract political concepts to concrete professional practices. These adaptive approaches align with Yang's precision-oriented framework, demonstrating how standardized content can be tailored to specific educational environments to enhance relevance and reception[2].

4.2 Educational Platform Development

Party organizations within the Business School have developed multiple educational platforms that serve as delivery channels for ideological and political education. These platforms encompass both traditional approaches and innovative mechanisms that leverage technological capabilities and student interests.

Traditional educational channels include regularly scheduled theoretical study sessions for both faculty and student Party members, political education courses integrated within formal curricula, themed educational activities marking significant political anniversaries or events, and lecture series featuring Party leaders or academic experts addressing ideological topics. These traditional platforms maintain consistent educational presence but show variable engagement levels across student populations, with higher voluntary participation among Party members and activists compared to the general student body.

Digital innovation in educational delivery represents a significant development area, aligning with Wei, Hu, and Cao's emphasis on adapting ideological education to the intelligent media environment[12]. The Business School's Party organizations have developed several digital platforms, including a WeChat public account for distributing ideological content, an online learning platform hosting interactive educational modules, and digital documentation systems tracking student participation in political education activities. These digital platforms extend educational reach beyond traditional face-to-face contexts and enable personalized learning pathways, though their effectiveness varies substantially across student segments, with higher engagement among technologically-oriented students.

Creative educational formats demonstrate particular innovation, exemplified by the "Red Script Murder Mystery" approach documented by Liu and implemented within the Business School beginning in 2023[8]. This format transforms historical and ideological content into interactive scenarios where students solve mysteries while engaging with political themes, combining entertainment value with educational objectives. Initial implementation involved three mystery scenarios focusing on revolutionary history, economic development principles, and ethical challenges in business contexts, with student participation rates substantially higher than traditional educational formats (68% versus 37% for lecture attendance).

4.3 Curriculum Integration Models

The integration of ideological and political elements within professional curricula represents a central educational strategy for Party organizations, implemented through multiple mechanisms that bridge political and disciplinary domains.

Explicit integration occurs through designated ideological components within professional courses, where faculty incorporate political concepts directly into course content. This explicit integration follows standardized guidelines developed by the Business School Party Committee in collaboration with academic departments, identifying key connection points between disciplinary content and ideological themes. Implementation effectiveness varies across disciplines, with stronger integration in management courses (particularly organizational behavior and business ethics) compared to technically-oriented courses in accounting and finance where conceptual connections prove more challenging.

Implicit value transmission strategies operate through subtler mechanisms, including faculty modeling of values in professional contexts, case studies that incorporate ethical and political dimensions alongside technical content, and experiential learning activities that connect professional practices to broader social responsibilities. These implicit approaches often demonstrate greater student receptivity compared to explicit ideological content, as they contextualize political concepts within professionally relevant frameworks that students perceive as directly connected to career development.

The research identified faculty engagement as a critical factor in curriculum integration effectiveness. Faculty members actively involved in Party organizations (particularly those holding branch leadership positions) demonstrate stronger implementation of integration guidelines compared to non-Party faculty. This pattern highlights the importance of faculty development in supporting curriculum integration, with faculty Party members serving as bridges between political and professional educational domains.

4.4 Party Member Cultivation and Development

The development of student Party members constitutes both an organizational objective and an educational strategy, as these students serve dual functions as recipients and transmitters of ideological education. The Business School implements a structured development pathway that progresses from identifying potential recruits among high-performing students through staged educational programming to full membership status.

Initial recruitment emphasizes academic performance alongside political activism, with faculty recommending candidates based on classroom performance and participation in educational activities. This initial stage aligns with

Wang, Wu, and Pan's[6] observation that effective Party building begins with identifying students who demonstrate both academic potential and ideological receptiveness. Candidate development involves progressive educational responsibilities, beginning with participation in basic theoretical study sessions and advancing to leadership roles in organizing educational activities for broader student populations.

Probationary membership represents an intensive development phase, with structured mentorship programs pairing student candidates with faculty Party members who provide both theoretical guidance and professional development support. This mentorship model demonstrates effective integration between political development and professional education, creating personalized learning pathways that connect ideological growth with academic and career advancement.

The research identified several effectiveness factors in member development processes, including integration of political education with career development opportunities, peer learning networks among student Party members across different academic programs, and progressive leadership responsibilities that provide practical application opportunities for theoretical learning. These factors align with Wang's analysis of organizational infectivity, demonstrating how peer influence and leadership modeling enhance educational effectiveness[11].

4.5 Empirical Case Studies

Three educational initiatives implemented by Business School Party organizations demonstrate distinctive approaches to exercising educational leadership functions, illustrating different integration mechanisms between Party building and ideological education.

The "Economic Theory and Practice" integration seminar series, initiated in 2023, exemplifies curriculum integration approaches. This faculty development program, led by Party branch secretaries from economics disciplines, trains faculty in integrating ideological elements within economics and finance courses. The program developed discipline-specific teaching cases connecting economic theories to policy applications and ethical frameworks, with participating faculty subsequently revising course materials to incorporate these integrated approaches. Assessment data indicates that courses revised through this program demonstrate higher student-reported relevance ratings (average 4.2/5 compared to 3.6/5 for standard courses) and stronger learning outcomes on both disciplinary knowledge and policy understanding dimensions.

The "Business Ethics Leadership Program," launched in 2022, illustrates student development approaches. This selective program, targeting high-potential undergraduate students, combines theoretical study of business ethics principles with practical implementation through community service projects addressing local economic development needs. Party members serve as project mentors, guiding student teams in applying ethical frameworks to real-world challenges. The program demonstrates effective bridging between ideological education and professional skill development, with participants reporting strengthened understanding of social responsibility concepts (89% reporting significant improvement) alongside enhanced leadership capabilities (94% reporting skill development).

The "Digital Citizenship Academy," implemented in 2024, represents educational innovation responding to the intelligent media environment. This online platform, developed by the student Party branch in collaboration with the information systems department, provides interactive modules addressing critical media literacy, digital ethics, and online political participation. The platform incorporates gamification elements to enhance engagement, with participation rates reaching 74% of undergraduate students during its first implementation year. Assessment data indicates improved understanding of digital citizenship concepts (average knowledge gain of 27% on pre/post assessments) and enhanced critical evaluation of online political information (61% demonstrating improved analytical skills).

These case studies illustrate different dimensions of Party organizations' educational leadership functions, demonstrating how organizational structures translate into specific educational practices that address contemporary challenges in ideological and political education within professional education contexts.

5 IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

5.1 Structural and Organizational Limitations

Despite the established organizational architecture, grassroots Party organizations within the Business School encounter structural limitations that constrain their educational leadership effectiveness. The research identified several key structural challenges that impact implementation quality and reach.

Resource capacity constraints represent a primary limitation, with Party organizations operating within relatively narrow resource parameters compared to academic departments. The Party Committee's operational budget (approximately 3% of the Business School's total budget) limits capacity for extensive educational programming, particularly for resource-intensive initiatives involving technological innovation or experiential learning approaches. As Wei notes in his analysis of political functions, this resource differential often creates implementation gaps between ambitious educational objectives and practical delivery capabilities[10].

Organizational fragmentation presents a second structural challenge, with disconnections sometimes emerging between Committee-level planning and branch-level implementation. The research identified communication barriers between hierarchical levels, with branch organizations occasionally receiving directives without sufficient contextual understanding or implementation guidance. This fragmentation aligns with Chen and Shu's observation regarding

systemic structural integration difficulties between Party building and ideological education, where organizational complexity creates coordination challenges[3].

Workload distribution imbalances constitute a third structural limitation, with disproportionate responsibilities falling on a limited subset of actively engaged Party members. The research found that approximately 30% of Party members contribute to 70% of educational activities, creating potential burnout risks for highly active members while leaving broader organizational capacity underutilized. This imbalance reflects what Wang identifies as challenges in organizational role fulfillment, where formal membership numbers exceed active participation levels[7].

5.2 Integration Barriers with Professional Education

The integration between ideological education and professional curricula represents a particularly challenging implementation domain, with several persistent barriers limiting integration effectiveness.

Disciplinary compatibility variations significantly impact integration success across different academic fields. The research identified stronger integration potential in disciplines with inherent socio-political dimensions (such as management and marketing) compared to technically-oriented fields (particularly accounting and quantitative finance). In these technical disciplines, faculty often struggle to identify meaningful connections between specialized methodological content and broader ideological concepts, leading to artificial or superficial integration attempts that students perceive as disconnected from core disciplinary content.

Faculty capacity gaps present additional integration challenges, with many disciplinary specialists lacking sufficient understanding of ideological concepts to effectively integrate them within professional teaching. While Party member faculty demonstrate higher integration capabilities, they constitute a minority within some disciplinary departments, limiting integration reach across the full curriculum. This capacity limitation aligns with findings from the research group at Capital University of Physical Education, which identified faculty development as a critical factor in enhancing political guidance functions within educational contexts[5].

Competing educational priorities create tensions between depth of disciplinary coverage and breadth of ideological education, particularly within professionally-oriented programs focused on employment outcomes. Faculty interviews revealed concerns about curriculum crowding, with ideological integration sometimes perceived as requiring trade-offs against technical content coverage. These tensions reflect broader challenges in balancing multiple educational objectives within constrained instructional timeframes, requiring careful prioritization and integration approaches that enhance rather than compete with disciplinary learning.

5.3 Assessment and Evaluation Challenges

The assessment of educational leadership effectiveness presents methodological and practical challenges that complicate evaluation of Party organizations' impact on student development.

Measurement complexity stems from the multidimensional nature of ideological and political education outcomes, which encompass knowledge components, value orientations, and behavioral dispositions. Current assessment practices within the Business School primarily emphasize quantitative activity metrics (participation rates, event frequencies) and satisfaction measures rather than substantive learning or developmental outcomes. This measurement approach aligns with Yang's critique of imprecision in ideological education assessment, where accessible metrics substitute for meaningful evaluation of educational impact[2].

Attribution difficulties compound assessment challenges, as students experience multiple influences on their ideological and political development beyond Party-led educational activities. Disentangling the specific contribution of Party organizations from other factors—including classroom instruction, peer influences, media consumption, and family backgrounds—presents significant methodological challenges. The research found that current evaluation approaches inadequately address these attribution questions, leading to potentially inflated claims regarding organizational impact on student development.

Temporal dimensions further complicate assessment, as significant aspects of ideological and political education involve long-term developmental processes that extend beyond measurement timeframes. While immediate learning can be assessed through knowledge tests, more profound value integration and behavioral disposition development involve extended timeframes that current assessment approaches rarely capture. This temporal challenge reflects Wei, Hu, and Cao's observation regarding the complex formation mechanisms of political trust among students, which involve multistage developmental processes difficult to capture through conventional assessment methods[12].

5.4 Student Engagement Variables

Student receptivity to Party-led educational initiatives varies substantially across student populations, with several key factors influencing engagement patterns.

Generational characteristics significantly impact reception of ideological education, with current students (predominantly born after 2000) demonstrating distinctive engagement preferences compared to previous cohorts. Survey data revealed stronger preference for interactive, experiential, and technology-enhanced educational formats (76% expressing preference) compared to traditional lecture-based approaches (24% preference). This generational pattern aligns with Liu's[8] analysis of innovative approaches like "Red Script Murder Mystery," which address contemporary students' engagement preferences through interactive educational formats.

Prior political socialization creates substantial variation in baseline knowledge and interest levels across the student population. Students from families with Party membership backgrounds or from regions with stronger political education traditions demonstrate higher initial engagement with Party-led educational activities. This variation necessitates differentiated approaches that accommodate diverse starting points, though current programming often employs standardized formats that inadequately address this heterogeneity.

Perceived relevance to professional development significantly influences student reception, with higher engagement for educational initiatives that explicitly connect ideological concepts to career preparation. Survey data indicated that 78% of students considered career relevance "important" or "very important" in their decision to participate in voluntary educational activities. This relevance factor aligns with Wang, Wu, and Pan's[6] findings regarding the importance of connecting ideological education to practical concerns relevant to students' future professional roles.

5.5 Contextual Factors Affecting Implementation

The specific institutional context of an applied science university creates distinctive challenges for implementing Party-led ideological education compared to comprehensive or research-intensive universities.

Professional orientation represents a defining contextual characteristic, with the Business School's educational mission primarily focused on developing practical business competencies for immediate employment contexts. This applied focus creates both opportunities for connecting ideological education to practical applications and challenges when abstract theoretical concepts appear disconnected from practical skills development. Faculty interviews revealed tension between professional training objectives and broader ideological education goals, requiring careful integration strategies that demonstrate relevance to professional contexts.

Institutional history and identity factors further shape implementation contexts. As a relatively young institution (established in 1999) with primarily regional recruitment and employment networks, Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology lacks the established political education traditions found in older, elite universities. This developmental context necessitates adaptations of standardized approaches to align with institutional identity and student characteristics, though national directives sometimes insufficiently accommodate these contextual variations.

Regional economic development priorities create additional contextual influences, as the institution's location in a developing region of Jiangxi Province shapes educational expectations toward immediate economic contribution. Local government and industry stakeholders emphasize practical skills development, sometimes viewing ideological education as secondary to employment preparation. Party organizations must navigate these contextual expectations while maintaining focus on ideological education objectives, requiring strategic framing that connects political understanding to regional development contributions.

These implementation challenges and constraints collectively shape the operational environment within which grassroots Party organizations exercise their educational leadership functions. Understanding these limiting factors provides essential context for developing realistic enhancement strategies that address specific barriers rather than proposing idealized solutions disconnected from practical implementation realities. The final section develops recommendations for strengthening organizational effectiveness within these contextual parameters.

6 IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of grassroots Party organizations' educational leadership functions within the Business School of Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology yields several significant theoretical contributions and practical recommendations for enhancing organizational effectiveness. These findings contribute to broader understanding of how political organizations exercise educational influence within professional higher education contexts, with implications that extend beyond the specific case study to similar institutional environments.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research extends existing theoretical frameworks for understanding Party organizations' educational functions through several conceptual refinements. First, it develops an integrated model of organizational influence that bridges structural and processual dimensions, demonstrating how formal organizational arrangements translate into educational practices through intermediary mechanisms including leadership behaviors, resource allocations, and communication channels. This integrated perspective advances beyond the structural focus prevalent in existing literature, such as Wei's analysis of organizational functions, by explicating the conversion processes that transform structural capacity into educational impact[10].

Second, the research contributes a contextually-sensitive understanding of ideological education effectiveness in applied science institutions. By identifying the distinctive challenges and opportunities within professionally-oriented educational environments, the study refines Chen and Shu's mutual construction framework to account for disciplinary variations in integration potential[3]. This refinement helps explain why integration succeeds more readily in some academic domains than others, providing a more nuanced understanding of how institutional contexts shape educational possibilities.

Third, the findings advance theoretical understanding of student reception factors in ideological education. By documenting how perceived professional relevance, generational characteristics, and prior political socialization jointly influence educational receptivity, the research extends Wei, Hu, and Cao's student-centered perspective to incorporate

multiple reception dimensions. This multifaceted reception model helps explain the variable effectiveness of different educational approaches across student populations, contributing to more sophisticated audience segmentation within ideological education theories[12].

6.2 Practical Recommendations

Organizational optimization strategies should address the structural limitations identified in the research. First, developing tiered membership engagement systems that differentiate participation expectations across member categories could address workload imbalances while maintaining broad organizational involvement. Second, implementing structured communication protocols between hierarchical levels—including regular cross-level consultation forums and standardized feedback mechanisms—would reduce organizational fragmentation and improve implementation alignment. Third, strategic resource concentration on high-impact educational initiatives rather than diffuse distribution across multiple activities would enhance capacity for depth-oriented programming despite overall resource constraints.

Integration enhancement mechanisms can strengthen connections between ideological education and professional curricula. Discipline-specific integration frameworks, developed collaboratively by Party organizations and academic departments, would provide tailored approaches that respect disciplinary characteristics rather than imposing standardized integration models. Faculty development programs focused specifically on integration capacities, prioritizing disciplines with identified integration challenges, would address faculty capability gaps limiting implementation. Cross-functional teaching teams combining ideological expertise with disciplinary knowledge could create collaborative implementation structures for complex integration initiatives beyond individual faculty capabilities. Student participation frameworks require refinement to address engagement challenges and reception variations. Segmented programming strategies that differentiate educational approaches based on student characteristics—including prior knowledge levels, academic programs, and career aspirations—would enhance relevance across diverse student populations. Progressive engagement pathways offering escalating involvement opportunities from casual participation to leadership roles would create developmental continuity currently lacking in episodic programming approaches. Explicit connection mechanisms linking ideological education to employment preparation—including industry partnerships highlighting political knowledge requirements in business environments—would strengthen perceived relevance among professionally-oriented students.

Evaluation system refinement represents a critical implementation priority for measuring educational impact beyond superficial metrics. Developing multidimensional assessment frameworks incorporating knowledge, attitudinal, and behavioral indicators would provide more comprehensive evaluation of educational outcomes. Implementing longitudinal tracking systems that follow student development across their educational trajectory would address the temporal limitations of current cross-sectional assessment approaches. Comparative assessment mechanisms examining differential educational impacts across student segments and program types would generate more nuanced understanding of effectiveness factors currently obscured by aggregated evaluation.

Digital transformation pathways offer significant potential for extending educational reach and enhancing engagement. Building upon the initial success of digital platforms like the "Digital Citizenship Academy," Party organizations should develop comprehensive digital strategies integrating online and offline educational components into coherent learning experiences. Interactive content formats incorporating gamification elements would address generational engagement preferences while maintaining substantive educational content. Personalized learning pathways utilizing digital platforms to tailor content to individual student characteristics would enhance both relevance perception and learning effectiveness across diverse student populations.

6.3 Conclusion

Grassroots Party organizations within the Business School of Jiangxi University of Applied Science and Technology demonstrate distinctive approaches to exercising educational leadership functions that balance standardized political directives with adaptation to local educational contexts. These organizations have developed organizational structures and operational mechanisms that enable implementation of ideological and political education through multiple channels, though with variable effectiveness across different student populations and educational domains.

The research identified significant achievements in organizational development, educational innovation, and curriculum integration, particularly in disciplines with natural connections to political and societal dimensions. Innovative approaches like the "Red Script Murder Mystery" format demonstrate creative adaptation to contemporary student engagement preferences while maintaining substantive educational content. Integration initiatives like the "Economic Theory and Practice" seminar series show promising approaches to connecting disciplinary content with ideological frameworks in mutually reinforcing educational approaches.

However, persistent challenges remain in resource capacity, integration effectiveness across highly technical disciplines, assessment methodology, and student engagement among non-politically oriented students. These limitations reflect both contextual constraints specific to applied science institutions and broader challenges in ideological education within contemporary higher education environments. The recommendations developed from this research provide a roadmap for addressing these challenges through targeted organizational, educational, and technological strategies that build upon existing strengths while addressing identified limitations.

This case study contributes to broader understanding of how political organizations exercise educational influence within professional education contexts, illuminating both the possibilities and constraints inherent in Party-led approaches to ideological and political education. The findings suggest that effective educational leadership requires careful balancing of political objectives with educational methodologies, organizational capacity with implementation ambitions, and standardized directives with contextual adaptations.

Future research should extend this investigation through comparative studies across different institutional types, longitudinal examination of educational impacts beyond immediate learning outcomes, and deeper exploration of integration models within highly technical disciplines. Such expanded research would further enrich understanding of how grassroots Party organizations can most effectively fulfill their educational leadership functions within the evolving landscape of Chinese higher education.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] G Yu. New situation under the college basic-level party organization political leadership role research. *Contemporary Education Practice and Teaching Research*, 2017(07): 242–243.
- [2] J Yang. Precision of ideological and political education for college students. Heilongjiang University Press, 2015.
- [3] J Chen, H Shu. Research on mutual construction of student party building and ideological and political education in universities. *School Party Building and Ideological Education*, 2025(04): 28–30.
- [4] L Jiang. The influence of organizational strength of grass-roots party organizations in colleges and universities on ideological and political education of students. *China Military to Civilian*, 2023(8): 166–168.
- [5] Capital University of Physical Education Research Group on "Strengthening the Political Leadership of Grass-roots Party Organizations in Colleges and Universities". Research on strengthening the political leadership of grass-roots party organizations in colleges and universities. *Beijing Education*, 2017(07–08): 82–85.
- [6] Y Wang, L Wu, G Pan. Analysis of how student party building in colleges and universities helps the high-quality development of college students' ideological and political education. *Journal of Hubei Open Vocational College*, 2024, 37(22): 130–132.
- [7] Y Wang. Research on innovation of ideological and political education of student grass-roots party organizations in colleges and universities, *Industry and Technology Forum*, 2019(13): 287–288.
- [8] Y Liu. "Red script murder mystery": Innovation and application of college students' ideological and political education carried out by grass-roots party organizations in the new era. *University*, 2023(24): 14–17.
- [9] Y Cheng, X Wang. Research on the innovation of ideological and political education practice in private colleges and universities in the new era. *Decision Exploration*, 2021(09): 27–28.
- [10] Y Wei. Research on the political leadership role of grass-roots party organizations in colleges and universities in the new era. *Modern Communication*, 2021(05): 175–177.
- [11] Z Wang. The connotation, generation mechanism and promotion strategy of organizational infectivity in college students' ideological and political education. *Journal of Northeast Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, 2024(05): 134–141.
- [12] Z Wei, Y Hu, Y Cao. Research on the path to improve the effectiveness of ideological and political education in colleges and universities in the intelligent media era – from a student-centered perspective. *Modern Business, Trade and Industry*, 2025(03): 46–49.
- [13] Y Jin, X Li. The leading role and realization path of grass-roots party organizations in campus culture construction in colleges and universities. *Journal of Party and Government Cadres*, 2017(6): 39–42.
- [14] B Huang. The leading role of grass-roots party organizations in colleges and universities in the work of teachers' ethics and style. *Political Work Garden*, 2023(5): 135–137.
- [15] M Zavala, N Henning. The Role of Political Education in the Formation of Teachers as Community Organizers: Lessons From a Grassroots Activist Organization. *Urban Education*, 2021, 56(7): 1123–1148.
- [16] A Kezar, J Lester. Internationalising Student Learning at the Meso Level: The Impact of Grassroots Leadership in a University in Central Europe. *European Political Science*, 2024.

BEYOND SOCIOPATHY: UNDERSTANDING EVIL THROUGH THE LENS OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Ya Ma

Keystone Academy, Beijing 101318, China.

Corresponding Email: ya.ma@student.keystoneacademy.cn

Abstract: The exploration of evil in literature has long been a captivating subject, and few works engage with this theme more profoundly than Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. By focusing on Shylock, the Jewish moneylender, Shakespeare provides a multifaceted portrayal of evil that transcends traditional notions of villainy. In this essay, I analyze Shylock's character to reveal how his actions stem from deep emotional turmoil and a lack of introspection, demonstrating that evil, as Shakespeare presents it, is not a fixed trait but rather an outcome of personal choices and circumstances. The play invites us to consider that human beings are not solely defined by their actions or perceived moral shortcomings, but by the complex interplay of their emotions, environment, and social pressures. This analysis underscores the significance of mercy and goodness as forces that ultimately triumph over evil, inviting a reconsideration of what constitutes true villainy in the human experience. Through Shylock's complex psychological profile, Shakespeare explores the fragility of human identity and the consequences of moral rigidity in a world that demands adaptability. The play ultimately encourages readers to reflect on how societal structures and personal choices shape our understanding of morality, and how the human capacity for change offers hope for redemption, even for the most flawed individuals.

Keywords: Evil; Villainy; Shakespeare; Emotional turmoil; Mercy

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Shakespeare's Exploration of Evil

In literary traditions, evil is often depicted as a force embodied by villains who seem to lack the capacity for introspection or change. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* complicates this traditional view by presenting evil as something shaped by choices, not an intrinsic trait. Through Shylock's character, Shakespeare challenges the conventional portrayal of villainy, exploring how personal grievances, emotional pain, and the refusal to change can contribute to the formation of evil. Shylock is presented as a deeply human figure, one whose actions are informed by years of mistreatment and exclusion from the larger Venetian society. This nuanced portrayal suggests that evil can arise from the human condition itself, rather than being a permanent flaw. In contrast to conventional villains who act out of pure malice, Shylock's journey reveals that evil can sometimes be a rational response to years of mistreatment. By portraying Shylock as a product of his environment, Shakespeare's play challenges the audience to reconsider whether Shylock's actions are entirely evil or a consequence of systemic injustice. His bitterness and desire for revenge can be seen not merely as villainy but as a reflection of the emotional scars he carries as a marginalized individual. Furthermore, Shylock's desire for retribution serves as a critique of a society that systematically oppresses him, raising important questions about the role of social and economic forces in shaping one's moral choices. Through this lens, Shakespeare portrays evil as a mutable trait shaped by external forces and internal struggles, which urges the audience to reconsider how they perceive human morality and villainy in the world today [1, 3].

1.2 Purpose of the Analysis

This essay will examine Shylock's character to show how his evil actions stem not from pure malice, but from emotional injury and a failure to introspect. It will argue that Shylock's inability to embrace mercy, despite being fully aware of the consequences of his actions, ultimately leads to his downfall. In doing so, Shakespeare presents a more complex view of evil, suggesting that goodness and mercy, not vengeance, are the ultimate forces that define human identity. The analysis will explore how Shylock's personal grievances—both emotional and societal—contribute to his transformation from a victim of prejudice to a figure who embodies the very vengeance he seeks. This transition from victimhood to villainy provides valuable insight into how personal suffering, when left unchecked by compassion or understanding, can fuel destructive desires for retribution. The essay will also explore the interplay between victimhood and villainy, highlighting how Shylock's complex emotional state pushes him toward a destructive path. By analyzing his character within the context of Shakespeare's exploration of mercy and justice, we will uncover how personal suffering can morph into moral blindness and, eventually, evil actions. Additionally, this study will explore the possibility that mercy—the very trait that Shylock refuses to embrace—is the key to resolving the tragic tensions of the play and restoring moral clarity to a society dominated by rigid laws and unforgiving judgments [1, 4].

2 THE COMPLEX NATURE OF SHYLOCK'S EVIL

2.1 Shylock's Emotional Turmoil and Personal Grievances

Shylock is not a simple villain; his desire for revenge is rooted in deep personal injuries. The emotional betrayal by his daughter, Jessica, who runs away and converts to Christianity, is a significant blow to his sense of identity. When Shylock exclaims, "This man is sticking a dagger in me," it reveals his emotional vulnerability and the profound impact of his daughter's betrayal. This reaction shows that Shylock is capable of feeling pain and empathy, complicating the idea of him being a heartless sociopath. His grief is compounded by the societal rejection he faces due to his Jewish identity, which isolates him and fuels his anger. Shakespeare uses Shylock's emotional conflict to illustrate how individuals subjected to societal oppression may react with bitterness and resentment, which over time can evolve into a desire for revenge and a loss of moral clarity. The experience of being marginalized by both the Christian society around him and the disloyalty of his own flesh and blood leads Shylock to become more consumed by vengeance than empathy. His personal grievances, particularly the societal injustice he faces as a Jew in a predominantly Christian society, fuel his sense of injustice, making his pursuit of revenge seem, from his perspective, justified. Shakespeare thus paints Shylock not as inherently evil, but as a tragic figure whose personal suffering distorts his moral compass. This emotional turmoil is not just a product of personal pain, but also a reaction to the larger social and religious pressures that define Shylock's position as an outsider in Venice. Through Shylock's emotional trajectory, Shakespeare critiques a society that forces individuals into positions of moral rigidity, where revenge is the only perceived form of justice available[5, 7].

2.2 Shylock's Capacity for Self-Awareness

Although Shylock's actions are cruel, he demonstrates an awareness of his emotions and the consequences of his decisions. For instance, when he chooses to pursue the pound of flesh, he is not driven by blind malice, but by a sense of justice and a desire to restore his dignity. His actions, although extreme, reflect a logical pursuit of what he believes is rightfully his. This complexity challenges the traditional view of villains as one-dimensional characters motivated solely by evil. Shylock's awareness that his quest for revenge could lead to his downfall shows that he is not entirely blinded by hatred. He is aware of the gravity of his actions and the risks they entail, but he is so consumed by his pride and his need for validation that he refuses to change course. His refusal to accept mercy, however, reveals a tragic flaw—his pride and obsession with honor prevent him from seeing the possibility of redemption. His awareness also highlights the power of introspection: while Shylock is aware of his emotions, he is unable to engage in meaningful self-reflection that would allow him to see past his bitterness and grief. Shakespeare uses this self-awareness to contrast Shylock's inability to evolve with the transformative power of mercy, which can only be embraced through introspection and a willingness to forgive. While Shylock understands the consequences of his actions, his internal conflict and emotional paralysis prevent him from taking the steps necessary to heal and reconcile[8-9].

2.3 Shylock's Motivations and the Role of Justice

Shylock's desire for revenge against Antonio is not merely fueled by hate, but by a sense of justice. Antonio's wrongdoings towards him, including lending money without interest, are the basis for Shylock's animosity. His insistence on the pound of flesh is a way to restore balance and right the wrongs he perceives. Shakespeare uses Shylock's character to explore the idea that revenge is sometimes seen as a form of justice, which complicates our understanding of evil. In Shylock's eyes, he is simply seeking reparation for the wrongs committed against him. The play highlights the tension between personal justice and the broader societal idea of justice, suggesting that an individual's sense of justice can be distorted when they are driven by personal wounds and unhealed trauma. This confusion between personal and societal justice mirrors broader philosophical debates about retribution, fairness, and the need for emotional closure, particularly when the law does not provide for personal grievances. Shylock's pursuit of the pound of flesh is his attempt to reclaim agency in a world that has treated him as inferior. Shakespeare uses Shylock's character to ask whether seeking justice can sometimes be an excuse for moral excess. The play ultimately critiques the role of legalistic frameworks in reinforcing personal vendettas, arguing that true justice must be more than retribution—it must involve understanding, compassion, and the willingness to forgive[2, 6].

3 SHYLOCK'S SELF-AWARENESS AND ITS TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

3.1 Shylock's Awareness of His Actions

Shylock is aware of the consequences of his actions, but instead of seeking redemption, he embraces the opportunity to exact vengeance. When he is offered mercy, he declines, saying, "The pound of flesh, which I demand of him, is dearly bought; it's mine and I will have it." His decision to pursue revenge, even when given the chance to show mercy, reflects his refusal to introspect and embrace the possibility of change. This refusal stems from a combination of personal pride and an inability to forgive the past, even when forgiveness offers a path to healing. His awareness of the potential consequences of his actions, including the loss of his wealth and status, makes his decision even more tragic, as it reveals his stubbornness and emotional rigidity. Shakespeare uses Shylock's self-awareness to underscore the tragic inevitability of his downfall: while he is aware of the stakes, his inability to choose a different course of action shows the destructive power of a fixed mindset. His inability to embrace mercy highlights the destructive consequences of

vengeance, which can blind even the most intelligent individuals to the possibility of change and reconciliation. By refusing to reconsider his stance, Shylock unwittingly becomes his own worst enemy, sealing his fate[4-5].

3.2 The Tragic Flaw: Stubbornness and Refusal to Change

Shylock's greatest flaw is his refusal to forgive or change his course of action. His inability to consider the perspectives of others, especially when Portia offers him mercy, leads to his downfall. By choosing to cling to the letter of the law and his personal vendetta, Shylock ultimately isolates himself from the possibility of redemption. This stubbornness serves as a powerful illustration of how personal trauma can lock individuals into a cycle of revenge, making it nearly impossible to break free. In this way, Shylock's refusal to adapt to the circumstances and consider mercy as a solution becomes a representation of the dangers of inflexibility in both individual lives and in society. Shakespeare uses Shylock's unyielding stance to reflect the danger of being consumed by past wrongs and unresolved grievances. This flaw is not just an individual failing, but also a commentary on how larger societal pressures—such as racial and religious discrimination—can prevent individuals from healing, perpetuating cycles of hate and vengeance. Shylock's downfall, in this sense, is not merely a personal tragedy, but also an indictment of a society that values legalistic retribution over human empathy and forgiveness. By placing Shylock in such a rigid moral framework, Shakespeare shows that without the flexibility to adapt, even well-meaning individuals can become trapped by their own beliefs and ultimately destroy themselves in the process[7, 9].

3.3 Shylock's Self-Deprecating Identity

In the courtroom, Shylock adopts an animalistic identity, declaring, "Since I'm a dog, beware my fangs." This self-deprecation reflects his internal conflict and inability to rise above his victimhood. His decision to embrace an identity defined by hatred and vengeance prevents him from seeing the potential for personal growth and redemption. This tragic flaw underscores the idea that evil, when tied to personal identity and grievances, can become self-perpetuating. Shylock's inability to see himself as anything other than a victim leads to his self-destructive behavior, reinforcing the notion that personal identity can significantly shape an individual's choices and actions. His self-perception as a wronged party is so deeply ingrained that he defines himself by his pain and resentment, ultimately giving these feelings a power that overrides any possibility of forgiveness. Shakespeare's portrayal of Shylock's internal battle highlights how the choices we make about our identity can either limit or liberate us. By choosing to define himself through hatred, Shylock locks himself in a cycle of vengeance that ultimately destroys him. The play also raises the question of how society shapes an individual's sense of self. Shylock's identity as a Jew, an outsider, and a victim of systemic prejudice fuels his actions, suggesting that while personal agency is important, societal pressures also play a significant role in shaping how individuals view themselves and others. This interaction between personal identity and societal labels creates a powerful commentary on how deeply ingrained societal structures can influence individual behavior and morality[6, 8].

4 MERCY AND GOODNESS: THE OVERARCHING FORCES IN THE PLAY

4.1 The Power of Mercy Over Revenge

Shakespeare contrasts Shylock's evil with the power of mercy, which is depicted as a higher moral force. In the courtroom scene, Portia's famous speech on mercy compares it to "gentle raindrops" that fall softly on the earth, symbolizing its natural, uncontrollable, and life-giving qualities. Unlike Shylock's rigid pursuit of vengeance, mercy is shown to be a force that transcends anger and retribution, offering healing rather than destruction. Mercy is portrayed as a divine quality that brings about spiritual growth and reconciliation, making it a more powerful and transformative force than revenge. The speech emphasizes how mercy is not just a passive act of forgiveness, but an active force that transcends human limitations. Through mercy, Shakespeare suggests that one can rise above the constraints of law and social norms to achieve a higher form of justice, rooted in compassion and empathy. In contrast to the cold logic of the law, mercy allows for flexibility, understanding, and the chance for emotional healing. Portia's speech becomes a turning point in the play, not only because of its moral implications, but also because it challenges the audience to consider the deeper values that should guide human interactions—values such as empathy, understanding, and kindness. By emphasizing the supremacy of mercy over revenge, Shakespeare advocates for a form of justice that is restorative rather than punitive, and ultimately more powerful in healing the wounds inflicted by wrongs[7-8].

4.2 Mercy as a Transformative Force

Portia's plea for mercy is not just a call for forgiveness, but a recognition of the transformative power of goodness. Shakespeare suggests that mercy is a force capable of changing the course of events and offering redemption, not just to the victim, but also to the wrongdoer. By allowing mercy to triumph, Shakespeare illustrates that the true power lies in the ability to forgive and move beyond the cycle of vengeance. Mercy is portrayed as a tool for personal growth, showing that through forgiveness, individuals can overcome their flaws and become better versions of themselves. The transformative nature of mercy is shown not only in how it impacts the lives of others, but also in how it reshapes the person who offers it. Through mercy, Shakespeare portrays the possibility of moral elevation and personal

transcendence. Mercy, therefore, becomes more than an act of kindness—it is a transformative process that allows both the wronged and the wrongdoer to find redemption. Shakespeare's portrayal of mercy as a transformative force suggests that it is not simply an act of charity, but a powerful tool for moral and emotional growth. By choosing mercy over revenge, characters like Portia and even Antonio demonstrate the potential for positive change and moral clarity, offering hope to those who might otherwise be consumed by bitterness and rage[6, 9].

4.3 Shylock's Forced Conversion and Potential for Redemption

At the end of the play, Shylock is forced to convert to Christianity, symbolizing the possibility of redemption. This conversion is not just a punishment, but also a chance for Shylock to change his identity and embrace the virtues of mercy and goodness. Shakespeare's inclusion of this moment challenges the idea that individuals are forever defined by their past actions, suggesting that even the most villainous characters can change through the embrace of mercy and forgiveness. Shylock's forced conversion underscores the play's broader message that no one is beyond redemption, and that the capacity for change exists within every individual, regardless of their past mistakes. This moment also highlights the tension between justice and mercy, as Shylock is forced into a new identity that may allow him to transcend his earlier victimhood and embrace a new path of reconciliation. However, it is worth considering the ethical implications of this forced conversion. While it can be viewed as a form of redemption, it also raises questions about the power dynamics and cultural impositions that are present within the play. Shakespeare, therefore, not only challenges the notion of fixed evil, but also critiques the societal structures that prevent genuine personal transformation, offering a complex view of redemption that requires careful examination. In this way, the forced conversion both symbolizes Shylock's potential for change and highlights the complex relationship between societal expectations, personal identity, and the possibility of spiritual renewal[1, 3].

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Shylock as a Representation of Complex Evil

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare presents a view of evil that is not fixed but shaped by personal decisions and emotional responses. Shylock's character exemplifies the complexities of evil, showing that it arises not from inherent malice, but from a refusal to introspect and change. His tragic downfall underscores the dangers of clinging to vengeance and the importance of mercy. By exploring Shylock's emotional depth and psychological complexity, Shakespeare encourages readers to reconsider the nature of evil and to see it as a product of circumstance, rather than a permanent trait. The play presents evil as a multifaceted construct that requires a deeper understanding of its causes, both personal and societal. It forces us to confront the uncomfortable reality that evil is often a consequence of personal suffering and societal oppression, rather than a simple, inherent flaw. This view of evil complicates the audience's moral judgment, as it pushes us to question how we, as individuals and as a society, respond to those who have been wronged. By reframing our understanding of evil, Shakespeare invites us to view villains like Shylock not as one-dimensional characters, but as complex individuals shaped by their environment and circumstances. This perspective prompts a reflection on our own moral beliefs and the societal structures that perpetuate cycles of victimization and retribution[4-5].

5.2 The Triumph of Mercy Over Evil

Ultimately, Shakespeare's work suggests that goodness and mercy are the true guiding forces in human identity. While evil can be rationalized as justice, as Shylock does, it is mercy that offers the path to redemption. Through Portia's speech and Shylock's forced conversion, the play highlights the transformative power of mercy and the potential for change that exists even for the most flawed individuals. Mercy becomes the ultimate force that allows individuals to transcend their past mistakes and find redemption. Through mercy, Shakespeare emphasizes the possibility of healing, not only of the wronged but also of the wrongdoer, making it the superior moral force. The play ultimately demonstrates that while vengeance may provide temporary satisfaction, it is mercy that offers lasting peace and healing for both the individual and society. It is through mercy that we find the courage to rise above our past grievances and create a more compassionate world. Shakespeare's message is not just about the triumph of mercy over vengeance, but about the potential for reconciliation between conflicting forces. His portrayal of mercy as a transformative force challenges the audience to consider how forgiveness can break the chains of past wrongs and create a more just society[6-7].

5.3 Shakespeare's Message of Hope

Despite Shylock's tragic end, Shakespeare presents a hopeful vision: that evil, while powerful, is not unstoppable. It is the choices individuals make—particularly their ability to choose mercy—that define their true character. The play ultimately emphasizes the importance of introspection, forgiveness, and the possibility of redemption. Even those who seem irredeemable, like Shylock, can change if they embrace the power of mercy and let go of their hatred. Shakespeare's message, then, is not one of nihilism but of hope: through reflection, empathy, and mercy, individuals can overcome their flaws and find a path to personal growth and moral clarity. The play's final moments, while tragic, offer a vision of hope: that mercy, though often difficult to embrace, holds the power to transform even the most rigid and

embittered souls. Shakespeare's play encourages us to reflect on the redemptive power of compassion, not only for the wrongdoer but also for those who have been wronged. This final message points to the potential for societal healing, urging us to recognize that true strength lies in the ability to rise above personal pain and extend kindness in the face of adversity. The conclusion of the play is not just a resolution of conflict but a call to action: to transform personal and societal narratives of vengeance into stories of reconciliation and shared humanity[2, 9].

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

REFERENCES

- [1] Shapiro J. *The Concept of Mercy in Shakespeare's Works*. Oxford University Press, 2023.
- [2] Johnson R. *Character Development in Shakespeare's Villains: A Study of Shylock*. Cambridge University Press, 2022.
- [3] Brown L. Mercy and Justice in *The Merchant of Venice*. *Journal of Shakespeare Studies*, 2024, 21(3), 124-136.
- [4] Smith T. The Role of Introspection in Shakespeare's Villains. *Shakespearean Journal*, 2023, 45(2), 202-215.
- [5] Davis M. Emotional Complexity in Shylock's Character. *Journal of Literary Analysis*, 2024, 12(4), 98-110.
- [6] Taylor P. *Revenge and Redemption in Shakespeare's Tragedies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.
- [7] Martin E. The Role of Law in *The Merchant of Venice*. *Law and Literature*, 2024, 30(1), 15-29.
- [8] Williams C. The Function of Mercy in Shakespeare's Courtroom Dramas. *Drama Quarterly*, 2023, 18(2), 78-92.
- [9] Walker F. Sociopathy and Self-Awareness: Understanding Shylock's Evil. *Psychology and Literature*, 2024, 22(3), 56-71.

DIGITAL TWIN RECONSTRUCTION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN DUNHUANG MURALS: AN ENGINEERING WORKFLOW GROUNDED IN PHYSICAL REPLICAS

ZiLe Liu*, JiaYang Du
Lanzhou University of Arts and Science, Lanzhou 730070, Gansu, China.
Corresponding Author: Zile Liu, Email: 53636042@qq.com

Abstract: The Mogao Caves murals at Dunhuang preserve a dense iconography of music and dance from medieval times, yet the two-dimensional carrier and age-related degradation hinder quantitative understanding of instrument morphology. This paper proposes and validates a replica-based, 3D-capture-centered, visualization-oriented workflow for digital twin reconstruction. Using historically reasoned physical replicas as targets, we perform multi-sensor acquisition (structured light, photogrammetry), accurate registration, and high-fidelity meshing; we then conduct semantic retopology with lightweighting in parallel to physically based texture repainting. Representative samples—including the gourd lute (huluqin), large gourd lute, petal-edged ruan, guqin, bent-neck pipa, stick pipa, and round-bodied large ruan—are used to establish a traceable data lineage and metadata schema, demonstrating portability and dual effectiveness for exhibition and teaching. Results indicate that the method preserves mural-style cues while markedly improving geometric consistency and interactive legibility. The workflow provides an engineering-grade, reusable path for digital conservation, scholarly comparison, and public outreach of Dunhuang instruments.

Keywords: Dunhuang murals; Ancient musical instruments; 3D scanning; Photogrammetry; Semantic retopology; Unreal engine

1 INTRODUCTION

Instrument imagery in the Dunhuang murals is a primary source for studying medieval music and craft. Since the 1990s, physical reconstructions pioneered by Zheng Ruzhong and collaborators have helped clarify form and fabrication. In 2018, follow-on work by the Dunhuang Academy with industry partners refined shapes and materials, completing four major categories, 97 types, and 245 replicas [1-3]; in 2021, the “Hearing Dunhuang” initiative increased public visibility of these outcomes. Building on this corpus of replicas, we present a digital workflow—“replica as foundation, 3D capture as core, visualization as use”—that aims at engineering repeatability and scholarly verifiability [4-5]. In our pipeline, physical replicas provide a stable geometric baseline. We capture geometry via structured light and AI-assisted photogrammetry, perform semantic retopology and PBR repainting, and implement multi-endpoint interaction in Unreal Engine 5 (UE5) [6]: metric overlays, exploded views, deterministic camera paths, and side-by-side comparison. The present study focuses on geometric and visual recovery and does not address acoustic simulation. Our goal is a high-fidelity, cross-sample-portable procedure that serves exhibition and pedagogy while meeting reproducibility requirements for digital-humanities research (Figure 1).

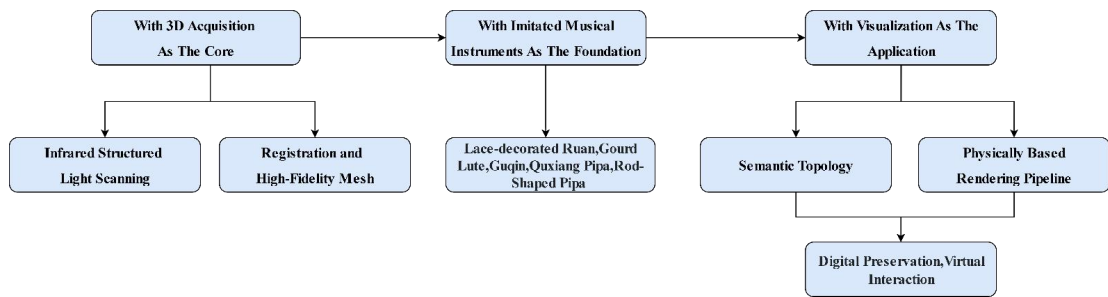


Figure 1 Digital Restoration Flow Chart

2 RELATED WORK AND RESEARCH GAP

Heritage digitization has evolved from manual polygonal modeling to measurement-based scanning. Manual modeling excels at stylistic synthesis but struggles with authentic tool marks and consistent high-frequency detail; scanning samples reality directly yet is sensitive to illumination, reflections, and occlusion. For Dunhuang instruments, the literature emphasizes iconographic scholarship and physical reconstruction. What remains under-specified is a reusable digital workflow that (i) is grounded in physical replicas, (ii) preserves mural stylistics without over-stylization, (iii) encodes traceable metadata, and (iv) packages a cross-device interactive template with measurable evaluation criteria. This paper addresses these gaps by balancing “authentic geometry—mural style—interactive legibility” with explicit thresholds and audit trails.

3 METHODS AND WORKFLOW

3.1 Acquisition Protocol: Multi-Sensor Complementarity

For small- to mid-scale instruments, structured light serves as the primary modality. We begin with far-range mode plus coded markers to capture the global silhouette; markers densely cover the underside to stabilize registration. We then switch to near-range mode and apply feature-based stitching to acquire carved details, reinforcing alignment between detail and global datasets. To mitigate occlusion and shadow, concentric rings of near/mid/far photographs at alternating pitch angles are captured for photogrammetric fusion. All data are imported into Revo Scan 5 [7], where far-range (global) and near-range (detail) sets are registered to form complete, high-accuracy point clouds (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Scanning is Performed Using Methods with Different Distances

3.2 Registration and Mesh Reconstruction

Point spacing during fusion is set to 0.2–0.3 mm to preserve carvings and curvature. Automated detection removes isolated and overlapping points; residual non-target clusters (e.g., matting powder flakes, background noise) are manually lassoed out. For meshing, the quality parameter is set to the maximum (8.0) to increase subdivision and detail capture. Holes induced by occlusion or specular glare are closed manually to ensure surface integrity, enabling stable downstream analysis and archiving.

3.3 Topology Optimization and Detail Transfer

Meshes are exported to Maya for retopology under the principles of clean edge flow and structural completeness, prioritizing evenly distributed quads and planned loops to support later sculpting and materials. Base meshes are then refined in ZBrush to restore carvings and surface texture using appropriate subdivision and brushes. The low-poly returns to Blender for UV unwrapping; shells are segmented by structural logic, with controlled stretch and optimized density. Low- and high-poly pairs are baked in Marmoset Toolbag 4 (normal, displacement, AO), with tuned sampling and cage settings to transfer detail while balancing render cost and fidelity.

3.4 Physically Based Texture Repainting

Baked maps feed into Substance Painter for PBR repainting. After close inspection of roughness distribution, metallic parts (e.g., tuning pegs), and characteristic surface patterns (carving grain, wear) [8], we assign region-specific roughness and metallic values and replicate distinctive textures to match physical behavior. Historic patina cues—non-uniform weathering, edge fading, and micro-polishing at hand-contact zones—are layered to encode “readable craft history” without exaggeration.

3.5 UE5 Interactive Scene and Scripting

To ensure reuse and verification, we formalize the mapping “mural instrument geometry—semantics—interaction” via an isomorphic tri-layer: Data (D), Logic (L), and View (V).

D-layer: A data-asset descriptor standardizes geometric parameters (e.g., soundbox axes, neck length, string spacing), disassembly levels, measurement baselines, and material channels. Traceable metadata (cave, date, panel, version, author, timestamp) support asset versioning, experimental replication, and auditability.

L-layer: A finite-state machine plus an event bus models the verifiable sequence “entry → search → focus → explode → measure → compare → back.” Interactive objects are parametric Actors/Components; behaviors are instantiated through data-driven Blueprints to minimize hard-coded coupling and enable horizontal scale-out.

V-layer: Nanite hosts dense geometry and Lumen provides consistent global illumination. CineCamera and Level Sequence guarantee deterministic camera paths and reproducible viewpoints. Textures and meshes stream asynchronously with a lightweight loading widget to suppress perceived stutter. Cross-device input is normalized via Action/Axis Mapping; UMG/Canvas ensures resolution-independent UI.

Performance and interaction telemetry (frame time, draw calls, dwell time) plus contract-based assertions (geometric

thresholds, material-channel completeness) close the loop “asset—script—render—evaluation,” elevating scenes from engineering artifacts to measurable, reproducible research objects.

4 CASE IMPLEMENTATIONS AND RESULTS

We conducted reproducible experiments on six representative categories under a unified chain—acquisition, reconstruction, semanticization, rendering, and evaluation—with gates for geometric consistency (curvature fields, outline overlap, normal stability), material plausibility (complete PBR channels, continuous specular flow), interactive verifiability (auditable state transitions, parameter traceability), and process auditability (versioning and metadata completeness). Below we summarize working conditions, challenges, responses, and validation.

4.1 Petal-Edged Ruan (Mogao Caves 220/217)

Thin petal rims with high specularity and sharp edges risk under-sampling, normal flips, and boundary oscillation. We applied light matting to reduce local specular components and used grazing-angle sidelighting. Near-range, high-density layered scans were rigidly registered; semantic retopology abstracted rims as ring-shaped edge loops, stabilizing exploded-view mechanics and specular-flow continuity. Results show congruent morphology (body diameter, petal width/density, short-neck ratio) with the murals; PBR layering renders lacquer–wood core–wear transitions naturally, and normal-flip rates remain within thresholds (Figure 3).

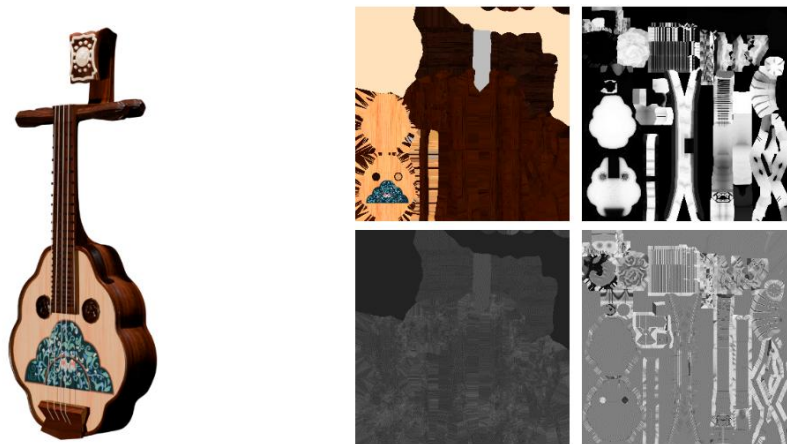


Figure 3 Rendered Images of the Petal-Edged Ruan and Four Texture Maps

4.2 Gourd Lute (Mogao Caves 322/420/262/423)

Weakly asymmetric double-curved soundboxes, compounded by hand-made replica deviations, can produce “bulging” artifacts under global smoothing. We used centroid–principal-axis constrained registration, reconstructed “gourd neck/belly” in sub-domains, and placed constraints at curvature maxima to suppress over-smoothing; a partitioned error field guided global merging. The process yields a traceable chain “mural parameters → physical deviation → digital fit.” Exploded views reveal the assembly logic of tuning pegs—nut—soundboard, supporting cross-version auditing and parameter back-tracking (Figure 4).

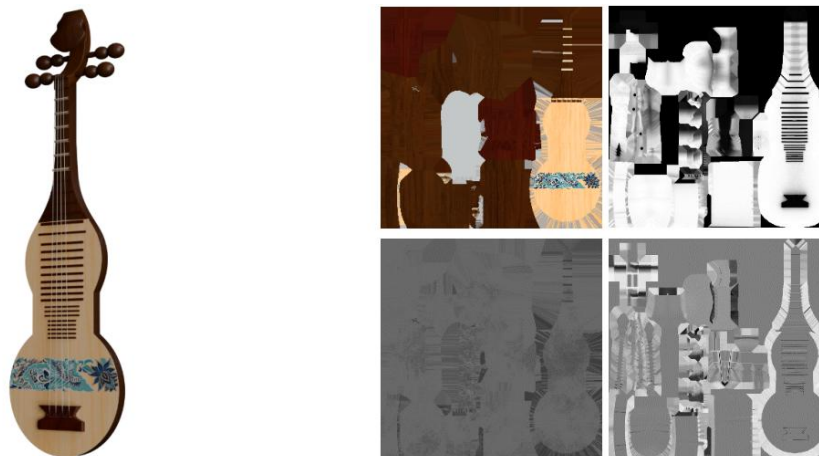


Figure 4 Rendered Images of the Gourd Zither and Four Texture Maps

4.3 Guqin (Mogao Caves 85/172/299)

Long, slender pieces with strong anisotropic reflections suffer local under-sampling and registration drift. We adopted a “segment scan—stitch—global optimize” strategy, using the thirteen hui as a linear baseline to impose sequential constraints. A soft constraint on the top-board camber maintained continuity, and local curvature priors reconstructed under-sampled regions. Measurements reproducibly recovered key indicators (camber profile, yueshan position, tuning-peg to panel proportions), supplying geometric evidence for typological evolution and a baseline for cross-sample comparison (Figure 5).

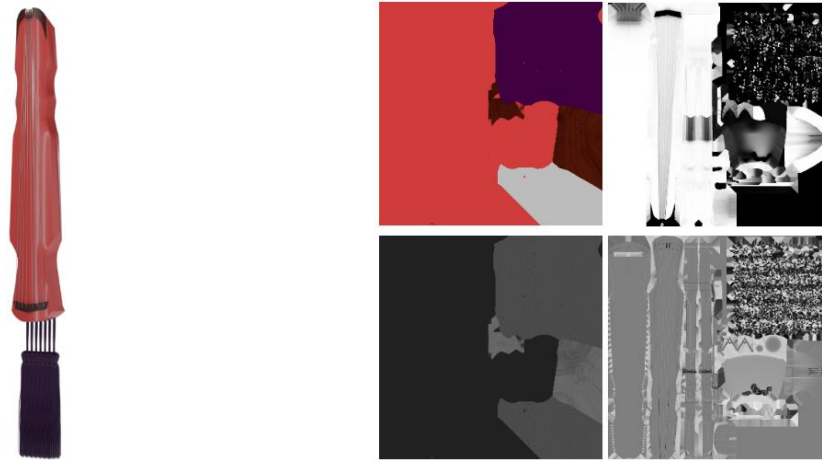


Figure 5 Guqin and Four Rendered Maps

4.4 Bent-Neck and Stick Pipa (Mogao Caves 112/220/313)

Thin curved necks with strong highlights destabilize normals; high curvature gradients at the “straight-neck—pear-body” transition induce artifacts. We employed local polarization imaging and multi-exposure fusion to suppress reflective noise. The bent neck was first fit with segmented NURBS under curvature-continuity constraints, then polygonized; conformal feature lines across the transition stabilized curvature fields. Parameters such as guard (hanbo), “phoenix eye,” string spacing, and neck curvature are now comparable across forms. The frontend supports side-by-side comparison with parameter-linked queries, ensuring repeatable observation paths and camera solutions. Across “high-gloss thin walls, weak asymmetry, near-axis symmetry, long slenderness,” we achieved (i) geometric consistency and normal stability within preset tolerances; (ii) complete craft-plausible PBR channels; (iii) auditable, replayable FSM-driven interactions; and (iv) traceable asset/process metadata. These validate portability to exhibition-and-teaching scenarios and establish a baseline for quantitative cross-cave, cross-type comparison (Figure 6).

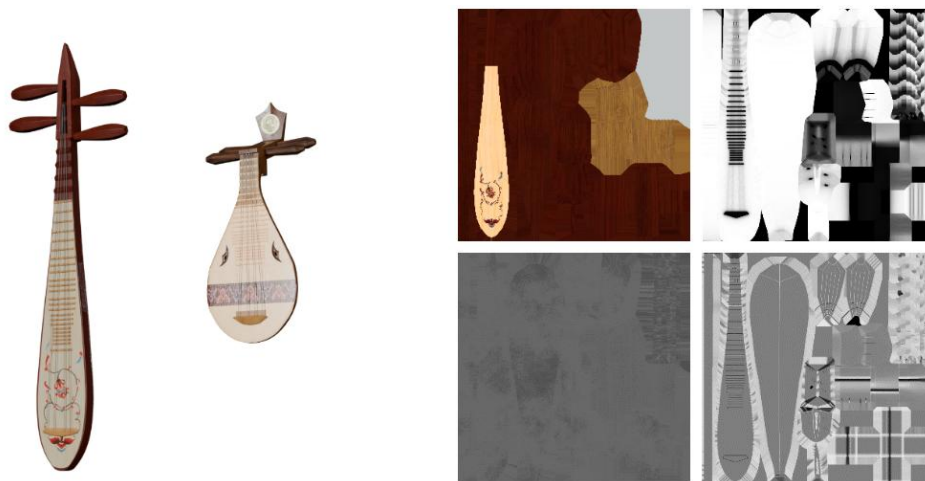


Figure 6 Quxiang Pipa and Rod-shaped Pipa

5 SYSTEM EVALUATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Visualization and Interaction Performance

In a 4K viewport, four to six instruments can be displayed side-by-side with stable frame cadence and smooth manipulation. On large touchscreens, gesture rotation/zoom is low-latency and controllable. In VR, in-place scaling and view bookmarks minimize large locomotions and alleviate oculovestibular mismatch. Nanite-based hosting removes manual LOD and baking, lowering asset maintenance and version evolution costs.

5.2 Reconstruction Consistency and Traceability

Geometric consistency. Using mural measurements and physical replica measurements as dual baselines, key parameters stay within engineering tolerances. For thin ornaments and sharp edges, visual and structural legibility is prioritized over acoustics-grade precision.

Pattern consistency. Textures are academically repainted as secondary creations; layer-level metadata and processing lineage enable provenance, correction, and re-editions.

Cognitive readability. Metric overlays, comparison viewpoints, and exploded diagrams create a closed loop of “observe—analyze—compare—retain,” shortening the path from “image → morphology → construction” while improving transparency of the evidence chain.

5.3 Portability and Boundary Conditions

The method is most cost-effective for small- to mid-scale artifacts. Highly specular and ultra-thin parts still require matting plus polarization and close-range rescans to suppress normal instability and under-sampling. Photogrammetry remains sensitive to lighting uniformity; on-site shielding, controlled lighting, and reference calibration are recommended. Texture repainting should follow a “history—craft—style” tri-evidence chain to avoid misreading artistic exaggeration as material property. These boundary conditions should be encoded in acquisition protocols and error budgets when extrapolating to very large or composite artifacts.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND OUTLOOK

We present an integrated geometry—craft—interaction workflow for digital twin reconstruction of Dunhuang mural instruments. Grounded in physical replicas, the pipeline combines multi-sensor 3D capture with semantic retopology and PBR repainting, and delivers measurable, disassemblable, and comparable interactions in UE5 through Nanite/Lumen and data-driven Blueprints. Implementations across multiple plucked and struck instruments demonstrate engineering reusability and dual effectiveness for exhibition and pedagogy.

Future work proceeds along three lines: (1) multi-scale detail fusion using reflectance-transformation imaging and micro-topography to map tool marks and craft textures across scales; (2) spatiotemporal semantic labeling that introduces multidimensional tags (“cave—dynasty—panel—component”) and narrative timelines to enhance scholarly retrieval and audience understanding; and (3) open asset management via a versioned digital instrument library and metadata standard to support cross-institution collaboration and long-term preservation.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

FUNDING

This work was supported by the Lanzhou Science and Technology Plan Project (2023-3-120).

REFERENCES

- [1] Zou C, Rhee SY, He L, et al. Sounds of History: A Digital Twin Approach to Musical Heritage Preservation in Virtual Museums. *Electronics*, 2024, 13(12): 2388. DOI: 10.3390/electronics13122388.
- [2] Sun T, Jin T, Huang Y, et al. Restoring Dunhuang Murals: Crafting Cultural Heritage Preservation Knowledge into Immersive Virtual Reality Experience Design. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 2024, 40(8): 2019-2040. DOI: 10.1080/10447318.2023.2232976.
- [3] Wheeldon D. 3D Digital Technologies for Studying Historical Musical Instruments. *Journal of Musicological Research*, 2024, 43(2-3): 197-221. DOI: 10.1080/01411896.2024.2376943.
- [4] Liu J. From Traditional Perspectives to Design Innovation: A Study on the Digital Restoration and Redesign of the Konghou in Mural No. 465 of Mogao Grottoes. *Highlights in Art and Design*, 2024, 7(2): 78-81. DOI: 10.54097/c5f03020.
- [5] Chen Y, Peng Y, Tan Y, et al. Achieving Cultural Heritage Sustainability Through Digital Technology: Public Aesthetic Perception of Digital Dunhuang Murals. *Sustainability*, 2025, 17(17): 7887. DOI: 10.3390/su17177887.
- [6] Li Z, Zhang Q, Xu J, et al. Gamification of Virtual Museum Curation: A Case Study of Chinese Bronze Wares. *Heritage Science*, 2024, 12: 348. DOI: 10.1186/s40494-024-01464-2.
- [7] Liu Z, Chen D, Zhang C, et al. Design of a Virtual Reality Serious Game for Experiencing the Colors of Dunhuang Frescoes. *Heritage Science*, 2024, 12: 370. DOI: 10.1186/s40494-024-01477-x.
- [8] Di Iorio F, Fiocco G, Angeloni R, et al. Violins Unveiled: A Photogrammetric Framework Integrating Multiband and Spectroscopic Data for In-Depth Examination of Two Musical Instruments. *Sensors*, 2025, 25(11): 3278. DOI: 10.3390/s25113278.

