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Abstract

In social work education, the implicit curriculum is integral in shaping professional values, ethics, behaviors, and practices. When faculty are consciously aware of how classroom interactions explicate, demonstrate, or underscore content covered in class material, they are more likely to use these instances as an invitation for students to analyze and provide a critique of their professional practices. Answering the clarion call to indigenize social work education, and to fulfill the objectives of Kenya's Technical and Vocational Education and Training system, we argue that the social work profession needs to turn its attention to the implicit pillars of the curriculum. By focusing on mid-level colleges, which serve the vital function of addressing workforce gaps in resource constrained settings, we examine the significance of implicit aspects of learning on students' professional development. We focus on the country's multicultural identity, trauma histories, and the deeply embedded culture of student activism and argue that by applying a transformative lens in the conceptualization of the implicit curriculum we can prepare future-ready social workers equipped for practice in Kenya's diverse and rapidly changing practice environment. While the strategies we propose are not exhaustive, they are initial steps in embracing the indigenization of the social work profession.

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INTRODUCTION

The profession of social work suffers from a bifurcated identity—as a state-sanctioned social control agent juxtaposed against its mission of social care. It is through social work's carefully articulated curriculum and field education experience that we equip our students to recognize and resolve this dissonance. And a regionally responsive curriculum allows students to align their personal values, behaviors, and social expectations with the profession's ethical standards and expectations. Adding to the rich complexity of social work education in sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) has been the need to design curriculum that de-centers Western hegemonic pedagogies and challenges the epistemic silencing of indigenous perspectives. To this end, the region has produced a rich body of work, including the indigenization literature (Canavera et al., 2020; Nilsen et al., 2023; Twikirize & Spitzer, 2019), decolonization pedagogies (Mathebane & Sekudu, 2018), and Afrocentric paradigms (Kurevakwesu & Maushe, 2020; Mugumbate et al., 2023; Mwansa, 2011). However, while this literature acknowledges the multidimensionality of social work education, a significant body of work has focused primarily on elements of the explicit curriculum, theory development, and the field practicum experience, with little attention paid to the implicit learning environment. This unintended subordination of the learning environment in the social work literature is regrettable because the implicit curriculum is the vehicle through which professional values, ethics, and expectations are communicated.

In Kenya, certificate and diploma-level social workers constitute a significant segment of the workforce (Wairire, 2014), and supporting their skills and competence development is critical to ensuring the continued implementation of locally responsive evidence-based services. However, the social work teaching and learning literature in SSA has tended to spotlight four-year degree university education, ignoring the unique issues facing vocational training colleges. The dearth of literature on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions in the region is not surprising; technical and vocational colleges were historically viewed as subordinate to four-year institutions, attracting low-performing students with few career prospects (African Union, 2007; Aryeetey et al., 2011; Essel et al., 2014; Kahihu et al., 2021). However, the critical role played by the cadre of paraprofessional and auxiliary practitioners graduating from TVET institutions is incontestable. Across sub-Saharan Africa and other resource-constrained societies, these practitioners augment degree-level service providers; they can be rapidly deployed due to the shorter training period required, and provide an intimate connection to the local communities they serve (Global Social Service Workforce Alliance, 2017; Schmid, 2018).

This article argues that to support workforce needs and realize social work's global ethical principles we must pay attention to the implicit learning environment in TVETs. We consider the mechanics of re-imagining the current social work curriculum in an education system where curriculum development is centralized and disconnected from the instructors who deliver it. We outline the challenges associated with a centralized curriculum development system and argue that paying attention to the implicit elements of the social work curriculum will reinforce professional behaviors and prepare students for practice in complex and challenging situations. We begin by providing an overview of curriculum development in the Kenyan TVET system, examine the role of the implicit curriculum in social work education, and conclude by proposing classroom strategies to bolster the implicit environment.

TVET Institutions

Globally, middle-level colleges serve the vital function of workforce development and retention. In Kenya, these technical and vocational education and training institutions are significant actors in the country's development agenda (Republic of Kenya, 2012). TVETs are designed to align with the nation's long-term development blueprint of preparing a competent workforce for sustainable development. Their key role is to equip learners with a wide range of technical work skills and prepare them for (self)employment in industries including manufacturing, construction, health, and transportation.

In our very recent past, TVETs suffered from low social prestige, with the average learner stereotyped as having low intellectual abilities and limited employable skills. Post-colonial Kenya's hyperfocus on producing white-collar workers at the expense of skilled trade workers further diminished the social standing of these institutions. However, TVET popularity has increased as policy and funding changes have made them more attractive and accessible to families (Ministry of Education, 2022; Odhiambo, 2003). In the two years leading up to the financial year 2022, there was a 14% growth rate in TVET institutions and a corresponding increase in student enrollment of approximately 82,000 learners (Republic of Kenya, 2022). Current government statistics indicate that there are currently 350,000 students enrolled in TVETs across the country (Muoria, 2023).

A key attraction to TVETs is their affordability. Even for students who may qualify for government scholarships to attend four-year public universities, the cost of attendance remains prohibitive. TVETs are a more academically accessible option for students whose academic scores exclude them from admission into four-year degree programs. Furthermore, these institutions are deeply rooted in their local communities. For instance, vocational training centers (formally village polytechnics) offer programs responsive to local industry needs and will likely attract learners who live and work in these communities. Indeed, TVETs serve an essential function of professionalizing the human service sector by enrolling adult learner volunteers who serve their communities in various positions. For learners interested in pursuing degree programs, articulation agreements are in place with four-year institutions to facilitate the transition.

The Kenyan TVET system is advantageously placed to train the workforce needed to address issues that people who experience poverty face. Increasing income inequalities and deepening rural and urban poverty (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023) have necessitated human service workers to support community and government-led anti-poverty interventions. Other social problems intimately connected to poverty, including substance use and misuse and mental health issues, have also become a growing concern in the country. Government data indicates that 75% of the population lacks access to mental health care in part due to low provider levels (Kenya Ministry of Health, 2020). The country also reports increasing substance use and misuse issues, more so among children and youth (NACADA, 2022). However, intervention services, including inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation facilities, remain insufficient to meet national needs. Available data confirms this skewed provider-client ratio with an estimated medical social worker-client ratio of 1:920,000 and a psychologist-client ratio of 1:4,600,000 (Office of Auditor General, 2017). The country's high poverty rates, high burden of mental health disease, and skewed patient-mental health provider ratios mandate the continuation of efforts to optimize available community-level strategies, including professionalizing the human services workforce. Moreover, while not a panacea, TVETs present a promising strategy to address these gaps in the human service sector. Indeed, a recent environmental scan has identified 61 institutions (both four-year and TVET institutions) offering social work or social welfare courses with the potential to graduate workers to support the implementation of evidence-based community interventions.

Developing the TVET Curriculum

This section examines curriculum design and development in the Kenyan TVET system. Curriculum development and management are the responsibility of multiple semi-autonomous governmental agencies. These agencies work collaboratively under the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), which was established to regulate vocational training, verify assessment tools, enforce curriculum compliance, and develop and regulate training standards.

Curricula development begins with a draft proposal submitted to a curriculum-developing body. While TVETA's Curriculum Development, Assessment and Certification Council (CDACC) is the primary governmental agency charged with the design and development of curricula, other key players include the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) and the National Industrial Training Authority (NITA). These agencies work collaboratively with industry experts organized under Sector Skills Advisory Committees (SSAC) to inform this emerging curriculum. These bodies

are charged with ensuring that the draft curricula comply with national competency-based education and training standards (Kahihu et al., 2021). In the last six years, Kenya has adopted a competency-based education approach across basic educational structures focusing on skills development that facilitates integration into the workforce. Therefore, Sector Skills Advisory Committees propose content aligned with specified competencies and employer-based occupational standards and develop assessment tools to measure mastery of those competencies. Following this, the curriculum is submitted to the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) for registration and then finally to TVETA for implementation in identified institutions (Ministry of Education State Department for Vocational and Technical Training, 2018). It is also important to note that future curriculum amendments must be resubmitted to the CDACC for approval.

There is broad consensus in the literature that teaching faculty play a vital role in the (re)development of curriculum (Allan & Estler, 2005; Alsubaie, 2016), and yet the curricula process described above is primarily external to the instructors who deliver it. Educators offer professional expertise, have knowledge of the local student body, and are intimately connected to the institutional resources that shape the curriculum. When non-educators and actors not directly responsible for in-class instruction control the curriculum, it can adversely impact the educators' ability to rethink pedagogy and innovate through self-determined teaching methods, compromising the classroom environment and student-teacher relationships.

Furthermore, from the curricula development and assessment processes described above, there seems to be a heavy focus on the explicit curriculum (see Kahihu et al., 2021), with only cursory mention of the integral unwritten and hidden elements of the implicit curriculum (Kirior, 2017; Muchira et al., 2023). The teacher's responsibility in curriculum implementation is to translate the explicit curriculum into meaningful learning experiences and to foster a supportive and challenging learning environment. This speaks directly to the implicit curriculum, "which is as important as the explicit curriculum in shaping the professional character and competence of the program's graduates" (Council on Social Work Education, 2015, p. 14). Table 1 briefly compares critical aspects of explicit and implicit curriculum in the educational context.

Table 1 Explicit and Implicit Curriculum Comparison

Aspect	Explicit Curriculum	Implicit Curriculum
Definition	Clearly defined and formally documented in the curriculum guides	Sometimes undefined and often learned through experiences
Intention	Deliberately planned and stated educational objectives	Unwritten and may be unintentional; learned through observation and experience
Visibility	Observable and measurable in formal lesson plans and assessments, conscious awareness	Less observable and often invisible, it is embedded in the culture and social interactions and operates unconsciously with individuals unaware of its impact
Delivery	Taught directly in the classroom through formal instruction through lesson plans, textbooks, syllabi, etc.	Conveyed indirectly through values, attitudes, cultural norms, and instructor tone and emphasis
Control	Controlled by educational authorities and institutions	Influenced by societal, cultural, and contextual factors

Implicit Curriculum in Social Work Education: A Roadmap for TVETs

While the explicit curriculum is the written part of the curriculum housing coursework and learning activities, the implicit (hidden) curriculum embodies a program's goals, values, and aspirations. The implicit curriculum is the setting within which students experience the explicit curriculum (Bogo & Wayne, 2013). It is the part of the curriculum that is unwritten and demonstrated through unintended learning moments both in and outside the classroom. While not overtly communicated to students, the implicit curriculum is well-thought-out and articulated. In the social work curriculum, it is the element responsible for shaping social work students' professional character and identity. When faculty are consciously aware of how classroom interactions explicate,

demonstrate, or underscore content covered in class material, they are more likely to use these instances as an invitation for students to analyze and provide a critique of these behaviors. For example, when an instructor is fully present in classroom interactions—paraphrasing and reflecting what is said, withholding judgement, paying attention to students' non-verbal cues—it models the active listening skills students need to practice in their field placements. Further, when an instructor artfully facilitates difficult, controversial, or uncomfortable classroom discussions, students observe firsthand the skills needed to demonstrate empathy, handle conflict, and manage uncomfortable emotions in professional settings.

Compared to the explicit curriculum, which is controlled and driven by external actors, the structure and execution of the implicit curriculum are wholly under the purview of individual institutions. Administrative structures, organizational resources, and the classroom environment all play a role in communicating both national and social work's mission and values. Therefore, the implicit curriculum in schools of social work cannot be underemphasized given its importance in helping bridge the gap between theory and praxis.

The following section discusses how, through their interactions with students and institutional structures, educators can use the implicit curriculum to inculcate social work values and model professional behavior while supporting content presented in the explicit curriculum. The strategies we propose emerged from the clarion call to indigenize social work education and are informed by a national discourse on social work theory and pedagogy initiated by the Association of Social Work Educators in Kenya (ASWEK). A robust discussion that has drawn together educators, scholars, and practitioners from across the African continent. The indigenization philosophy undergirds our (re)thinking of the implicit curriculum. In our context, indigenization refers to educational practices that acknowledge hegemonic interests and power structures while addressing the unique aspects of the Kenyan ecology through locally developed strategies. This means a curriculum that unapologetically addresses issues of ethnic conflict, corruption, economic inequalities, and historical and contemporary marginalization of minoritized communities. While the concepts covered here are not exhaustive, we intend to address facets that are especially applicable to social work education in the country. In particular, we focus on the country's multicultural identity, trauma histories, and the deeply embedded culture of student activism.

Social Work Practice in Multicultural Settings

Africa is a multi-cultural continent where practitioners must acknowledge and embrace a range of diverse client characteristics and experiences. Teacher-learner and peer-to-peer interactions can shape learners' attitudes toward diversity in teaching inclusion and diversity content. Through the intentional choices they make in the classroom, social work educators can illustrate this content in a way that considers the institution's localized reality. For example, given the rich multicultural makeup of most African societies, educators may assume that students will intuitively exemplify principles of inclusiveness and respect for diversity. However, we know that implicit biases and stereotypes could, in practice, unconsciously impact actions and attitudes toward communities and groups. Because these unconscious biases are developed over a lifetime of social interactions and remain primarily unexamined, students may be unaware of how they shape their professional identity. Like most African nations, Kenya continues to grapple with creating a single nation-state from more than 40 ethnically unique tribes (Population Reference Bureau, 2008) drawn together based on arbitrary administrative colonial boundaries. The result has been the ethnicization of social, economic, and political structures, which, when exploited, have in the recent past stoked ethnic differences, resulting in both localized and national conflict (Kagwanja, 2006). Moreover, while these discordant ethnic sentiments may be implicitly held, when not acknowledged and addressed they could adversely impact the provider-client relationship (AUTHOR et al., 2016). Therefore, we must equip novice practitioners with tools to self-reflect and identify unconscious biases in their practice.

The implicit curriculum is used by teaching faculty to leverage content explicitly enumerated in the curriculum and content that may be missing (null curriculum) or inadequately addressed. For

instance, we know that the region as a whole continues to struggle with the concept of unabridged human rights of socially marginalized communities, including sexual and gender minorities. To our knowledge, there is no explicit course content addressing the unique socio-political and economic realities of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex communities in Kenya. Social work educators should demonstrate inclusive behavior in the classroom, regardless of their personal and religious beliefs. An inclusive classroom improves educational outcomes for all students, not just those who may identify as gender or sexual minorities. Alongside supplemental readings, teaching faculty can use the implicit curriculum to address these gaps in the explicit curriculum by creating a climate of mutual respect and a recognition of the region's diverse makeup.

Addressing the uneven practitioner-client power dynamics is crucial in the social work classroom. Not only are we charged with engaging in actions or behavior that could strengthen client self-worth, but this introspective practice is critical in resource-constrained practice settings where clients lack alternative sources of care. Encouraging students to be introspective about the blind spots, particularly the subconscious biases they hold, and to consider how these might impact future practice is key for social work practice in multicultural societies; instructor modeling reflection skills in the classroom is crucial for student professional development. Modeling introspection involves the instructor helping students connect their internal motivations to actions or positions that may come up in classroom engagement and discussion of application in practice.

Even with a centralized curriculum, the quality of training differs across institutions (Government of Kenya, Ministry of Education, 2019), partly because the trainers' knowledge determines the kind of knowledge and skills transferred to the learners. The same is true in applying the implicit curriculum, which can elicit positive and negative learning outcomes depending on the instructor's skill and orientation. To mitigate unintended adverse outcomes, instructors should also pause and reflect on how their biases could inform their interactions with students. Just like our clients, students can easily pick up on the unconscious cues around age, gender, tribe, sexual orientation, and nationality, and this could adversely impact the learning environment. The literature offers several strategies to signal egalitarianism, which embraces a supportive multi-cultural classroom culture. Engaging in inclusive classroom activities provides a safe atmosphere for student self-exploration. These activities can include transparent grading and assessment mechanics that help protect us from having our biases seep into the classroom (Malouff & Thorsteinsson, 2016) and embracing a Freirean approach that centers students' knowledge and invites more collaborative engagement around course work (Clark, 2002).

The Trauma-Informed Classroom

Among college-age Kenyan students, the ongoing stress and difficult circumstances stemming from high poverty rates, substance use and misuse, and exposure to gender-based violence (Oino & Obare, 2022; Wane et al., 2018) are of particular concern. Financial instability and the constant struggle to make ends meet can lead to the development or exacerbation of health issues. Indeed, youth behavioral health disorders are a leading cause of health-related disability in SSA (Erskine et al., 2015; Jenkins et al., 2010; Patel, Flisher, Hetrick, & McGorry, 2007). Individuals living in poverty report feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress. Estimates suggest that 46.8% and 31.7% of college-enrolled youth report incidences of depression and anxiety (Muriungi & Menecha, 2020; Othieno et al., 2014).

What we also know is that trauma histories and diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health are especially prevalent among students in the social work classroom. The concept "wounded healer" is used to explain why helping professions such as social work are disproportionately populated by practitioners with trauma histories, behavioral and mental health problems, and histories of substance use and misuse (Didham et al., 2011; Straussner et al., 2018). Furthermore, while these behavioral and health issues may have occurred prior to joining these professions, research also indicates these issues could onset or be exacerbated during their time in practice (Straussner et al., 2018). When a practitioner's behavioral and health issues are unaddressed, there could be detrimental consequences

on the client-provider therapeutic alliance, including re-traumatization, burnout, and reactions to vicarious trauma (Zerubavel & Wright, 2012). Adopting trauma-informed classroom strategies can help support students experiencing these issues and mitigate adverse professional outcomes.

Instructors can support student learning by committing to a trauma-informed classroom culture. This means identifying course structures that may recreate systems of oppression and reviewing course content to ensure that it is not re-traumatizing to students. Instructors could employ thoughtful ways to address trauma in the classroom (AUTHOR, 2022). First is guidance around the use of self-care strategies (Newcomb et al., 2015). Self-care is an essential skill that we teach students who will be working in extremely emotionally and physically demanding positions. In teaching self-care, instructors can engage in deliberate actions in and out of the classroom to model ways to manage stress, prevent burnout, and improve overall health. Classroom strategies that avoid re-traumatizing students include acknowledging trauma triggers in course content and creating a classroom plan to manage reactions to these triggers (Boysen, 2017). For instance, TVET instructors teaching in regions with histories of ethnic conflict possess historical, cultural, social, and political knowledge that positions them to customize the curriculum to the local context and the social mores to promote and model appropriate behaviors and attitudes. In addition to acknowledging these realities, providing warnings on course content that addresses issues of conflict and violence can also signal care and empathy to students who may have lived experiences of ethnic violence. While these warnings should not minimize class discussions or stifle opposing views, they remind students to be mindful and respectful of the diverse experiences represented in the classroom.

Instructors can also give students the tools to practice reflexive social work. Masson & Graham (2022) provide the critical technique of reflectivity in social work practice where students gain self-awareness through examination of self, which leads to a better understanding of how they situate in the practice setting. In highlighting the instructor's role, the authors point to the need for reflective classroom practices that model for students how they (students) can apply this construct in their own practice. This includes "establishing a trusting and safe emotional context" space where students can learn how to engage in reflective practice. These extend into the class discussion spaces where students are encouraged to share and examine feelings and experiences after client contact in practicum (Masson & Graham, 2022, p. 171).

Preparing for Anti-Oppressive Practice

It is in the social work classroom that students are equipped with skills to disrupt systems of oppression, including sexism, tribalism, classism, homophobia, ableism, and ageism. Advocacy is the fundamental social work skill to promote and defend these human rights and empower communities to achieve their full capabilities. Through case and cause advocacy, students learn the arts of persuasion, networking, fundraising, and coordinating community movements. Students can identify the interpersonal and structural barriers that keep resources and opportunities out of the hands of the people who need them. Informed by the conscientization philosophy of '*each one teach one*,' students are conversely expected to teach and model these skills to their communities. To fully realize the profession's call to champion social change, we need to train practitioners who can navigate power dynamics and empower communities to identify and leverage their collective power. To achieve these goals, we propose two strategies—direct exposure to county and national political structures and creating institutional student co-governance structures.

Political social work. In political social work, the profession engages in the political machinery toward social change. Lane & Pritzker (2018) propose five domains of political social work: (i) supporting community engagement in political processes, (ii) influencing policy agendas, (iii) staffing political offices, (iv) party politics such as campaigning, and (v) seeking and holding political office. While there is no official data on the exact number of Kenyan social workers engaged across this political practice spectrum, the profession has recently produced at least three parliamentarians. The Kenyan higher education ecosystem boasts a rich history of vibrant student leaders whose work has precipitated tremendous social, political, environmental, and economic gains.

This normative culture of political activism could be why the social work profession in Kenya does not seem to have the innate struggle with its political identity faced by the social work profession in the West (Pritzker & Lane, 2017). Kenyan social workers' engagement as policy influencers, political activists, and elected officials is a natural outcome of Kenyan social work practice.

Hands-on exposure to political activities is part of the social work implicit curriculum (Pritzker & Lane, 2017), communicated through direct lobbying of political actors (AUTHOR, 2012), and attending local political meetings (Pritzker & Lane, 2017). TVETs, by virtue of being embedded at the constituency and county levels, are well-placed to socialize students with the traits needed to engage effectively in the political arena for the benefit of their clients. Local political and civic leadership engagement includes public participation forums, a key element in policymaking enshrined in the Kenyan constitution. Students can also learn to reflexively engage the political system by modeling political neutrality in the classroom. In so doing, the learning environment trains students to engage in direct political action even as they learn about structural determinants of individual and community-level problems.

Student co-governance. Another strategy for preparing students to engage in anti-oppressive practice is through student co-governance. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2014) formally recognized students as university stakeholders. Student leadership provides social work students with a platform through which they can act as advocates for their peers and have a firsthand view of how advocacy campaigns can impact decision-making at the organizational level. Social work students should be encouraged to engage with teaching faculty to contribute to programming and curriculum development to cover any educational gaps to support their learning needs as future social workers. Social work students should also apply their social work skills to critically examine TVET structures to illuminate areas of inequity and oppressive policies and present solutions to provide a better educational experience. Administrators can support student engagement by providing students with the avenues to engage in governance by having well-articulated regulations specifying the opportunities available for students to do so.

CONCLUSION

Informed by the indigenization philosophy, this paper argues for a thoughtful re-thinking of the implicit pillars in Kenya's competency based social work curriculum. The implicit curriculum is the vehicle by which Kenya's national identity as a multicultural nation can be embedded into social work practice. This discussion is especially salient given that the explicit curricula development is external to the individual institutions that train and graduate social work practitioners. Faculty and administrators communicate and model professional values and expectations through these unwritten elements of the curriculum. Furthermore, because the implicit curriculum can be used to convey content that is intentionally and unintentionally absent from the curriculum, it allows instructors to present content that is responsive to the unique characteristics of the particular institution and student body.

Social justice and human rights are at the very core of the social work curriculum, and the implicit curriculum is the element in the learning environment that can carry these concepts across all course content and program structures. Faculty are, therefore, called to create an environment where students can learn how to use an intersectional lens to recognize and challenge the historical and contemporary marginalization of individuals and communities. It is through faculty modeling that students learn how to engage in the lifelong process of reflexivity, wherein they can challenge and hold themselves accountable for personal actions and behaviors that may perpetuate structures that are injurious to communities. As instructors and administrators, we acknowledge and appreciate the diversity of our student body when we create a learning environment that is both relational and interactive. Indeed, the importance of the teaching faculty in executing the implicit curriculum cannot be understated, given the power they exercise in choosing what behaviors to elevate or minimize, include or exclude in their classroom interactions.

Finally, we acknowledge that the strategies presented here, while not exhaustive, present the initial steps to create structures that embrace the indigenization of the profession. The journey towards indigenizing social work education in Kenya by focusing on the implicit curriculum is a transformative stride towards fostering cultural relevance, inclusivity, and genuine community empowerment. By recognizing and addressing the hidden structures that perpetuate colonial legacies, we pave the way for a more equitable and responsive social work education system and social work practice. By dismantling the remnants of colonial influences, we lay the foundation for a socially just and culturally sensitive practice that genuinely serves the needs of the people.

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Teacher Engagement in Homework: The Case of Private and Government Secondary Schools in Addis Ababa

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Abstract

This study explored teachers' engagement in homework across private and public secondary schools in Addis Ababa. A qualitative method with an embedded approach, ensuring validity and reliability by incorporating member checking, conducting extended site visits, and utilizing peer validation, was employed. The study involved 30 participants, including 12 teachers, 12 students, and six school leaders. The collected data was analyzed thematically. The study reveals that many teachers are not well-trained in creating effective homework assignments, even though they assign homework that fits the curriculum. They often do not consider the diverse needs of students, tend to give less time for homework, and are unable to prepare engaging and creative homework. During the homework assignment process, they impose penalties for incomplete work, as well as overseeing and completion of homework face challenges with large class sizes, cheating, and technology use. Private schools generally provide better feedback on homework than public schools. Many teachers express unhappiness with homework due to heavy workloads, stress from grading, and negative views on digital technology, along with parental criticism in low-performing schools.

The analysis reveals distinct variations in homework practices between public and private secondary schools. These factors significantly impact the effectiveness of homework. Therefore, it is essential for policymakers and stakeholders to reevaluate the methods of crafting, implementing, assessing, and perceiving homework in order to improve children's learning outcomes and overall performance.

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INTRODUCTION

Origin and Development of Homework

The evolution of homework, initially examined by the German politician Horace Mann in the 19th century, received global acknowledgment following its implementation by the Italian educator Roberto Nevillis (Bembenutty, 2010). According to Keith (1986), homework refers to any work students accomplish outside class, such as during study sessions or library visits. Cooper, H., Robinson, J. C., and Patall, E. A. (2006) describe teachers responsible for distributing homework that students are expected to complete outside of regular instructional hours.

A study conducted by Ilgar (2012) indicates that homework is essential to the educational process; nevertheless, it has historically sparked significant debate among educators, parents, and students. Authors Sullivan and Sequiria (1996) contend that, despite criticisms of too much homework, it positively affects educational outcomes. As well, in the U.S., schools have introduced a policy against homework, focusing on quality instead of quantity, as highlighted by Nuzlam (1998).

Authors like Trautwein and Schnyder (2009) emphasize that homework is important in classrooms for three main reasons: it helps students develop self-achievement, motivation, and self-regulation; it connects school with home, allowing parental involvement; and it encourages time management skills and good study habits (Bempechat 2010).

Earlier findings show that homework is a debated topic in education, traditionally used to strengthen what is learned in class. Its success relies on how teachers view, assign, and manage it, as well as the homework's design, complexity, and amount (Keith, 1986).

Teachers are important in selecting suitable homework by considering the curriculum and students' abilities, significantly influencing learning and teaching (Hanafin, 2014).

Research indicated that the shift from traditional education to contemporary, secular systems in Ethiopia presented considerable difficulties for earlier leaders. During his reign from 1889 to 1913, Emperor Menelik II endeavored to create the first educational institution within his palace. Acknowledging the constraints of this initiative, he opted to recruit teachers from Egypt (Seyoum, 1996). Presently, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education (2018) is worried about secondary school teachers' low quality and motivation, which results in poor student attendance and engagement. It mentions that teachers fail to motivate students, and high staff turnover worsens the situation. The report also points out that teaching methods are often non-engaging and lack practical relevance.

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives

According to previous studies by Davis et al. (2003), teacher engagement is important for forming strong relationships with students. These connections enhance student involvement and improve educational outcomes. Teachers who build caring relationships with their students often feel better and have less stress and burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Moreover, in schools, teacher engagement involves physical, mental, and emotional elements linked to their social interactions with students and peers (Rich et al., 2010). Well-trained teachers, on the other hand, are vital in homework task practices. As well, proper training enables teachers to give fun projects, while untrained teachers may provide unclear instructions (Landing 2009).

Some studies noted that homework works better depending on factors like the subject, its amount, difficulty, and priorities. Teachers should tailor homework to different learning styles, set clear goals, and communicate these with students to promote independent learning and improve

academic success (Holte, 2016). As well, Fitzmaurice et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of homework being relevant and meaningful for students' learning and motivation.

Research emphasizes the importance of carrying out assigned homework with monitoring and support (Fitzmaurice et al., 2019). According to Salee and Rigler (2008), digital technology also boosts education with online tools and interactive platforms. It supports personalized feedback for student homework and success. As well, NOUN (2008) stresses accountability in education, especially in homework.

Earlier research shows that teachers play a key role in encouraging students to take charge of their learning at home. They can help students appreciate homework and offer helpful feedback (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). Authors suggest using personal pronouns, metaphors, and questions to engage students in homework. Evaluating assignments and giving feedback is also crucial (Trautwein et al., 2006). Research by Fitzmaurice et al. (2019) indicates that teachers apply different techniques for correcting homework, such as individual corrections, self-correction, and visual checks.

According to studies by Trautwein et al. (2009), among other factors, teachers' beliefs about homework are crucial for children's learning, indicating academic performance, teaching self-regulation and time management, and improving academic performance through practice. On the other hand, as it takes time to prepare and assess, homework can be a major challenge for teachers (Trauwein et al., 2006).

A study by Fleisher and Ohel (1974) show that parents frequently criticize teachers in professional matters, which makes them feel helpless and undermines their authority. Homework is thought to enhance students' academic performance through practice, with studies examining its benefits and drawbacks, including immediate improvements in grades, school performance, and study habits (Trautwein, etNiggli, Schnyder, &Ludtke, 2009). Moreover, teachers have been discovered to be slightly hesitant about utilizing the web to prepare homework, although they no longer actively object (Kolikant, 2010).

Statement of the problem

In Ethiopia, a major problem is that many students are uninterested in learning, and teachers are not fully engaged in the homework process (MoE, 2018). Besides, teachers lack better training for effective homework assignments and clear guidance (Landing 2009). This results in students having low attendance, enthusiasm, and interest in their studies. Teachers also worry that homework may harm students' mental and physical health (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Jonas sen & Blondel, 2005; Allen et al., 2007). However, a child's success with homework largely relies on the teacher's involvement (Hanafin, 2014). As well, teachers' views on homework affect students' willingness to do it (Trautwein et al., 2009).

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated teacher engagement in homework tasks in public and private secondary schools in Addis Ababa. Motivated by parents' desire for quality education and their concern for student outcomes (Saboka, 2003), the researcher seeks to fill the knowledge gap by studying the differences and similarities in teachers' engagement with homework in these schools. In this qualitative methods study, our research questions (RQs) are as follows:

RQ1. How are teachers involved in creating homework tasks in public and private secondary schools in Addis Ababa city?

RQ2. How are teachers participated in executing homework activities in private and government secondary schools in the city of Addis Ababa?

RQ3. To what extent do teachers assess homework in private and public secondary schools in the city of Addis Ababa?

RQ4. How do teachers perceive homework in private and public secondary schools in the city of Addis Ababa?

METHODS

Research Design and Approaches

This study employed qualitative methodologies with an embedded approach to gain a more profound understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It examined teachers' involvement in homework-related tasks, encompassing the design, implementation, and evaluation processes, as well as their perceptions. Consequently, an interpretative philosophical framework was utilized to gather comprehensive data regarding teachers' engagement (Pring, 2015).

Samples and sampling techniques

The research used purposive sampling to select study areas based on differences in children's academic performance, location, and the researcher's knowledge. Purposive sampling involves intentionally choosing specific individuals or locations for their valuable insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This differs from quantitative research, which examines larger sample sizes (Ogula, 2005).

A qualitative research methodology conducts a comprehensive examination with a specific sample size, as demonstrated in the table below.

Table1. Characteristics of Respondents

	Gender		Total	Qualification	Gender		Total	Qualification
	M	F			M	F		
School Leaders	2	1	3	Masters	2	1	3	Masters
Teachers	4	2	6	Degree	4	2	6	Degree
Student leaders	3	3	6	11-12 grades	3	3	6	11-12 grades
Total	9	6	15		9	6	15	

In the above **Table 1**, 30 participants—12 teachers, 12 student representatives, and six school leaders—from both public and private schools participated in the study. The selection of informants was relies on expertise, experience, exposure, and closure to the issue. The study focused on selecting secondary schools based on children's national exam results over three years. This involved 47 schools from three sub-cities: Gullale, Kolfe-Keranio, and Addis Ketema. Hence, six schools were chosen—three each from private and government sectors—categorized as high, medium, and low achievers. The selected high-achieving schools were Etege-Menen and Bekulos-Nur; medium-achieving schools included Addis Ketema and Amigonia; and low-achieving schools were Ayer-Xena and Betel-Mekane-Yesus respectively.

Data collection instruments

A semi-structured interview was employed as one method of data collection. A semi-structured interview is a data-gathering technique in which the interviewer is not required to ask exact formal questions (George, 2022).

Semi-structured interviews

The study included semi-structured interviews with 12, teachers, 12 students' representatives, and six school leaders of upper-grade (grades 11–12) secondary school from government and private

secondary schools. A study by Ogula (2005) showed that open-ended and unstructured interviews help in discovering new ideas. To encourage participants to share freely, the researcher adjusted the time and location of the interviews. A checklist was created to compare homework engagement among teachers in private and government secondary schools in Addis Ababa. The study aimed to gather qualitative data from students, teachers, and school leaders through semi-structured interviews, and theme analysis was used for data evaluation.

Methods of data analysis

Thematic data analysis was conducted post-data presentation, examining varied epistemologies and inquiries. Braun and Clarke (2006) define it as detecting, analyzing, categorizing, summarizing, and presenting themes through color-coding. The prevalent approach consists of a six-step procedure: becoming familiar with the data, coding, developing themes, reviewing those themes, defining and naming the themes, and finally, composing the report were employed (George, 2022). Moreover, an established method was employed to represent respondents in analyzing the collected data. Teachers were then presented from Tone (T1) to T twelve (T12), students, from S one (S1) to S twelve (S12), and school leaders, from L one (L1) to L six (L6). The text examines the categorization of secondary schools, encompassing both public and private institutions, into three distinct performance tiers: low, medium, and high-achieving. Each category is assigned specific labels, with government schools identified as HAGS, MAGS, and LAGS, while private schools are referred to as HAPS, MAPS, and LAPS. The analysis focuses on comparing teacher engagement in homework-related activities across these public and private educational establishments.

RESULTS

The role of teachers in the field of education is complex and holds significant importance. However, this section focused solely on their engagement in homework in private and public secondary schools, centered around four themes that emerged from the research findings. Earlier studies by Keith (1986) indicate that despite some past criticisms of homework's educational value, its effectiveness depends on teachers' perspectives, the nature and management of the homework, as well as their design and difficulty. As well, Hanafin (2014) highlights the importance of teachers in choosing appropriate homework that matches the curriculum and students' abilities, which greatly affects learning and teaching. As a result, the qualitative analysis of the study's findings revealed the following themes: the perception, creation, execution, and evaluation of homework by educators.

Teacher's craft of Homework

The design of the homework part is the first component of the teacher's engagement in homework. Thus, among other issues, teacher training in the preparation of homework plays a pivotal role in the preparation and implementation of homework. The awareness and training conditions of teachers on how to set, assign, implement, and assess homework matters more than any components of homework design since the teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to design homework determine the quality of the teaching and learning process. Even though studies suggest the relevance of teachers' training on how to create homework, the results show inadequate training provided particularly at higher institutions as well as job training as reported by respondents:

> In HAPS and HAGS schools there is no homework training, but professionals provide orientation on assessment. [S1, L1, T2 and S7, L4, T8]. Similarly, in MAPS and MAGS separate training related to creating well-designed homework was not provided at higher institutions though pedagogical courses were provided, on-the-job training is lacking. [S3, L2, T4 and S9, L5, T10]. In LAPS and LAGS, participants emphasized the importance of prior experience and training in assigning homework. Yet only a few higher institutions provided seminars on homework tasks. [S6, L3, T5 and S11, L6, T12]

As far as creating homework is concerned, the assigned homework needs to be derived from the existing curriculum. However, some educational institutions integrate additional curriculum elements or content pertinent to the subject, while others promote the use of Google resources for students when fulfilling homework tasks. Finally, participants described this methodology in the following manner:

> HAPS schools place a higher value on real-world experience of the current content [S2, L1, and T1] while HAGS, focus on references and textbooks [S 7, L 4, and T 8]. MAPS maintained alignment but added other ideas to homework [S3, L 2, and T 4]. Yet, MAGS schools doesn't assign homework unrelated to the material [S 9, L 5, and T 10].In LAPS, homework delivery relates to the primary topic [S 6, L 3, and T 5] and in LAGS homework preparation includes extracurricular activities. [S 12, L 6, and T 11]

Most secondary schools have endeavored to design homework that is purposeful and meaningful, aiming to make homework interesting, engaging, and relevant to both the subject matter and the students' learning capacities. However, some institutions faced challenges in preparing such types of homework, as indicated by the respondents:

> Both HAPS and HAGS schools provide engaging, creative, and motivating homework. [S2, L1, T1 and S 8, L 4, T 7]. Nevertheless, MAPS and MAGS schools assign it by adding other values that do captivating and interesting homework. [S 4, L 2, T3 and S 9, L1, T 9]. Alternatively, in LAPS schools, it is difficult to prepare homework that meets every need of an individual. [S 5, L 3, T 6].In LAGS, in contrast, a standardized and excellent homework design is maintained. [S 11, L 6, and T 12]

The frequency with which content or homework is assigned to children is a significant consideration. In this context, some institutions regularly assign homework, while others do so infrequently. Consequently, respondents from each institution provided the following feedback:

> In both HAGS and HAGS schools, homework is assigned based on teachers' guidelines and schedules [S 1, L1, T2 and S 8, L 4, T 7] While in MAPS, schools give out additional homework each week [S 9, L 5, T 10] and in MAGS, schools English and math subjects are provided daily.[S 3, L 2, T 4]. LAPS schools usually provide homework once a week [S 5, L 3, T 6], while LAGS adhere to monthly and weekly timetables. [S 12, L 6, T 11]

Although the literature supports the preparation of homework tailored to the learning differences among children, some secondary school teachers take into account the learning difficulties and variations of their students when assigning homework, while others do not consider the learning challenges faced by their pupils, as suggested by various respondents:

> In preparing homework, HAPS school teachers do not consider the learning differences of children [S 1, L1, T2], but HAGS school teachers adapt homework to accommodate children's different learning styles [S 8, L 4, T 8]. Nevertheless, in both MAPS and MAGS, school teachers do not consider learning difficulties among children while designing homework. [S 4, L 2, T 3 and S 10, L 5, T 9]. As well, in LAPS and LAGS schools, teachers are not tailored based on student ability and struggle to give appropriate and pertinent homework. [S6, L3, T5 and S11, L6, T12]

Teacher's execution of Homework

The implementation of homework, alongside design elements, constitutes a significant factor in the successful execution of homework tasks. In this context, the volume of homework assigned to students is crucial; some schools impose an excessive amount that can be perceived as tedious and burdensome, while others assign a moderate quantity, with a few providing minimal assignments, as noted by informants:

Both high-achieving private and public secondary schools help to have a minimal amount of homework [S2, L1, T1 and S 8, L 4, T 7]. In MAPS, schools, significant homework loads are not encouraged [S 4, L 2, and T3]. In contrast, MAGS, schools persuade pupils to do as little homework as possible [S 9, L 5, T 10]. In LAPS, it is advised to assign eight to ten questions daily [S 5, L 3, T 6]. Yet, LAGS schools practice doing the least amount of homework possible. [S 11, L 6, T 11]

In relation to the availability of time for effective homework practices, certain schools advocate for an extended duration for children, while others recommend a more moderate amount of time. Consequently, respondents indicated that:

In HAPS schools, more time is recommended for setting aside enough homework [S 1, L1, and T2]. But in HAGS schools, children don't get sufficient play time [S 7, L 4, and T 7]. Similarly in medium-achieving private and public secondary schools, little time is provided for children to perform their homework tasks [S3, L 2, T 4 and S 9, L 5, T 10]. In schools, both private and public, that exhibit low academic performance, the challenges students face in the learning of respective grade levels are factored into the allocation of time designated for homework [S 5, L 3, T 6 and S 11, L 6, T 12]

The matter of overseeing and supervising homework represents a significant aspect of its implementation. Effective management and regulation of homework are crucial due to the prevalent lack of motivation and engagement among many children. Various viewpoints regarding homework monitoring were noted, as indicated by the informants:

Both high-achieving private and public schools periodically check on the completion, employ procedures, and arbitrary checks of homework [S2, L1, T1 and S 7, L 4, T 8]. As well, medium-achieving private schools observe their students daily [S3, L 2, T 4]. Yet, medium-achieving government schools monitor poorly, and plagiarism is common. [S 9, L 5, T 10]. Low-achieving private schools conduct observation to ensure that it is finished. [S 6, L 3, T 5]. In low-achieving government schools, however, seldom supervise their notes because of the large class size. [S 11, L 6, and T 12]

Children who fail to comply with homework assignments should face penalties, as suggested by various previous studies. The findings revealed that children who are reluctant to participate in their tasks are subject to certain consequences, as reported by informants:

In this perspective in HAPS schools children who disobey suffer some legal consequences. [S2, L 1, T1]. Similarly, in HAGS, it's normal to kneel in front of the class whenever they do not perform homework. [S 8, L 4, T 7]. As well, in medium-achieving private schools, some punishments were employed. [S3, L 2, T 4]. Also in MAGS schools reducing grades and reporting errors are commonly exercised.[S 9, L 5, T 10]. In addition, in both low-achieving private and public schools penalties including reporting, marking, and deducting of marks are employed. [S 6, L 3, T 5 and S 11, L 6, T 12]

Digital technologies enhance the execution of homework practices by providing children with access to information in a remarkably brief period. Furthermore, the findings revealed that a majority of teachers are presently utilizing digital technologies to offer feedback. Overall, these tools facilitate the distribution of questions and simplify communication with learners. Respondents also highlighted the tangible advantages of this technology as follows:

HAPS and HAGS school teachers have a positive view of the use of digital technology in homework. [S2, L1, T2 and S 7, L 4, T 8]. But in medium-achieving private secondary schools technology use effects that are both positive and negative [S3, L 2, T 4] while in MAGS schools children are dependent on social media [S 10, L 5, T 9]. According to LAPS, when

used carelessly, digital technology has detrimental effects [S 6, L 3, T 5] while it aids in efficiently distributing homework documents in LAGS. [S 12, L 6, T 11]

Teacher's assessment of Homework

The evaluation of homework constitutes the third aspect of teachers' engagement in the homework process. Following the design and execution of homework assignments, research indicates that the review of homework is a significant concern. In this context, providing feedback on students' work is a key component of the homework review process. The findings reveal that while some schools offer comments on homework, others refrain from doing so for various reasons, as reported by respondents:

HAPS schools offer helpful critiques [S2, L1, and T 2] while HAGS school children acknowledge their errors and are willing to accept the comments provided. [S 8, L 4, T 7]. Besides, MAPS, schools stress the importance of receiving constructive criticism [S 3, L 2, T 4] and in MAGS, schools' unfinished homework is regularly commented on.[S 9, L 5, T 10]. Likewise, low-performing private and public schools engage in editing and providing constructive criticism. [S 6, L 3, T 5 and S 11, L 6, T12]

The correction of homework constitutes an essential aspect of the homework review process. In this context, various strategies were utilized for the correction of homework assignments. Participants indicated the specific strategies implemented in different school environments as follows:

In High-achieving private and government schools, the four correction strategies (visible inspection, self-correcting, individual correcting, and reporting) are executed well. [S 1, L1, T2 and S 7, L 4, T 8]. However, in MAPS and MAGS schools, the visual inspection process is mostly employed. [S3, L 2, T 4 and S 9, L 5, T 10]. Similarly, in low-achieving private and public secondary schools visual inspection is employed to mark each student's work. [S5, L 3, T 6 and S12, L6, T11]

The examination of homework assessment indicated that specific private educational institutions utilize a grading system for homework, whereas some public schools do not consider homework in their grading criteria. In general, there is a practice of evaluating homework, although the application of this practice varies, as noted by the respondents:

In most HAPS schools, homework is graded and valued. [S2, L1, T1] and also in HAGS schools, approximately 10% of continuous assessment is part of homework. [S 7, L 4, T 8]. Similarly, in MAPS schools, 15% of continuous assessment relies on homework grading. [S 4, L 2, T3]. But in MAGS schools, homework is graded rarely. [S 9, L 5, T 10].Yet in low-achieving private secondary schools, grading is not uniform among subjects [S 6, L 3, T 5], and in low-achieving government schools, homework is not graded due to large class sizes. [S 11, L 6, T 12]

Teacher's perception of Homework

Educators' perspectives on homework significantly influence its design, implementation, and assessment. While certain teachers hold a favorable view of homework, others express skepticism. Furthermore, their beliefs can either enhance or impede the effectiveness of homework assignments. These viewpoints also shape the practices surrounding homework. Participants provide valuable insights into teachers' attitudes toward homework:

In HAPS and HAGS schools, nearly half of teachers dislike homework, preferring it over classwork due to the workload and questions. [S 1, L1, T2 and S 7, L 4, T 8]. Furthermore, in both MAPS and MAGS schools, teachers hold varying perspectives on homework, with some expressing favorable opinions while others convey negative sentiments. [S3, L 2, T 4 and S 9,

L 5, T 10]. LAPS school teachers reluctantly assign with negative views. [S 6, L 3, T 5].and also teachers in LAGS often perceive homework unfavorably, since the burdensome nature of large class sizes, difficulties maintaining control, and the discomfort associated with grading assignments. [S 11, L 6, T 12]

Studies indicate that inadequate time for homework correction has emerged as a significant challenge recognized by teachers to prepare and review homework. Because of this, most teachers express a negative attitude towards the process of preparing and reviewing homework, which was time-consuming. Regarding their perspectives on homework preparation and review, and times limitations, respondents have articulated the following:

In HAPS schools, the preparation and review of homework tasks every week are regarded as a more significant burden for teachers; however, a monthly approach is generally considered to be less demanding.[S2, L1, T1].While, teachers at HAGS schools maintain an optimistic perspective of homework, even in light of potential challenges.[S 7, L 4, T 8]. Teachers in MAPS are acknowledged for the significant responsibilities associated with preparing homework and providing feedback. [S3, L 2, T 4]. Yet, teachers in MAGS schools perceive that preparing and reviewing homework is an essential responsibility of teachers.[S 9, L 5, T 10].In LAPS schools, the substantial workloads experienced by teachers have a significant impact on their perceptions and attitudes regarding homework.[S 5, L 3, T 6]. And this is viewed unfavorably due to the substantial class sizes in LAGS. [S 12, L 6, T 11]

A significant issue related to the perception of teachers arises from parental criticism. Many parents express discontent regarding the assignment of homework, although not all educators agree with these critiques. In light of this matter, the respondents provided the following recommendations.

HAPS and HAGS school teachers value criticism, note the lack of parent follow-up on homework, are open to learning from mistakes, and suggest parental involvement. [S2, L1, T2, and S 7, L 4, and T 8]. In MAPS and MAGS schools, teachers recognize the value of constructive feedback in improving teaching methods and supporting students and address parental criticism positively to improve teaching. [S 4, L 2, T 3, and S 9, L 5, T 10]. In both LAPS and LAGS, parents of students assess teachers according to the homework given; however, they claim that the instruction provided by teachers is insufficient. [S 11, L 3, T 12 and S 5, L 3, T 12]

DISCUSSION

Teacher's craft of Homework

This section discussed the engagement of teachers in homework in private and public secondary schools and compares the results with previous studies. The study's findings connect with existing research, revealing four main themes: homework creation, execution, assessment, and perspectives. Teacher training significantly impacts how homework is designed. However, research by Landing (2009) suggests that many teachers lack adequate training for giving clear homework instructions. Many teachers across various school performance levels have not received enough college training in homework practices, and few attended relevant seminars. Holte (2016) urges teachers to make homework engaging and inspiring, but some high-performing schools struggle with this due to heavy workloads. Fitzmaurice et al. (2014) state that for homework to be effective, it should align with the school's curriculum, which is generally followed in most schools. On the other hand, government schools tailor homework to fit different learning styles, while high-performing schools focus on academic achievement. However, many private and public school teachers often do not consider students' skill levels when providing homework, which partly aligns with earlier research suggesting that homework should reflect students' varying abilities and learning challenges (Holte, 2016; Ndebele, 2018).

Teacher's execution of Homework

A thoughtfully crafted homework assignment can significantly enhance its effectiveness, provided that teachers are committed to implementing it with enthusiasm. The teacher plays a crucial role in setting the right amount of homework for students. Research indicates that a moderate amount of homework is better for children than having too little or too much (Keith, T. Z. 1986). It shows that secondary school students, regardless of their performance levels, are usually given a balanced amount of homework. Similarly, properly monitoring homework completion can improve student behavior and motivation in both private and public schools, but this is often lacking in large public school classes. Hence, studies have shown that such monitoring of homework can significantly enhance student behavior and motivation (Trautwein et al., 2006).

Students who do not fulfill their homework obligations may encounter various consequences: a decline in academic achievement, the necessity to kneel before their classmates, and the possibility of being referred to the school administration. This applies to private and public educational institutions, irrespective of the student's overall performance. Results are in agreement with a study by Katz et al. (2010) who recommended the establishment of consequences for those students who cannot fulfill their homework obligations. On the other hand, a study by Fitzmaurice et al. (2019) showed that teachers use various methods to correct homework, including individual feedback, self-correction, and visual checks. High-performing schools favor these methods and use digital technology for quicker feedback, while medium and low-performing schools have inconsistent outcomes with tech. According to NOUN (2008), school administrators must answer to the community regarding educational goals, and strong accountability enhances homework management in successful schools. In contrast, underperforming schools face challenges due to low accountability and weak teacher-student relationships.

Teacher's assessment of Homework

Different authors believed that the homework tasks needed to be evaluated. Teachers and parents believe that checking homework is important for student learning. While parents want teachers to correct assignments, those from average schools value feedback over grades. Homework should be short, but larger schools struggle to give effective comments. Research by Tautwein et al. (2006) supports the need for homework assessment and constructive feedback. Studies show that teachers provide parents with feedback on homework, which connects learning at home and school (Dor & Rucker-Naidu, 2012). Hence, high-performing and successful private schools emphasize homework feedback and grades. But public schools regard homework less in grades, and underperforming private schools face inconsistent grading due to class size issues.

Teacher's perception of Homework

Teachers' views on homework affect the assignments they give. In high-performing schools, opinions vary, and some teachers report stress. Average schools have mixed views, while teachers in low-performing schools often question homework's value, especially in struggling government schools. Research shows that teachers see homework as important for learning, developing self-regulation, managing time, and enhancing academic performance through practice (Trautwein et al., 2009). Homework preparation and review vary in perception among education systems. Private schools see it as a tough monthly challenge, while high-performing government school teachers view it positively. In contrast, low-performing schools face heavy workloads and large classes, affecting student attitudes, and research indicates that homework can be a significant challenge for teachers (Trauwein et al., 2006).

Fleisher and Ohel (1974) revealed that parents often criticize teachers, which can make teachers feel powerless and weaken their authority. However, some teachers appreciate feedback from parents about homework, as it helps improve teaching and student progress. In struggling schools, parents are dissatisfied with the quality of homework and teaching. The use of digital technology has

mixed effects; while it can enhance learning, it may also lead to problems like addiction. Teachers are a bit wary of using the internet for assigning homework, though they do not oppose it as before (Kolikant, 2010).

CONCLUSION

The research examined teacher engagement in homework across both private and public secondary schools, analyzing the levels of involvement among educators in these two types of institutions. The perceptions, design, implementation, and evaluation of homework vary significantly between public and private secondary schools. Many teachers show a lack of thoroughness in planning and grading homework, despite private schools often achieving better results. There are no clear guidelines for homework practices, and most teachers do not see homework's academic value positively. This variability in teachers' strategies for assigning homework highlights the need to align tasks with the curriculum and address students' diverse learning needs. Factors like homework's difficulty level, type, frequency, and quantity vary significantly across schools, impacting student engagement and academic success. Effective homework management by teachers is key to boosting student involvement, but private and public schools implement these practices differently. The use of digital technologies and accountability also affects how homework is given, with challenges and benefits that depend on the school's environment.

Additionally, grading and feedback on homework differ widely, with some schools focusing on constructive criticism while others do not, which can harm student learning. Teachers' attitudes towards homework greatly influence its effectiveness, revealing a mix of positive and negative views. The study calls for tailored strategies and updated policies to improve homework engagement by teachers and foster a better educational environment, ultimately aiming to enhance student outcomes.

Implications and Practices

The research focused on how teachers create, implement, assess, and view homework in private and public secondary schools in Addis Ababa. It found both types of schools have strengths and weaknesses, with differences in teachers' engagement levels. Monitoring teachers' attitudes towards homework is important for understanding challenges they face and can help improve students' learning experiences and academic performance. Teachers should approach homework positively, recognizing that the home environment plays a key role in education. Proper implementation of homework practices is essential for quality learning. The Ministry of Education is encouraged to update policies regarding crafting, executing, assessing, and perception of homework while promoting better teaching methods and providing effective homework training for teachers at colleges as well as on careers. Additionally, raising awareness among parents is crucial for helping their children with homework and establishing effective communication channels among parents, teachers, and schools is essential.

Limitations

The research presents certain limitations that influence its conclusions. It primarily examines a selection of government and private secondary schools, which complicates the generalization of the findings to other educational institutions across the nation. Subsequent studies should investigate this subject in a broader range of environments. Additionally, time constraints faced by teachers and school administrators challenged the collection of interview data. Private schools exhibited reluctance in sharing information due to concerns about potential negative repercussions, in contrast to their government counterparts. The analysis of the extensive interview data proved to be both challenging and time-intensive. Nevertheless, the researcher successfully completed the paper, gaining insights into patience and resilience throughout the process. Regular visits to the study locations facilitated the management of these obstacles.

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Changing from a Two-Model System back to a One-Model System: A Qualitative Study on an International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Program English Department from the Perceptions of the Teachers as the School Responds to Educational Reforms and IB Requirements

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Abstract

International Baccalaureate (IB) Chinese Internationalised Schools who teach compulsory education are tasked with meeting the demands of both the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the IB. This follow-up study documents the transition of a Middle Years Program English department from a Two-Model System back to a One-Model System to meet requirements of both respective authorities. Advantages of the One-Model System are presented including communication, but continued disadvantages highlighted in the Two-Model system are also present, specifically the appropriateness of the MYP for students of low level English ability. Assessment tensions are underscored with school leadership forcing MYP teachers to inflate MYP summative assessment scores while also requiring teachers to implement unstandardized in-house Chinese National Curriculum 'based' examinations. Scores from both forms of assessment were used interchangeably as a measurement to determine student phasing. Reasons for these assessment policy changes were related to parents, marketing, and preparation for Chinese national examinations. The use of inflated MYP assessment scores and non-standardized in-house examinations raises questions about the legitimacy of this CIS's MYP English teaching and learning practices and perhaps the greater Chinese context as CIS who to teach the MYP implement policies to meet MOE CNC examination requirements.

Keywords: International Baccalaureate, Chinese Internationalised Schools, Two-Model System, One-Model System, Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

This follow-up study, along with the initial study (Clark & Terrett, 2024), is in response to Bunnell's (2020) invitation to scholars to investigate "significant transformations... in the characteristics, purpose, and identity of certain institutions... particularly from those with firsthand experience of these changes within…mainland China" (p. 3), as international schools undergo a transitional period. This article also looks to provide findings for scholars such as Wright et al. (2022a) who have called on researchers to provide authentic accounts for how Chinese IB schools are adapting to education reforms. Two types of international schools are found in the Chinese education system. This first is the traditional understanding of an international school, termed Type-A in the literature (Hayden & Thompson, 2013), designated as 'Schools for Children of Foreign Workers' in the Chinese context.

The second type of international school is non-traditional, termed Chinese Internationalized Schools (CISs) in the literature, which have seen rapid growth in China (Keeling, 2019; Poole, 2020). These schools cater to affluent Chinese stakeholders and teach some form of British, American, or Canadian curriculum (Wu & Koh, 2022a). A hallmark of these schools is their bilingual curriculum and employment of both expatriate teachers and local Chinese mainland teachers. Poole (2020) states "CISs are characterised by the coexistence of national and international orientations which are often in tension, leading to dissonance" (p. 6).

This dissonance is further exacerbated by Ministry of Education (MOE) policies which limit, restrict, or completely censor foreign curricula (Deng et al., 2023). Wright et al. (2022a) report the MOE tightened regulations for CISs beginning in 2021 with the introduction of policies such as the banning of foreign textbooks, but mention some schools work around these restrictions by offering international curriculum as extension or integrated courses. The ability for schools to integrate the CNC and a foreign curriculum have been called into question by some researchers (Poole, 2016).

The context of the present study, a CIS middle school English department, is the same as a previous study conducted by the same researchers (Clark & Terrett, 2024) who documented the dissonance this department experienced as the school tried to find a means to satisfy both the International Baccalaureate (IB) and the new reform policies enacted by the MOE. The CIS's leadership decided to create what they branded an AB model, which for clarity Authors (2024) later termed a "Two-Model" system, in the middle school English department to meet the demands of both organisations. Model-A would be tasked with teaching the CNC and Model-B would teach the MYP. School leadership marketed the Two-Model system to parents as a blended approach combining the best aspects of both curricula. Results indicated the 'integration' between the CNC and the MYP for the department between the two Models was to the degree that both could be conceptually understood as constituting the English department, but teachers' perceptions defined the two Models as being completely separate in practice (Clark & Terrett, 2024). This was the first documented case, to our knowledge, of a CIS implementing a framework in which both curricula were taught independently by a single department under the guise of integration. This follow-up study explores and reassesses teachers' perceptions in the same English department as these teachers transitioned from the Two-Model system back to a One-Model system.

Theoretical Framework

This study continued to use Albert and Whetten's (1985) organisational identity as the lens to view participant responses. Researchers believe the collective understandings of the participants regarding the English department's identity to be central and reasonably permanent, created from the interactions between members of the department which was established in the seminal study (Clark & Terrett, 2024). In alignment with organisational identity, multiple identities were identified which were influenced by internal and external factors (Authors, 2024; Pratt and Foreman, 2000) leading to synergy and dissonance. The continued use of organisational identity is appropriate for this study and is justified by an organisation's identity forever being fluid and dependent upon the members of the

organisation as well as changing external factors. In this case, some members left the department while the department dropped the Two-Model system and transitioned back to a One-Model system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chinese Internationalized Schools (CISs)

CISs are schools which cater to an affluent Chinese middle-class and offer a foreign bilingual curriculum to Chinese students delivered by Chinese and expatriate teachers (Poole, 2020) The Chinese faculty normally outnumber the expatriate faculty (Gaskell, 2019; Poole, 2020). These schools provide an alternative route for stakeholders who lack the means to access the local public schools or for students who have failed out of the public school system (Young, 2018).

This is particularly salient for students entering their high school years due to the structure of the Chinese education system; specifically, the Zhongkao, the high school entrance exam, and the Gaokao, the university entrance exam. Students who fail the Zhongkao do not get placed in a high school and instead move to vocational or technical schools. Students who perform poorly may be placed in a low-ranked high school meaning their chances of accessing a top Chinese university are negligible due to the difficulty of the Gaokao. Students who enrol in a CIS high school program are not required to take the Zhongkao to gain entrance and in entering a CIS high school program are exempt from taking the Gaokao. In doing so, students forfeit their right to a Chinese university education to access a potentially higher quality of education compared to the trajectory of attending a vocational school or a low-ranked high school. We note this can be assumed for the majority of students attending CISs, there still remains a minority of high academic achieving students who choose CISs as a pathway to elite universities.

Most research on CISs regarding the IB in China is focused on the IB Diploma Program (DP). However, the IB consists of four programs including the Primary Years Program (PYP), Middle Years Program (MYP), Diploma Program (DP), and the Career-related Program (CP). The research presented in this study is unique due to the context being an IBCIS MYP. This context is significantly different compared to the IBDP context due to the curriculum restrictions placed on PYP and MYP CISs which are not apparent in IBDP CISs.

The PYP and MYP run from grades 1 to 9 which is designated as compulsory education in China. Schools who serve these student populations are prohibited from using foreign curricula and textbooks (CPC Central Committee and State Council, 2019; MOE, 2020). Wu and Koh (2022b) found some schools renamed their programs, realigned content with the CNC, and increased students' exposure to Chinese history, culture, and technological advancements in order to promote patriotism. Mandatory flag raising ceremonies for these schools can also be viewed as supporting this increase in patriotism (Wright et al., 2022b). Deng et al., (2023) have referred to this as the fourth phase of IB development in China which they termed "localization". Previously there was a focus on integration between the IB and CNC, now however the emphasis is on placing the CNC and Chinese identity at the core of education (Deng et al., 2023). This increase in patriotism across the curriculum creates dissonance, requiring schools to reevaluate their position in the Chinese education system and adapt to policy changes.

Authors (2024) documented how one MYP CIS implemented what was later termed a Two-Model system to meet the demands of both the IB and the MOE. School leadership reorganised an MYP English department creating what leadership designated a Model-A group and a Model-B group. Model-A was tasked with teaching the CNC and Model-B the IB. Although this new Two-Model system was marketed to parents as an integrated model with their respective subject matter experts which would benefit students more compared to the previous One-Model system, the Two-Model system was abandoned the following year in favour of returning to a One-Model system. There were several challenges when implementing the Two-Model system.

Structural Challenges (Department Organization, Time, Classes)

The first challenge was the structural organisation between the Model-A and Model-B. Model-A and Model-B, even though under the umbrella term of the English department, had two separate line-managers who met infrequently. Model-A and Model-B even met separately in what were colloquially termed "department" meetings even though the entire department, both Model-A and Model-B, members were not present. Both Models shared the same open-plan office space, but most members were separated by an invisible line which divided the office. Only one member of Model-A located their desk in an area which was otherwise Model-B terrain. The first time both Models met was when the original study was first presented. Teachers' time schedules also made regular full department meetings impossible.

Another structural challenge was student placement in classes. Before implementing the Two-Model system, leadership was informed collaboration between Models would only be possible if both Models' students were phased into the same classes so these same classes could be taught by teachers from both Models. Mode-B phased students, a requirement of the MYP, based on Aptis data as a means of measuring student language ability, with the Aptis test sat once each year. Leadership decided not to phase students for Model-A and did not provide reasoning to support this decision. One possible reason may have been staffing, with Model-A not having enough teachers to cover the number of Model-B phased classes. At the beginning of the second semester, leadership decided to phase Model-A classes. This may be seen as an attempt to appease parents instead of authentic phasing because these classes again were not phased according to Model-B, but independently based on Model-A test results. Parents were seen as being a powerful force of change in the school by both Models and is similar to reports by Wu and Koh (2022b, p.14) who found "pressure from parents, making it nearly a 'must' for international schools to follow their demands."

Conceptual Challenges

Both Models presented different collective understandings of their and the other Model's identities. Model-A viewed themselves as Chinese teachers with a focus on teaching grammar, reading, vocabulary, and writing. Model-A teachers described these aspects of language as the basic precepts or core for language acquisition. Model-A saw Model-B teachers as Western and teaching listening and speaking with a focus on project-based learning. While Model-A was composed of only teachers of Chinese nationality, Model-B was composed of both expatriates and teachers of Chinese nationality. Model-B had more Chinese nationals than expatriate teachers. Model-B saw themselves as IB, but like Model-A reports, this was also reported by some Model-B teachers as being Western. Model-B also saw their instruction as appropriate for students with higher levels of English ability. Model-B viewed Model-A as Chinese teachers teaching the CNC with a focus on examination.

Dissonance was evident in the perceptions of both Models. Model-A was found to not be implementing the government mandated CNC, but instead a government-approved textbook due to most students having surpassed the CNC provided English textbooks. Similar to Wu and Koh's (2022b) findings, Authors (2024) documented a shift to adopt government approved textbooks. Wu and Koh (2022b) documented school leaders stating these textbooks as being government-mandated. This is in contrast to Authors (2024) who recorded teachers selecting government "approved" textbooks to use. This could be an area of the law for which CIS schools who serve compulsory years may be still trying to navigate.

Model-A also believed MYP English Language Acquisition (ELA) was mostly a communicative curriculum and did not stress what they called "core" skills necessary for language learning. The MYP requires assessments to be authentic and this could have been the reason for why Model-A believed the MYP ELA was project-based and communicative in nature. This could have also influenced Model-B teachers' reports where teachers saw communicative skills as the basis for language acquisition while Model-A stressed grammar and vocabulary.

Student challenges were also present. Teachers reported the difficulties students had adapting to both curricula. Students essentially had double the workload. Students went to two different classes, did two different sets of homework, and sat two different assessments. Students were also confused when courses or teachers seemed to contradict each other. Students with higher levels of English were reported by some Mode-A teachers as seeing Model-A being below them, causing classroom behaviour issues.

Response to Challenges

All teachers believed the Two-Model system could be improved. Most suggestions centred around better ways to integrate the Models including shared meeting times, shared classes, shared teaching, and a shared curriculum. After a meeting to present results, many teachers voiced the idea of developing a structural alignment of a shared system with students taking Model classes based on English ability. Specifically, Model-A could focus on the "core" skills for lower level English ability students by teaching more periods each week for lower-phased students. The example given was if students had 6 periods of English a week, 4-5 periods could be Model-A and 1-2 Model-B. This scale was not succinctly defined and was only discussed with the opposite being true for students with high English ability. The question arose from teacher-researchers what would distinguish this new form of integrated Two-Model system from a One-Model system.

Integrated or One-Model Systems

The MYP may be able to adapt to the MOE requirements while also providing an 'international' education. Without prescribed textbooks, the MYP is not in violation of the MOE's strict textbook policies. The MYP uses conceptual understandings to organise the curriculum which allow for teachers to populate and align content, including government-mandated content, while still maintaining MYP practices. This is not to say there are no difficulties in aligning compulsory education with the MYP.

Perry et al. (2018) noted MYP teacher perceptions of obeying "two masters" when adhering to MYP and Australian national curriculum standards. This tension caused teachers an increase in "workload and stress" (p. 4). However, teachers did report integration was "not impossible. It just makes life a bit tougher" (p. 4). Timetables, professional support, planning, and resource allocation were all challenges reported by teachers (Perry et al., 2018). Sizmur and Cunningham (2013) recorded 61% of their sample of UK MYP teachers reporting encountering problems when teaching the MYP. One teacher reported schools should choose either the UK national curriculum or the MYP curriculum, but not both. This statement was linked to the tension teachers felt in meeting assessment demands of both with most teachers reporting to focus on the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) over the MYP.

Final responses from teachers went as far as recommending "Don't try to do it (MYP) in parallel with another qualification if you want it (MYP) to be meaningful. Don't do it (MYP) alongside anything else. All or nothing!" (p. 42). Other public schools which teach a national curriculum and the MYP have given up the MYP due to the difficulty in meeting the demands of both curricula standards (Dickson et al., 2020). Within the Chinese context, Deng et al. (2023) cite two Chinese CNC subject-matter experts promoting the IB philosophy over the exam-oriented textbook-based Chinese education system. Some of the problems mentioned in the integrated One-Model system: timetabling, planning, lack of teacher support, assessment confusion (Perry et al., 2018; Sizmur & Cunningham, 2013); are similar to issues found in the Two-Model (Clark & Terrett, 2024).

The purpose of this study was to continue to explore teachers' perceptions within a MYP CIS English department as the department continued to meet the demands of both the IB and MOE standards. This follow-up study provides micro-level insights to the macro-level changes observed by researchers (Bunnell, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The previous study employed qualitative methodology in the form of a case study through individual interviews. This study looked to again explore teacher perceptions using qualitative case study design which was deemed most appropriate to provide insights to the given research questions:

RQ1: How do you feel about the One-Model system compared to your previous experience of the Two-Model system from last year?

RQ2: What are the advantages or disadvantages of the One-Model system compared to a Two-Model system?

RQ3: How do you feel about the IB and its appropriateness as a curriculum to teach Chinese students?

The focus of the previous study was on individual perceptions outside the influence of the group to explore how the department's identity was formed by the teachers who made up the Models. In this way we created a bottom-up analysis allowing us to collate themes which were shared or not shared across the group. These themes also provided insights on the difficulties in implementing a Two-Model curriculum as a means to satisfy both curriculum standards. The identity of the organisation is somewhat set from the last study, and with the return to a One-Model system, as mandated by school leadership, we decided to implement a focus group in lieu of traditional case study interviews. We chose to use a focus group to allow for teachers to build off each other's perceptions. Focus groups are suitable when researching understandings which emerge through group interaction (Cohen et al., 2018). We believed these "group" understandings were most appropriate in answering the research questions and the design was more aligned with the purpose of the study. The department was no longer two separate Models, instead having been placed into One-Model, with the aim of the school leadership to create an integrated department teaching an integrated curriculum. We had also already discussed the previous study's findings which helped to foster feelings of teachers belonging to a single department further strengthening the "group" mentality. One researcher served as a moderator facilitating the discussion (Cohen et al., 2018).

Participants

Clark who served as moderator did not participate in the discussion. The researcher no longer worked at the study site, but participated in the research as the focus group discussion facilitator (Cohen et al., 2018). Terrett took on the role of researcher-participant and participated in the focus group discussion as they were still an active member of the department. The English department is composed of 10 teachers. Two of these teachers are expatriates and the other 8 are Chinese Nationals. Three of the teachers are male while 7 teachers are female. All 10 teachers participated in the study and no new hires were made so from the original study 4 teachers were Model-A and the other 6 were Model-B (Author, 2024). Of the 10 teachers, 6 teachers are new to the One-Model system whereas 4 teachers have experience with both the One-Model and Two-Model system. All teachers of Chinese nationality teache the MYP ELA. The expatriate teachers support MYP ELA instruction by providing once a week listening and speaking to different ELA classes. The expatriate teachers are the only teachers who instruct the MYP English Language and Literature (ELL) students.

Data Collection and Analysis

Terrett presented a request in a department meeting for volunteers to participate in the follow-up study. Teachers discussed time schedules and decided the end of the semester would be most convenient. This also gave teachers the opportunity to experience final assessment under the new One-Model system potentially providing more important insights. Teachers suggested the focus group occur over Wechat, a Chinese messaging application. This was agreed upon by everyone with participants stating convenience and the preference to not conduct the study at school. This is of note,

teachers implied this may provide more 'valid' data. Also, researchers noted this format would leave a clear record of discussion and could help to address a limitation of focus groups where participants sometimes dominate discussion leaving others without the opportunity to voice their opinions (Cohen et al., 2018). All participants were given informed consent and understood their participation was voluntary. They were made aware their responses would be kept anonymous and they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Clark facilitated group discussion by posing research questions and prompts into the chat group. Teachers responded to both the facilitator's prompts and each other. Clark judged when an appropriate amount of time had passed, and qualified this by asking "Would anyone else like to respond to the discussion or the prompt before moving on". When no responses were given to the affirmative, Clark submitted the next research question or prompt. This was done in succession until all research questions and prompts had been asked. The discussion lasted several days and, after the data had been moved to secure files for analysis, the chat group was deleted.

Thematic analysis was conducted individually by manually reviewing and revisiting the participant responses obtained from the focus group, with a focus on identifying thematic content (Cohen et al., 2018). After establishing themes and categories, we convened to examine the emerging patterns, areas of agreement, and points of divergence in our analyses (Cohen et al., 2018). Consensus was reached on the identified themes and supporting evidence, which are presented below.

FINDINGS

One Department Fostering Collaboration and Communication

There were apparent advantages of the One-Model system over the Two-Model system regarding communication and group dynamics. One teacher remarked on how they felt more like they were part of a team:

> I feel like we are on the same boat.

Another teacher discussed how the One-Model system allowed for better communication.

All English teachers are together in the same department, so no separation based on Model. That was really weird last year, when we didn't know what each other were doing.

The use of past tense and referring to last year "we didn't know what each other were doing" implies under the One-Model system teachers are aware of the teaching and learning occurring in each other's classrooms. The above statement was met with affirmations from other group members lending emphasis to this "same department so no separation".

This communication and sharing were mentioned by one teacher as they were transitioning to become a first year MYP teacher.

> *The good thing is our department is one, no separation anymore, and much thanks to* [other Teachers] *for their help.*

The single department appears to better facilitate teachers in lending support, particularly veteran teachers helping novice teachers who are unfamiliar with MYP practices and standards. One teacher reported the One-Model system was better than the Two-Model, and that the One-Model was an "*IB system*". Another teacher focused on the student experience:

> *Returning to the One-Model IB system was the right choice for the students.*

No teacher disagreed with this statement nor did any teacher state the One-Model system was inappropriate or worse than the Two-Model system. As the teachers responded to each other in the focus group, new understandings and new definitions for terms emerged to describe this evolving One-Model system differentiating it from the Two-Model system.

Evolving Understanding of the One-model System

There was no distinction made between the One-Model system and the MYP indicating teachers had conceptually equated the One-Model system as being IB MYP.

> *The One-Model system is like the IB teaching model.*

One teacher discussed the relationship between the IB and the CNC in the One-Model system, which had previously been the criterion for separating the Model-A (CNC) and Model-B (MYP) in the Two-Model system.

> *The original unit plans are based on the provided CNC textbooks. We merely adapted the content to work within an IB (MYP) curriculum.*

Teachers regarded the MYP as positioned above the CNC from which it draws its foundation. While no teacher indicated the MYP was inappropriate for students, there was discussion on the appropriateness of curriculum focus and teaching methods depending on students' MYP phase. The MYP phases students for ELA with phase 1 being the lowest and phase 6 being the highest. In the study context, these phases represented almost the full range of CEFR framework levels from A1 through to C1. Students C1 and C2 had the choice to join the English language and Literature class. While discussing phasing, teachers began to change the use of the term *Model-A* from previous understandings.

> *For lower phased students, they should actually study Model-A first till they get enough input and learned basic vocabulary, grammar, accumulated basic reading and listening comprehension skills, and then move to IB model.*

Model-A is no longer associated with CNC, but is now beginning to evolve into a term meaning "*basic*" language skills. The lower phase focus on these basic language skills was echoed by another teacher:

> *Specifically focusing on remedial language acquisition … for phase 1 and 2*

This statement was agreed upon by many of the teachers with everyone relating Model-A to remedial English and later with traditional pedagogy. One teacher explained the differences between the Model-A (language) and Model-B (inquiry) in terms of teaching practices.

> *Teachers need to balance the language part and inquiry part. Especially for lower phase kids, the inquiry part has to be reduced greatly, which would also lead to a teacher-centred class. Coz I don't think we have the luxury to do inquiry about grammar rules.*

Along with "*basic*" language skills, "*remedial language*" and "*language input*" are both associated with the Model-A. One teacher described the Model-B or the MYP as being "*communicative*" in approach while the Model-A was more about content "*accuracy*". However, these were not necessarily seen at odds and in fact were seen as beneficial.

> *Communicative approach prepares students for real-life situations…language accuracy… is beneficial for students' (academic) writing in the future.*

Both practices (the former Model-A and Model-B) are seen as beneficial for students depending on their phase, communicative ability and accuracy of target language use. However, Model-A assessments were a source of tension for teachers. The discourse around assessment became a major theme for teachers.

Assessment Issues

Despite the absence of a formal distinction between Model-A and Model-B within the classroom, assessment practices stemming from the Two-Model system still endured. The MYP ELA only requires summative assessments based on four criteria with corresponding strands (IB, 2020). However, school leadership at this study site decided to keep the tests associated with Model-A in the Two-Model system which were drawn from the Cambridge English Qualifications.

> *Every half semester, we mark two* [MYP] *summative assessments and one KET/PET test.*

In-house language proficiency examinations were developed taking questions from the Cambridge English Qualifications Key English Test (KET), Preliminary English Test (PET), and CNC. These in-house examinations were later used as an alternative measurement to determine student phasing, meaning students had the potential to move either up or down. These language assessments were given as in-house midterm and end of semester exams.

> *Midterm and end of semester* [in-house] *exam data , now seems to carry as much weight as Aptis or MYP summative assessment data, and is now a consideration in English phasing.*

One teacher conveyed the belief these exams are intended to motivate students based on fear of demotion.

> *The role that assessment are playing is really to push…students. Coz they don't wanna be kicked down.*

One teacher expressed how this format does not seem to motivate lower phase students.

> *You know what 1-2 students always say to me after the* [MYP] *summative assessment? "We are stuck with you. You can't really drop us to even a lower phase class, right?*

Of note, where one teacher states the in-house examination scores are taken into "*consideration in English phasing"* alluding they are used in tandem with IB summative assessment scores, this is later clarified by the same teacher who expresses how MYP assessment scores are being manipulated by school leadership.

> [School leadership] *After evaluating the term grades* [MYP summative assessments]*, Heads of departments and teachers were called in to discuss why students had not achieved the "agreed upon" grades.*

This issue with summative assessments not achieving "*agreed upon*" grades is not limited to the English department as this teacher references "*Heads of departments*" attending the meeting. This same teacher saw this change in practice as the school leadership moving away from the IB (MYP).

> *School leadership itself does not have faith in IB… It seems like the IB is becoming more of a marketing tool than a legitimate education system in this school.*

Another teacher believed the exams were a means to align with educational reforms.

> *The whole point of midterm of end of semester exams* [in-house examination] *is to make sure the integration hasn't got CNC totally outta the picture, plus to cope with the inspection from education bureau.*

A large amount of time seemed to be spent by teachers *"training* [students] *for standardised exam"*. Time was a pressing issue for teachers with one teacher stating *"the problem is, time will not wait"* referencing the tension between MYP practices such as inquiry-based learning and the pressure to complete content in preparation for in-house examinations. Underlying these assessment issues was the perceived influence of parents who seemed to be the motivating force for the assessment policies and phasing.

> *I mean, we can't really say "your kids are not meant for IB (MYP)" to their parents, right?*

Other teachers discussed potential issues in presenting actual MYP standard assessment scores and depicted a three-way relationship between school leadership, parents, and the marketing department.

> *We would expect results* [MYP summative assessment scores] *to drop significantly and therefore, again, it is unlikely to be welcomed by school leaders or parents, and certainly won't be appreciated by marketing dept.*

Teachers appear to believe leadership is inflating grades to appeal to parents who have purchased or who may be considering purchasing a product, the IB. This is concurrent with the previous teacher's earlier mention of marketing trumping educational value. One teacher summed up these assessment policies and changes.

> *Assessment is no longer meaningful, cuz they* [leadership] *can always change the result into whatever they* [leadership] *want after* [assessment] *has been taken.*

This apparently is now the case at the study site as during discussion, teachers received a new assessment phasing policy which presented new criteria for English class placement that had been changed by leadership. These new criteria were not discussed with the department, nor did any teacher agree with the changes or voice they were beneficial for student learning.

DISCUSSION

The focus group served as a platform for the department to openly address and comprehend the challenges it encountered moving from the Two-Model to One-Model system. Teachers individually raised these issues, which were subsequently acknowledged, validated, and expanded upon by their colleagues, as indicated by the findings. A collective synergy emerged around teachers' perspectives, contributing to the solidification of the department's identity through active participation in this collaborative endeavour.

The advantage of the One-Model system over the Two-Model system appears to be an increase in teacher communication, an increase in peer support, and an increase in feelings of team camaraderie. In the original study (Clark & Terrett, 2024), there was the repeated use of the word "separate". Teachers in this study reported the One-Model system as being in the "same boat", "same department", with "no separation". The use of the phrase "same boat" implies a sense of team unity for which members are working together towards a goal. This feeling helped to foster an environment where teachers supported each other, particularly teachers new to the MYP.

Whereas in the previous study many teachers did not appear to interact across models, the discussion in this focus group saw teachers, who previously would not speak to each other, affirm and build off each other's statements facilitating discussion and collaboration. This led to synergy around

group understandings, one such understanding being the terms "Model-A" and "Model-B", which were still used by teachers to describe teaching practices. Models were equated with teaching practices as well as pedagogy, such as Model-B being student-centred and Model-A being teacher-centred, and not content like in the previous study where Model-B teachers reported the Model-A as being CNC.

Ostensibly this is because teachers used the CNC textbooks as the base to build the MYP framework therefore integrating the content into One-Model. In the previous study (Clark & Terrett, 2024), Model-A teachers labelled their teaching as "basic language input" and "teacher-centric" which now seems to be synonymous with the term "Model-A". "Model-B" and the "One-Model" system were used interchangeably by teachers who describe both as focusing on "inquiry-based" learning. Previously Model-A teachers had described the MYP as "spoken" and about "output", this no longer seems to be the case. This demonstrates the fluid nature of the department's identity as the individual teachers negotiate group and individual understandings. It also reinforces the teachers' own perceptions regarding the improvements in departmental communication.

All teachers hold the belief the MYP ELA is appropriate for students with higher levels of academic and English ability which is similar to the first study (Clark & Terrett, 2024). All teachers voiced the concern of the appropriateness of MYP inquiry-based learning for students with limited language ability and study skills. All teachers were of the opinion lower phased classes would benefit most from more direct instruction on basic language skills such as vocabulary and grammar. These are the same opinions made in the first study (Clark & Terrett, 2024) and are consistent with recommended practices for second language learning (Goo et al., 2015).

The integration of the MYP and CNC by CISs is not new to the Chinese education system. Deng et al. (2023) delineate the integration of the IB and the CNC during a two-year period spanning 2016 to 2018 but assert this integration phase concluded with the onset of 2019, a phase they term as *'strict restriction'* (Deng et al., 2023, p. 8). Deng et al. (2023) have even quoted policymakers stating that MYP, under the new educational reforms, to be illegal for all compulsory education, yet the CIS in our study still implements the MYP as a framework. However, similar to Deng et al.'s (2023) findings, national examination pressure seems to be influencing this study site's assessment policies and additionally may be impacting phasing policy for English language. In addition, during the writing of this article, teachers were informed government exams would begin to be implemented to monitor student learning at the CIS. Phasing and assessment led to the largest dissonance under the One-Model system as described by teachers.

Phases were connected to assessment as phase placement was determined using assessment scores. Phasing is required by the MYP for ELA but not required by the MOE. MYP assessments, in which teachers reported scores being inflated at the direction of the study site's leadership, were given the same weight as in-house examinations. These in-house examinations were not standardised, not aligned to the MYP, nor were the original examinations for which the in-house examination was populated from created with the intention to be implemented as a means of phasing students, and did not measure the top three CEFR bands (Cambridge Assessment English, 2019, p.2). However, these in-house examinations appear to be loosely aligned to the CNC.

One teacher postulated the emphasis on in-house examinations as being a requirement of the local education bureau. The connection between the use of an unstandardized exam with content questions populated from multiple English language curricula and the Chinese local education bureau test was unclear to teachers. Potentially these in-house exams, which are not used by Chinese education bureaus for examination purposes, were seen by MYP leadership as better preparation for local education bureau tests compared to MYP summative assessments.

A result of inflating MYP assessment scores by school leadership as well as the use of unstandardized in-house examinations is inaccurate student data. Questions then arise about the ethicality of the decision making processes by the study site's leadership, and the apparent misuse of data to make data-driven learning decisions. The focus by school leadership on artificially increasing

MYP summative assessment scores had some teachers questioning the legitimacy of the MYP practised within the study site's context, perhaps lending credence to Chinese State media scrutiny which has depicted IB CISs as corrupt for-profit institutions who have questionable "school-management" (Wright et al., 2022a, p. 8). However, it is promising that all teachers involved in the study did not agree with leaderships' actions to change student scores which challenges that same State media which has described teachers at IB CISs as "low quality" (Wright et al., 2022a, p. 8).

Parents were one reason alluded to by teachers for why school leadership was concerned with student scores. Parents seem to be a major stakeholder with teachers reporting not being able to communicate with parents about actual student performance "*I mean, we can't really say "your kids are not meant for IB (MYP)"*".Wu and Koh (2022b) discuss how parents are a powerful force at international schools for which these schools 'must' follow their demands (p. 14). The parent demand for inflated MYP scores and the use of unstandardized in-house examinations at the study site was not corroborated. However the new assessment policies were tied to parents with one teacher remarking how parents may not welcome actual student MYP performance scores and therefore the school's image would suffer, leading to challenges for marketing and finance.

One teacher believed the IB had become little more than a marketing tool for the school, and another stated they believed leadership had lost confidence in the MYP even though the MYP is what parents were paying for. School leadership appears to have manipulated grades and phasing criteria based on marketing which is related to parents as they are the purchasers of the product (the school). The implementation of in-house examinations to prepare students for national examination has been confirmed as MYP teachers were informed near the end of study that students would be sitting standardised local education bureau tests. However, how the in-house unstandardized examination, which is only partially and loosely based on the CNC, is supposed to support student preparation for Chinese local education bureau tests was not determined by teachers.

LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge the inherent limitations associated with qualitative methodology used in this study. Foremost among these limitations is the challenge of generalizability, as findings derived from our focus group may not be applicable to broader CIS populations or contexts. Furthermore, the subjectivity inherent in our study such as one researcher also having the role of participant can introduce biases in data collection, analysis, and interpretation, potentially compromising the validity of the findings. We justify the need for one of the researchers to participate based on the context of the study and the researcher being a member of the population of interest. We kept bias to a minimum by analysing findings separately before coming together to discuss results. Despite these challenges, acknowledging and addressing the limitations, we believe the study presented maintains a high level of integrity and rigour with results which are beneficial for similar contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the transition from a Two-Model to a One-Model system in CISs integrating the IB and the CNC. It underscored the advantages of the One-Model approach, emphasising enhanced teacher communication, peer support, and team camaraderie. However, despite the shift towards integration, terminology reflecting teaching practices persisted, albeit with an evolving understanding of pedagogical approaches. The study highlighted a broader tension between MYP integration and compliance with national examination standards, with CISs facing pressure to define their assessment practices and their use. School leadership's decision to manipulate MYP assessment scores related to marketing, ostensibly to assuage parental concerns about shifts in teaching, learning and assessment practice, raised questions about the fidelity of MYP implementation and underscored the influence of parental expectations on educational practices within CISs. Future research should explore the nuanced dynamics between school leadership decisions, parental demands, and student learning outcomes, particularly in navigating the complexities of international education environments and ensuring the integrity of educational frameworks amidst evolving policy landscapes.

The IB should reflect on the results presented paying particular attention to assessment and its relationship to school authorization. The IB, while not directly enabling CISs, play a major role in their legitimacy as institutions in the eyes of stakeholders.

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