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Table of Contents

The role of play in early childhood education curricula in Greece and the world: A systematic literature review <i>Maria Stamatoglou</i> https://doi.org/10.30935/mjosbr/14184	3-12
Compulsive Internet usage and social isolation among university students in Malaysia: Internet abuse <i>Toktam Namayandeh Joorabchi, Leila Davoudi Sani, Mehdi Qorbanian Qohroudi</i> https://doi.org/10.30935/mjosbr/14245	13-21
The role of staff engagement and satisfaction in the relationship between workplace spirituality and job performance: Evidence from Ghanaian tertiary institution <i>Smart Asomaning Sarpong, Dora Melanie Yanchira, Akwasi Agyei</i> https://doi.org/10.30935/mjosbr/14305	23-28
Empowering youth leaders in B40 marginalized communities: An innovative approach to social entrepreneurship in alignment with national entrepreneurship policy 2030 <i>Faizahani Ab Rahman, Arumugam Raman</i> https://doi.org/10.30935/mjosbr/14306	29-36



The role of play in early childhood education curricula in Greece and the world: A systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT

The scope of this systematic review is to present the role of play within early childhood education curricula in Greece and around the world. In particular, findings will be presented from 25 early childhood education curricula from the past 15 years (2004-2018). Seven of these come from countries of the European Union, one from a country that used to be a member of the European Union, two from countries of Africa, seven from countries of North and Latin America and the Caribbean, six from countries of Asia and two from Oceania. Findings present the role of play within the early childhood education curricula and where possible the role of the educator in relation to play in preschool settings. From the systematic review and the analysis of the curricula we can conclude that early childhood education curricula are in their majority child-centered, they vary in form and recognize the importance of play in children's holistic development and learning. Educators on their behalf tend to adopt various roles in order to support and promote play at the nursery school, indoors and outdoors in cooperation with parents and other professionals. Factors that influence the content of early childhood curricula and the role of play in them, are geographic location, cultural heritage, structure of society, knowledge of history and respect for the past and the future always in relation to the needs of the children of this age.

Keywords: early childhood education curricula, play, systematic review

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INTRODUCTION

This research is an attempt to study curricula from different regions of the world regarding the role of play in the learning of preschool children. To this end, an extensive study of the curricula was followed in terms of the role of play and where possible, the role of teachers towards children's play. Initially, the definitions and dimensions of curricula in general and those for preschool age in particular will be discussed, then the role of the teacher in play will be presented, and finally the research findings will be analyzed according to the country of origin of each curriculum and their relevance for pedagogical practice.

Analytical Programs: Definition, Dimensions, & Ideology

Setting the curriculum is a difficult task. If the curriculum is seen as the stuff of what happens in schools, there are many possibilities for considering what the above phrase might mean. Curriculum is often the formal products and documents that guide what happens in classrooms (Mueller, 2012, p. 54).

The term curricula refers mainly to the basic aspect of the educational process that has concerned teachers, students and parents with their content, as they constitute a fundamental dimension of the

whole process of education (Flouris, 2008, p. 9). The term "curriculum" is often identified with the Latin term "curriculum", which denotes a cycle in a stage (Chatzigeorgiou, 2004, p. 100). According to Hamilton (1989, p. 43), the term "curriculum" as a pedagogical term first appeared in scientific articles in various European countries.

Also, according to David (2001, p. 57) the new Oxford dictionary describes 'curriculum' as 'a course of study', while it defines 'syllabus' as 'summary statements of a course'. There seems to be little difference between these two definitions, although 20 years ago 'curriculum' would have meant a broader concept, focusing on the general aims and processes (including the 'hidden' or 'hidden' aspects of a learning environment) and 'curriculum' would have had a more limited and detailed content (i.e., what the child was to be taught/or learnt). It is therefore a document that refers to aspects of the learning environment.

In the literature there are also various classifications of curricula based on the general direction they seem to take. Starting from (Hadjigeorgiou, 1991, p. 17), three main directions are distinguished: cognitive, individual and social direction, while Xochellis and Dendrinou (1999, p. 2) present four categories, which are defined by them as programs and are, as follows:

- a. *subject-centered*, whose central axis is scientific knowledge and whose aim is the transmission of knowledge,
- b. *child-centered*, which emphasize the interests, needs and psychology of children,
- c. *social effectiveness*, prioritizing needs and social conditions, and
- d. *social reconstruction*, aimed at improving the social system.

On the other hand, Rubin (1990) identified seven types of curricula for primary school, which are similar to those of pre-school institutions. These are humanistic, behavioral/mechanistic, elementary, social imperatives, progressive, and developmental. Applying the typology to different models of early childhood education can mean exploring the philosophy of the model, on the one hand, while on the other hand it can demonstrate the combination of curriculum models that may work in a society or setting.

Around the same time Bernstein (1996) had argued that there are essentially two models of curriculum and that all curricula fall into one or both categories. According to Bernstein (1996), the curriculum is either performance-oriented or ability-oriented with the former (performance model) dominating throughout the world.

More recently, Pantazis and Sakellariou (2003), similarly, identified two types of curriculum orientation

- (a) the humanistic and
- (b) the technocratic.

The latter, according to the authors, tends to predominate and this can be seen from the clearly formulated contents, objectives and modes of assessment, which results in 'an emphasis on the managerial performance of the various educational processes, rather than on the achievement of substantive educational goals that will promote the improvement of educational practice'. Of course, the same article stresses the importance of the humanistic-oriented curriculum, particularly with a social dimension as 'it is organized on the basis of the

Concluding the reference to these two types of curricula, it is stressed that a curriculum characterized by its social dimension through all-round practices can lead to changes in the child's way of thinking and help him/her to acquire critical thinking, to become responsible, to be able to make decisions and to take part in constructive dialogues. The emotional dimension of the learning process is emphasized, and the ultimate goal is both to develop positive attitudes towards the child's life towards himself and the people around him and to develop his autonomy and conscience. Avgitidou and Gourgotou (2016) agree with the preceding researchers when they state that there are the open curricula, those that allow a form of flexibility for the teacher to make changes according to the needs of the children and "place more emphasis on the process through which the student is led to learning" and on the other hand there are the closed curricula that focus on the process of learning and the way of assessment.

Curricula, however, need some educational approaches in order to be implemented, and some of these are work plans, inquiry and differentiated instruction, discovery learning as recognized by authors such as Vrettos and Kapsalis (2009). According to Scott (2008), a curriculum can be specifically organized to include four dimensions:

- (a) objectives,
- (b) content or subject matter,
- (c) methods or procedures, and

- (d) assessment and evaluation.

The first dimension refers to the reasons for including certain elements in the curriculum and excluding others. The second dimension is content or subject matter, and this refers to the knowledge, skills or provisions implicit in the choice of subjects, and the way in which they are arranged. The third dimension is the methods or procedures, i.e., the pedagogy and is determined by the choices made for the first two dimensions. The fourth dimension is assessment or evaluation, i.e., the means of determining whether the curriculum has been successful.

Of course, all the previous references to curricula can be considered from the perspective that the educational environment is not devoid of conditions that affect the educational process and therefore the learning experience. Pinar (2004) states that the curriculum is in fact the school, as a whole, as experienced by students and teachers, agreeing with (Nason & Whitty, 2007, p. 272, in Katsarou & Tsafos, 2014) 'teachers and learners are never "just" teachers and learners. They are struggling, sorted, gendered individuals whose particular personal, social and cultural histories and world views shape and inform their actions in the context of ongoing social change.'

Schiro (2008) argues—and converges in view with the accusations made by Xochellis and Dendrinou (1999, p. 2)—that there are four dominant ideologies that shape curriculum practice in the United States. These four ideologies, then, are, as follows:

1. *The ideology of academic scholars,*
2. *The ideology of social efficiency,*
3. *Learner-centered ideology, and*
4. *The ideology of social reconstruction.*

Finally, emphasizing that the job of teaching is to fit the student into the curriculum and to fit the curriculum to the student (Schiro, 2008, p. 86). It involves stimulating students to operate the curriculum and adapting the curriculum to the students' capabilities. This implies that by knowing the students and considering their idiosyncratic natures, the curriculum designer will develop a curriculum for a typical student and the teacher will adjust for specific students.

Play & Learning

Play in preschool and childhood has been the subject of much study and research for more than 100 years. Reference to well-known theorists from various fields such as developmental psychology, biology, social psychology, sociology among many others is beyond the intentions of this paper. For the purposes of this paper, references will be made to key theorists and researchers of preschool and childhood play in general in relation to learning and how this relationship has influenced the writing of preschool curricula, not only those presented in the second part of this paper, but many others.

Play is increasingly institutionalized, not so much spontaneous but a means of learning placed in schemes and programs and used as a teaching method or pedagogical style applied with the aim of achieving and mastering skills on behalf of children. Of course, there are positive aspects to the discussion of play and learning. Children can learn and develop skills through pedagogically organized situations and environments while having fun learning. However, it may not be necessary to disguise learning processes and activities with play for the sake of the child. Empirical research has shown that children have specific and often positive expectations of both play and learning,

without necessarily operating connections between the two (Cecchin, 2013, p. 56).

Curtis (2002, p. 4) refers to well-known names in the field of early childhood education and training, such as Friedrich Froebel, Rudolph Steiner, Maria Montessori, Margaret McMillan, and Susan Isaacs, who continue to influence early childhood education today, either directly or indirectly. These five educators all held the view that young people, and primarily the child, are a whole person, with thoughts, feelings and imagination that need to be cared for and loved by adults. These young children are no longer seated in rows of desks or tables all day and are free to perform various activities in and out of the classroom and this is because these educators took a child-centered approach to education and believed that young children are intrinsically motivated and have a desire to learn.

On the one hand, Froebel, influenced by Rousseau and Pestalozzi, believed that play is a serious and profoundly important activity for preschool children (Curtis, 2002), but who believed that children's play should be bounded by teachers and not free. And on the other hand Maria Montessori who advocated that play is children's work, Steiner who was a proponent of outdoor play and believed that children should be engaged in free play with materials that serve in a variety of ways and enhance children's learning and creativity, and Isaacs who advocated the importance of social play and its benefits for young children have all influenced how curricula treat play and its relationship to learning. Vygotsky, finally, spoke of the importance of social play and believed that imagination and creativity have a dialectical relationship. He observed that children do not have to reproduce what they observe or experience in their daily lives in play, otherwise nothing new will ever emerge. Instead, they take elements from their observations and experiences and synthesize them to create something new (Vygotsky, 2004).

Recently, Wood (2013) argued that children should be involved in free play through which life attitudes are cultivated and furthermore, she believes that if early childhood teachers focus only on assessing the forms of play, knowledge, skills and understanding that are embedded within the curriculum, they will only achieve stable and partial concepts and interpretations of children's free play. Rather, paying attention to micro-analyses of play, alternative meanings and interpretations made accessible, opens up the possibility for deeper engagement with the socio-political dimensions of cultures and practices derived from play.

It is clear that there is a variety of views in the literature on the role of play and the form of play that should be followed in early childhood education. So in addition to free and structured play, we find guided play, which refers to learning experiences that combine the child-led nature of free play with a focus on learning outcomes and adult guidance. Children thrive when they participate in free play that involves their active engagement and is characterized by its fun, voluntary and flexible nature (Burghardt, 2011). But to achieve specific learning goals, some feel that adult support is essential. Therefore, guided play has two main elements: child autonomy and adult guidance. This makes it more interesting, and with the advantage of the child focusing on learning (Weisberg et al., 2016, p. 177-178).

The types of play vary according to their content. For example, in the literature we find social play, role play, symbolic play, imaginary play, play with or without objects, solitary and parallel play, plays with rules, outdoor play. In engaging in these different types of play, children

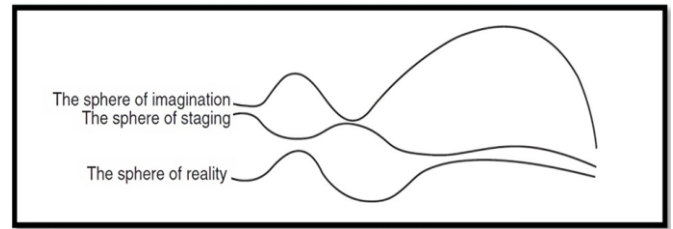


Figure 1. Model of three interdependent spheres of reality (Schousboe, 2013, p. 19)

are involved in realms of imagination, stage presence of play and reality (Figure 1).

Figure 1 suggests that the realm of fantasy includes the realm of performance in pretend situations, while the realm of stage presence of play focuses on organization, planning and negotiation. In the realm of reality, attention is paid to the present, physical location, laws of nature, objects and props chosen by the play partners. Schousboe's (2013) model allows researchers to consider play as a multi-level activity in which each play incident can be literally real and also be an act of imagination. This is possible because, in this play, scaffolding and reality are in balance with pretense. The interdependent spheres are seen as permeable and transparent. The connections are open and dynamic. During a play episode one sphere can transform the other sphere.

Various learning theories have at various times been associated with play in early childhood. Fler (2018, p. 337-341) refers to a range of learning theories in her attempt to help early childhood educators evaluate play situations in preschool settings based on theories that influence their own practice. The theories, therefore, presented in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that different development theories give weight to learning from different perspectives, as each theorist considers learning to be influenced by different factors. Therefore, we can easily consider the different approaches to learning from Gesell's biological theory and Piaget's psycho-genetic theory, which emphasize developmental milestones based on specific European standards as an independent process and the cultural/sociocultural theory of Vygotsky, Rogoff, and Fler), where emphasis is placed on learning as a cultural and social process. On the other hand, we can observe similarities between the theories of behaviorism/social behaviorism and that of social learning by Skinner and Bandura, where learning occurs through the observation of social norms and can be observed through the behavior of the individual. Finally, in Blaise's critical/poststructuralist theory learning is challenged as it can be influenced by power relations. But what is the role of the educator in terms of children's play and in terms of the learning that takes place in this age period?

The Role of the Educator

The reference to the role of play in preschool curricula and the relationship between play and learning could not be considered complete without reference to the role of the educator towards play. Fler (2015) points out that the role of the educator towards play for preschool children has been neglected. And she believes that Pellegrini's (2011) view that play is the children's business and therefore adults should not be involved may be responsible for this. She went on to research by analyzing the pedagogical practices of educators in order to understand the pedagogy of play (Fler, 2015).

Table 1. Theories of development

Biological (Gesell)	Reference is made to the development and evolution based on some milestones which are generally based on middle-class children of European origin.
Behaviorism/social behaviorism (Skinner & Bandura)	The focus is on observable behavioral outcomes.
Social learning (Skinner & Bandura)	Learning takes place through observation of patterns.
Psycho-genetics (Piaget)	Learning that is perceived on the basis of children's development and as a separate and independent process.
Cultural-historical/socio-cultural (Vygotsky, Rogoff, & Fleer)	Learning is perceived as a cultural and social process.
Critical/poststructuralist (Blaise)	Learning and learning processes are contested and subject to power relations and development is seen as diverse.

Therefore, there are the views of researchers who want educators to be active during children's play in early childhood education and training settings, providing support and encouragement for them to engage in more elaborate activities (Bodrova & Leong, 2006). On the other hand, Brown and Freeman (2001) present educators as those who should encourage observing children's play, as they should be given the opportunity to decide and organize their play. Similarly, Bennett et al. (1997) reinforcing the view that children's free play is highly beneficial to children, suggest that educators should avoid involvement in children's play and let them decide for themselves what their next actions will be.

Researchers agree with the above, pointing out that there are advantages and disadvantages to the influence that educators can have on children's play, and this depends on when educators become involved in children's play. Bodrova and Leong (2007) state that effective involvement of educators helps children to enrich and develop their play. Attention should be paid at this point to children's attitudes towards play, as the involvement of educators can help those children who find it difficult to interact with other children in the classroom, while children who are more independent need less involvement from educators.

Apart from the involvement of educators in the play of preschool children, observing children during play is one of the most common practices of educators in early childhood education and training settings. Through observation, educators can identify interests, emotions, and perceptions in order to take them into account when planning activities and assessing children (Abbott, 1994; Jones & Reynolds, 1992).

Whether observers, they are involved in the play, educators play a key role in the development of preschool children's play. As Wood (2014) points out, the challenge for educators lies in successfully engaging or observing children's play in order to enable them to enhance the educational process and enrich children's knowledge based on a play policy. And Fleer (2015) notes that a broader policy and perspective on play is needed in order to harness play through curricula and provide the foundation for achieving learning outcomes for children of this age.

Aim of the Research—Research Questions

As presented earlier, the purpose of this research is to reveal the role of play in preschool curricula, the relationship between play and learning and the role of the teacher in relation to play. The research questions are therefore the following:

1. *How is play defined in the curricula of different countries and what types of play are mentioned?*
2. *How is the relationship between learning and play mentioned in these curricula?*

3. *What is the role of the teacher in relation to play in the curricula of these countries?*
4. *What are the similarities and differences between the curricula?*

With the above research questions in mind, a systematic literature review of the curricula began in order to find answers to these questions. It is worth noting at this point that in the literature we can find articles with literature review and comparison of three to five curricula (such as Fleer, 2018; Synodi, 2010), with some of these studies focusing on play, which was the reason for conducting this research. Differentiating the research on early childhood curricula conducted by 30 academics coming from 12 different countries out of a total of 10 countries (five European and five non-European) by Oberhuemer (2005) with the aim to investigate the objectives, theoretical orientation, learning areas, assessment methods and the connection of these curricula to primary school.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed for the realization of this work is a systematic literature review. According to the literature, the term systematic literature review is used in identifying and synthesizing a research that addresses a specific question using organized, transparent as well as iterative procedures at each stage of the process. Good systematic reviews take adequate precautions to minimize errors and bias. This is particularly important in research synthesis because biases can arise in the initial studies, as well as in publication, dissemination and review, to project procedures, and these biases can accumulate and can consequently overstate or understate results and can lead to incorrect conclusions. Like any good study, a systematic review follows a protocol that defines the central aims, concepts and methods in advance (Jesson et al., 2011; Littell et al., 2008).

Method of Data Collection

In order to achieve this systematic literature review, the key words were the terms 'curricula' and the search of various countries in English. Furthermore, a prerequisite for the inclusion of a curriculum was that it had to be under the auspices of the ministry of education of the country concerned or an institute cooperating with the ministry (i.e., an official body). Using Google search engine on the Internet, the search words were: 'early childhood curriculum', 'kindergarten curriculum', in combination with country names and the words AND/OR.

According to Jesson et al. (2011, p. 24) the main challenge for the traditional literature review is based on a critique of the process, as critics argue that the design and method for a traditional review is also open and flexible. A key difference is that in a traditional review there is no obligation to state the method of data collection, only that the reader needs to be informed of the purpose of the review and does not

also need to be informed of how the sources were identified, what was included, what was excluded and why. The systematic review is therefore more suited to answering specific questions and test hypotheses than the traditional review. It is not a simple discussion of the literature but more of a scientific tool. It can be used to summarize, assess and communicate results and implications of different research. But it is widely believed that at least one of these elements, namely communication, needs to be significantly improved if systematic reviews are to be truly useful (Petticrew & Roberts, 2010, p. 10).

Thus, in the case of the present research, it should be noted at this point that the search resulted in a number of curricula for children aged zero-eight years of which the curricula for children aged three-six or

three-eight years that mentioned the term play were used for this work. This resulted, as will be discussed below, in the exclusion of the Zimbabwean curriculum, in Africa, as there was no mention of the term 'play' in the entire curriculum, but little mention of the term 'recreation'.

The search resulted in 35 curricula that also referred to the term play of which 10 were removed for practical reasons, as an analysis of all the curricula would be far beyond the time, purpose and scope of this study. Following the geographical placement of the curricula on the world map (Table 2, p. 19), 25 curricula remained with the attempt to make a representative mapping of the five continents.

Table 2. Summary table of systematic review of curricula

Country	Title	Reference	Objectives of curriculum	Types of play	Role of educator
Saint Mauritius	National curriculum framework pre-primary 3-5 years (parts 1 & 2)	Mauritius Institute of Education & Early Childhood Care and Education Authority (2008a, 2008b)	The development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, & values	Social, fine motor skills, mathematics, role-playing, & sensory	Organize, evaluate, & create safe environment
Alaska	Early learning guidelines: A resource for parents and early educators	Palin et al. (2007)	The social development of children	Fantastic play & language play	Support & working with parents
Australia	Belonging, being & becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia	Australian Government Department of Education and Training. (2009)	The child-centered nature of the program	Social, teamwork, play with materials from nature, & play with rules	Observe, embolden, & play
Brazil	Diretrizes curriculares nacionais da educação básica [National curriculum guidelines for basic education]	Moll (2009)	Knowledge through social relations affecting identity construction & human rights	Outdoor play with materials from nature, drama, & musical play	Create environments & interact
France	Programme d'enseignement de l'école maternelle [Kindergarten curriculum]	Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche [Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research] (2015a)	Kindergarten foundation is a first step in ensuring success of all children in a fair & challenging school & establishes the educational & pedagogical foundations that support & develop students' future learning throughout their schooling	Symbolic play, exploration play, construction and manipulation play, cooperative play, & board play	Observe & organized by assess
Germany (Bavaria)	The Bavarian education plan for children in day care facilities up to school enrolment	Bavarian State Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Family and Women State Institute for Early Education München (2016)	The social process and holistic development	Free play & role playing	Observe, evaluate, & interact
Switzerland (Zurich)	Curriculum for the kindergarten level of the Canton of Zurich	Education Directorate of the Cantone of Zurich (2008)	Development in various sectors	Free play & unstructured	Observe
Greece	Kindergarten teacher's guide educational designs: Creative learning environments	Dafermou et al. (2014)	The acquisition of knowledge through interdisciplinary practices	Free play, rules play, symbolic, movement, & rules play	Observe, evaluate, discuss, & working with parents
Japan	幼稚園教育要領解説 [Yōchien kyōiku yōryō kaisetsu]	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology-Japan (2017)	Early childhood, through direct & concrete experiences in flow of physical life. It is time to cultivate foundation of personality formation. Thus, in kindergarten, child must be motivated & empathetic & interested in happiness of other children.	Free play, play with materials from nature, & social play	Support & guide
Iceland	The Icelandic national curriculum guide for preschools	Ministry of Education and Culture (2011)	Democratic character with an emphasis on national heritage & community values	Social play, movement play, & dramatic play	Create, support, contact, & provide

Table 2 (Continued). Summary table of systematic review of curricula

Country	Title	Reference	Objectives of curriculum	Types of play	Role of educator
India (New Delhi)	Preschool curriculum	Senapaty and Rajput (2018)	Physical, cognitive, emotional & social development	Outdoor play, free play, guided play, & dramatic play	Observe, they plan, & evaluate
California (USA)	California preschool learning foundations	Abbott et al. (2008)	It is foundation for children's development.	Dramatic play, role-playing play, natural environment play, & construction play	Participants & observe
Canada (Ontario)	Early learning for every child today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings	Best Expert Panel for Early Learning (2007)	It is a key element in children's development & a link to primary & secondary education.	Dramatic play & dramatic-dramatic	Create environments, observe, participants, promote play, & provide opportunities
Korea	The kindergarten curriculum of the Republic of Korea	Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007)	Development of whole personality, happiness, autonomy, & creativity of children	Social play & play with words	Collaborate, organize, & implement
South Africa	The South African national curriculum framework for children from birth to four	Department of Basic Education (2015)	Organization of development & learning opportunities	Cooperative play, sensory, & role-playing play	Create interactive learning conditions
New Jersey	Preschool teaching and learning standards	New Jersey Department of Education (2014)	It increases children's perception of difference & similarities with others.	Dramatic play	Provide
New Zealand	Te whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o aotearoa [An educational mat for New Zealand's children]. Early childhood curriculum	Ministry of Education (2017)	A program of gender, ethnicity, & past & future inclusion activities	Dramatic play, kinetic play, & indoor & outdoor play	Involved & provide
Norway	Framework plan for kindergartens	Ministry of Education and Research (2017)	Promoting prosperity, good health, & global development	Social play, role playing, & outdoor play	They organize, help, observe, analyze, support, & participate
Russia	Guidelines for working with an exemplary basic educational program of preschool education and the Federal State educational standard of preschool education, Russia	Federal Institute for the Development of Education (2014)	Program has been designed to ensure a holistic pedagogical process aimed at child's full integrated development—physical, social, & communicative, cognitive, verbal, artistic, & aesthetic.	Social play, play with materials from nature, math play, & music play	Observe, organize, & evaluate
Scotland (UK)	The early years framework	The Scottish Government & COSLA (2008)	Vision of this curriculum is to establish a new vision of early years—that children should be valued & are active members of community, that relationship with parents & caregivers is both strong & sensitive, that children have right to a high quality of life & access to play.	Social play & outdoor play	Create environments, interact, support, & evaluate
Singapore	Nurturing early learners: A curriculum framework for kindergartens in Singapore	Ministry of Education (2012)	Learning & thinking outside box	Free play & undirected play	They play, organize, & evaluate
Sweden	Curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 98	Skolverket (2010)	Development of knowledge & values & democracy as foundation of kindergarten.	Imaginative play, creative play, maths play, & outdoor play	Contact, observe, & evaluate
Jamaica	The Jamaica early childhood education curriculum guide	Maye-Hemmings and Wint (2010)	More freedom of movement to get involved in activities	Dramatic play, sensory play, outdoor play, & building material play	Participants, evaluate, & observe
Texas	Revised Texas prekindergarten guidelines (2008)	Texas Education Agency (2008)	Learning experiences as a foundation for later academic, social, & emotional development	Dramatic play, imaginative play, role play, outdoor play, emergent writing play, & observational play of materials from nature	They help, guide, & cooperate with parents
Hong Kong	Kindergarten education curriculum guide: Joyful learning through play balanced development all the way	The Curriculum Development Council (2017)	Development in areas of ethics, intellect, physique, & social skills	Social play & kinetic play.	Create safe environments, participants, observe, & encourage



Figure 2. Detailed schedules & play by region (Source: Author)

Finally, an attempt was made to identify the most recent curriculum text, resulting in the analysis of curricula from 2004 to 2018. In total, more than 4,000 pages of curricula were indexed in order to be able to answer the research questions. Finally, a limitation can be seen as the fact that this research was carried out by one researcher and not by a group of researchers as found in the literature (Chambers et al., 2016 & Peleman et al., 2017).

RESULTS

This section presents the preschool curricula from different regions of the world. A total of 25 curricula emerged from the internet search, which could be used in the context of this work (Table 2).

Figure 2 shows in green the regions covered by the curricula discussed below, as an attempt was made to have as much coverage as possible at different latitudes and longitudes.

According to the presented curricula of preschool activities, play appears in a variety of ways (Schousboe, 2013), as the emphasis given to each of them is influenced by the specificity of the geopolitical position of the country, as mentioned before. Play is the main axis of development and learning for preschool children. According to the curricula studied, it is through play that children understand the world in which they grow up (Alaska, Australia, Ontario [Canada], Singapore), is the focus of all activities (Iceland), and is directly linked to learning (in 18 of the 25 countries).

Not only does it contribute to learning, but it is also important for development (Sweden), be it physical/physical (Hong Kong), social or mental (France) and emotional (California, USA). In other countries play is believed to be the joy of life (Japan and New Delhi), while in others play is a culture (St. Mauritius). Through play, children construct their personal identity and respect for their natural environment (Brazil).

References to play included both free (Burghardt, 2011; Wood, 2013) and structured play as well as indoor and outdoor play. In most of the early childhood curricula analyzed there appears to be a balance between free and structured play by teachers. As will be shown below,

teachers tend to structure play either indirectly (through the configuration of the classroom and the outdoor space of the kindergarten) or directly (through their own intervention, where necessary). An exception is the attitude of the Zurich (Switzerland) curriculum, where it is made clear that play ceases to be play as soon as the teacher intervenes.

As can be seen in the summary Table 2, social play is prominent (Vygotsky, 2004), outdoor play itself and free play dominate the references in the curricula. Few curricula, including the Greek one, refer to a variety of play activities. The rest are dominated by dramatic and social play and outdoor play with materials from nature. The relationship between learning and play, as reflected in the curricula, although taken for granted, is not always evident. This can be deduced from the fact that of the 25 curricula studied, 18 make direct reference to the relationship between play and learning. It is therefore clear that play and learning in the above curricula are inextricably linked and interdependent. While the emphasis on types of play varies, and the theoretical framework varies for the above countries, there is no learning without play as it is the driving force and numerous play activities lead children to learning in different areas (Cecchin, 2013).

Play is learning (Russia) and is one side of the coin while learning is the other (Bavaria/Germany). The present findings are consistent with the literature that supports the importance of play in early childhood education programs and the importance of free play as opposed to structured learning contexts, where children are allowed to choose the activities they engage in alone or with other children. Nevertheless, the role of teachers is not marginalized, but remains important for an effective learning experience.

The role of the teacher in relation to play in the curricula included in this research is multifaceted. In several curricula, references are made to parents' educational partners (Alaska, Ontario, Texas, Korea, Korea, South Africa, and Greece). Teachers are also presented as observers and evaluators of play (Hong Kong, Japan, Norway, Australia, Australia, Greece, and Iceland) and as helpers and supporters of children during play (Iceland, Norway, Australia, Greece, California, California, Jamaica, New Zealand, South Africa, and Iceland). Teachers therefore adopt different roles in order to support children during play and to

Table 3. Development theories & curricula: Similarities & differences

Growth theory child	Theoretical	Program country
Organic	Gesell (1925)	Canada (Ontario), California, New Jersey, Texas, & New Delhi
Behaviourism/social behaviourism	Skinner (1957)	Brazil, New Delhi, Japan, Bavaria (Germany), & Australia
Social learning	Skinner (1957) & Bandura	Alaska, Norway, & Scotland
Psycho-genetics	Piaget (1950, 1952)	Hong Kong, St. Mauritius, Switzerland (Zurich), & Greece
Cultural-historical/socio-cultural	Vygotsky (1999), Rogoff (2003), & Fleer (1995, 2010)	Texas, Sweden, France, Iceland, New Zealand, & South Africa
Critical/post-structuralist	Blaise (2005)	Jamaica, Singapore, Korea, & Russia

support the learning process (Curtis, 2002). There is agreement as to the importance of the role of teachers and the fact that they must allow space and time for children to actively engage in free and undirected play.

The curricula in this systematic literature review were divided into categories according to the developmental theory they appear to embrace (Table 3), following Fleer's (2018) table.

It is obvious that most curricula emphasize children's social and cultural development and less on biological and psychogenetic development, without this meaning that the importance of play in children's all-round development is undermined. Evidence presented on child development converges with that reported by Spodek and Saracho (1999) based on the theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Gesell, Skinner, and Erikson among others. It should not be overlooked at this point that the curricula studied in this literature review are child-centered, which is in line with Bernstein's (1996) literature and aim at the child's all-round development as well as the conditions for interactive and effective learning. In an ever-changing society, and with the above in mind, it can be said that the study of early childhood education curricula from different countries can make educators aware of practices - current and future - and the findings can be used to give play an essential role of communication between children and educators, respecting the specificity of each country of origin of children and educators.

CONCLUSIONS & RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

The present study attempted to present the place of play in 25 preschool curricula in Greece and in different regions of the world. After a brief bibliography on the definition and types of curricula and types of play and the relationship between play and learning, the methodology and presentation of the results followed. The findings converge with the literature that wants there to be a variety of types of curricula and for teachers to adopt practices influenced by the developmental theory they embrace. Play occupies a dominant position with social and outdoor play being most frequently encountered and structured and guided play being secondary.

Future research can include more curricula for a more comprehensive picture, and an effort should be made to communicate countries' practices within existing curricula so that the educational community is aware of practices from other regions of the world and to enhance their own.

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Compulsive Internet usage and social isolation among university students in Malaysia: Internet abuse

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between Internet usage, social isolation, and Internet addiction among university students. The study used a quantitative method and questionnaires to measure the 'problems of using the Internet', 'patterns of Internet usage', 'social isolation', and 'Internet addiction'. The study included 440 students from the University Putra Malaysia, chosen using a stratified random sampling method. The majority of the respondents were single (93.20%) and aged between 23 to 40 years old. The study found a significant relationship between 'problems of using the Internet, social isolation, and Internet addiction'. However, there was no statistically significant relationship between the patterns of using the Internet and social isolation. The t-test result showed that no significant mean differences were found among marital status, field of study, social isolation, and Internet addiction. Implication of the study discussed.

Keywords: Internet usage, social isolation, Internet abuse, Internet addiction

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become an essential part of modern life, with many people using it for various reasons every day. Fast Internet speeds are now available in many places, and new concerns have arisen with the advancement of technology (Bakken et al., 2009; McCormick et al., 2019). These concerns include Internet and computer addiction, compulsive Internet and computer usage, problems of using the Internet, and pathological Internet usage (Liu & Potenza, 2007; Maroma et al., 2019). Social isolation has also become a growing issue, with modern man becoming increasingly isolated due to the reduction of core networks and similar relations (Hampton et al., 2011). The term social isolation refers to the availability of social contacts or frequency of contact with social network members (Courtin & Knapp, 2017). This study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. Is there any statistically significant effect of Internet usage problem on Internet addiction and social isolation?

RQ2. Is there any statistically significant effect between Internet usage patterns, social isolation, and Internet addiction?

Moreover, the following hypotheses are suggested to study the potential relationships among the variables of Internet usage, Internet addiction, and social isolation:

H1. There is a relationship between marital status, social isolation, and Internet addiction.

H2. There is a relationship between the field of study, Internet addiction, and social isolation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pattern of Using Internet & Internet Addiction

According to the literature, the Internet plays a significant role in the academic and social life of university students in many countries (Ceyhan, 2008; de Zúñiga & Chen, 2019; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Understanding Internet use patterns can be helpful in comprehending how young people use this modern tool. Kheirkhah et al. (2010) conducted a study in which participants reported the hours they spent surfing the Internet in a week, including the number of hours spent online for different purposes such as entertainment, hobby, business, and academic. The researchers concluded that, on average, the subjects spent 10.31 hours online during a whole week. The dependent group spent 14.42 hours online on average, while the non-dependent group used the Internet for almost nine hours during a week, revealing that dependent Internet users were approximately using the Internet five

hours more than the control group. The results also confirmed a statistically significant mean difference between two groups of study.

Müller (2020) reported that, on average, Malaysian people spent 7.57 hours surfing the net per week. Watching TV programs online holds the second position with 2.59 hours. Using social media, listening to music, and playing games are respectively among the popular online activities in 2019. The literature also suggests that excessive Internet use can lead to impairments of real-life relationships, social isolation, and psychological and physical problems such as anxiety and depression. Dependence on the communicative features of the Internet is commonly linked to a lack of real-life social support and feelings of social isolation or loneliness, which all contribute to the development of Internet addiction.

Azmi et al. (2019) conducted a study to measure the frequency of Internet addiction among 178 eleven-year-old Malaysian primary school students and their parents using the validated Malay version of the Internet addiction test (MVIAT). The results revealed that 23.00% of the school kids and 15.70% of their parents were addicted to the Internet. The amount of Internet usage proved to be much higher during the holidays among the schoolers. A significantly positive correlation was found between MVIAT scores of parents and their children. The literature suggests that excessive Internet use can lead to impairments of real-life relationships, social isolation, and psychological and physical problems such as anxiety and depression. Dependence on the communicative features of the Internet is commonly linked to a lack of real-life social support and feelings of social isolation or loneliness, which all contribute to the development of Internet addiction (Kheirkhah et al., 2010; Müller, 2020).

Haque et al. (2016) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between Internet addiction and information-seeking behavior among postgraduate students. The study found that Internet addiction was significantly related to people's ethnicity and having holidays, but not correlated with surfing the Internet for the purpose of finding information. Additionally, students from different school years exhibited different behaviors concerning Internet addiction, with statistically significant differences between MVIAT scores of students from year 1 to year 5. The study highlights the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to Internet addiction among students, which can inform interventions to prevent and treat this issue.

Internet Addiction

According to Hoeg and Parisi (2019) together with Soule et al. (2003), there are five main groups of Internet addiction:

1. Cyber sexual/cyber porn addiction (addiction to +18 chat rooms)
2. Cyber relationship addiction (addiction to making online friends)
3. Internet compulsion (uncontrollable gambling, shopping, etc.)
4. Information overload (uncontrollable searching in the web)
5. Computer addiction (uncontrollable behavior in playing games or programming)

Cheng et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate the characteristics of Facebook users who find the platform difficult to use. The study found that such users are mostly younger males who are experiencing an important challenge in their lives. They spend long hours online, particularly at night, checking profiles rather than

following news feeds. Additionally, they prefer to text their friends more often and are more likely to deactivate their account for the purpose of managing their time more efficiently. Furthermore, they are probably being exposed to social media or phone addiction contents. The study highlights the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to problematic Facebook use, which can inform interventions to prevent and treat this issue.

The Internet has advantages, but it also poses challenges such as financial issues and mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and pathological addiction (Anandi & Gududur, 2018; D'Souza et al., 2018). Studies have shown that Malay students have the highest mean scores of Internet addiction, followed by Indian and Chinese students (Haque et al., 2019). According to Haque et al. (2019), age and gender play a role, with 20-year-old male medical students having the highest mean score. Religion was not found to have a statistically significant effect on Internet addiction. It is important to address this issue and develop strategies to promote a healthy relationship with the Internet, especially among young people who are more vulnerable to its negative effects.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have led to a significant increase in Internet usage, with many people working online and seeking information about the disease through search engines (Khodabakhsh et al., 2021). According to Dong et al. (2020), studies have shown a significant relationship between Internet addiction and the amount and purpose of Internet usage, poor quality of sleep, anxiety, depression, and excessive stress (Tortella-Feliu et al., 2019). The pandemic has also resulted in problematic Internet use and increased escapism, which is linked to Internet addiction. Pew Research Center (2009) surveys have found that the Internet has been essential or important to the majority of Americans during the pandemic (Cheng & Li, 2014).

The entertaining nature of the Internet has led many young people to prefer the virtual world over the real world, resulting in problematic Internet use and addiction (Masaeli & Farhadi, 2021). Online games provide users with autonomy and excitement, which can contribute to addiction (Adachi & Willoughby, 2017). Studies have shown that Internet addiction is pervasive among Asian nations, with a prevalence of 7.10%, and is six times greater in medical students compared to the general public (Ching et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this issue, with 83.50% of medical students engaging in excessive Internet use (Ching et al., 2017). Internet gaming disorders (IGDs) are more prevalent among Asian countries than European ones (Mihara & Higuchi, 2017), with 52.80% of Malaysian undergraduate students having a high score on a valid IGD test (Jaafar et al., 2021).

Social Isolation

Social isolation, as delineated by Hämmig (2019), manifests as a reluctance to engage in communication and a disinterest in interpersonal interactions, culminating in a dearth of social affiliations and companionships. This characterization aligns with the description offered by Flowers et al. (2017), who view social isolation as a deficit in establishing meaningful connections with fellow individuals. Notably, findings from Cigna (2018) research reveal a disconcerting trend, wherein a substantial proportion of participants between the ages of 18 and 22 recorded elevated loneliness scores, a pattern that persists among individuals aged 23 to 27. Conversely, older adults, aged 72 and above, displayed the lowest scores on these loneliness assessments, with a mere

38.60% registering high levels of loneliness. Williams and Braun (2019) underscore the ubiquitous nature of social isolation, emphasizing its prevalence across diverse life stages.

Social isolation, as noted by Pew Research Center (2009), weakens social bonds and reduces people's connections to various societal issues. The U.S. Department of Labor (2016) reports that many people are becoming less inclined to join social groups and participate in voluntary activities, increasing the risk of social isolation and related health problems. However, research by Holt-Lunstad (2017) shows that positive social connections can significantly improve health and reduce the risk of early death by almost half.

Moreover, numerous previous studies have confirmed the positive correlation between excessive use of social media, such as Facebook, and mental health disorders like depression and anxiety. In other words, prolonged Internet use has a negative relationship with the general health condition of individuals (Khodabakhsh et al., 2021; Marino et al., 2017; Shakyia & Christakis, 2017; Toker & Baturay, 2016). For example, the amount of time spent on social media has been found to have a positive relationship with depression symptoms in high schoolers from Central Serbia (Pantic et al., 2012), and young adults in the United States (Lin et al., 2016). Additionally, certain aspects of using social media have been identified as reasons for poor academic achievement (Al-Menayes, 2015; Junco, 2012).

Kim et al. (2009) found that unhealthy and lonely people face problems in communication in their real everyday life, which leads to difficulty managing their Internet usage and ultimately more Internet usage to evade reality and its increasing problems. As a result, such socially isolated people take refuge from their problems in their favorite Internet activity. Bakken et al. (2009) confirmed that most Internet addicts and at-risk Internet users use the Internet as a solution to evade their social problems or distress.

Huang et al. (2014) found that loneliness predicted problematic Internet use over time, and problematic Internet use predicted loneliness over time. Pontes and Griffiths (2014) found that Internet addiction and loneliness are significantly correlated among children and adolescents in the education setting. The current research suggests that one of the major motives driving individuals' Internet use is to relieve psychosocial problems like loneliness and depression, but individuals who were lonely or did not have good social skills could develop strong compulsive Internet use behaviors resulting in negative life outcomes instead of relieving their original problems (Bakken et al., 2009).

Marital Status, Field of Study, & Internet Addiction

Marital status can greatly influence the issue of Internet addiction. Being single or married is a significant element in relation to loneliness, as singlehood is regarded as a loneliness risk factor, particularly for widowed men, according to Dahlberg et al. (2015) and Menec et al. (2019) also found that widowed men experience side effects of loneliness four times more than married men, emphasizing the great effect of losing a partner. Losing one's wife could lead to a lack of interest in social interactions, as men are more prone to social isolation compared to women because their circle of connections is smaller, according to Menec et al. (2019). Research on loneliness argues that it is both the quality and quantity of social connections that are important, as having fewer relationships than desired, as well as when the intimacy from established relationships is not realized, lead to negative effects on older persons' wellbeing (Martin-Matthews, 2011). Married elders are

the least lonely group, while never-married elders come thereafter, better than widowed, divorced, and separated elders (Kislev, 2022).

Marital status has been studied in relation to Internet addiction. Kheirkhah et al. (2010) found a positive correlation between marital status and Internet addiction. However, Bakken et al. (2009) found no significant correlation between the amount of Internet usage and marital status. Abdel-Salam et al. (2019) concluded that variables such as age, degree, education, marital status, income, and mothers' level of literacy do not correlate with Internet addiction. Similarly, Haque et al. (2016) found no meaningful relationship between IA and marital status. Oguz and Cakir (2014) contended that the level of loneliness among the participants of their study, who were teacher candidates, do not reveal a significant correlation with variables of marital status, age, job, and online activities. However, married teacher candidates were found to be more addicted to the Internet compared to single ones. These findings suggest that the relationship between marital status and Internet addiction is complex and may depend on other factors.

Sally (2006) suggests that demographic factors such as age, gender, urban life, education level, and financial status may be important factors to consider in understanding problematic Internet use. However, further research is needed to better understand the complex relationship between these factors and Internet addiction. Sepehrian and Lotfi (2011) observed that severe Internet addiction affected 16.36% of Urmia students, and 20.90% were placed in the endangered group. The researchers found that male students were more vulnerable to severe Internet addiction than female students, and technical and foundation science students were more susceptible to severe Internet addiction than art and humanities students. They concluded that gender, major, and anxiety level were significant predictors of being vulnerable to Internet addiction.

Uses & Gratification Theory

The uses and gratifications theory (U&G), originally formulated in the 1940s, is a media theory that seeks to understand how individuals utilize media to fulfill their needs and discern the personal motivations behind their media consumption behaviors (Blumler & Katz, 1974). According to this theoretical framework, media consumers are self-aware of their intentions and beliefs, actively selecting specific media platforms to attain gratification (Papacharissi & Rubin, 2010).

U&G theory has been extensively applied to investigate the rationales for engaging with various media forms, including but not limited to the Internet, Facebook, WeChat, Twitter, social virtual worlds, smartphones, and social networking games (Li et al., 2015). U&G theory encompasses five core concepts: active audience, social and psychological origins, strong motives for media use, expectancy (potential gratifications), and gratifications (Chen & Kim, 2013).

Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011), for instance, leveraged U&G theory to explore the motivations behind people's use of Facebook, identifying nine primary purposes for which individuals access the platform: to integrate Facebook into their daily routines, seek relaxation, share information, acquire new information, temporarily escape from problems, enhance job-related skills, forge new friendships, find companionship, and engage in social communication (Kircaburun et al., 2020; Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2017). Similarly, Gadekar et al. (2012) conducted a study on academic use of Facebook, pinpointing five gratification motives: building relationships, seeking

entertainment, searching for information, self-expression, and establishing social identity (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2017).

Moreover, research by De Oliveira and Huertas (2015) elucidated the elements that positively influence users' satisfaction on Facebook, encompassing subjective norms, cultural and social identity, adherence to group standards, enjoyment, and interpersonal relationships (Punyanunt-Carter et al., 2017).

Studies rooted in U&G theory also propose a link between the motivations for media use and the potential for Internet addiction (Chae et al., 2018). Each gratification category entails various facets: content gratification comprises self-documentation, information sharing, and self-expression, while social gratification encompasses social interaction (Dhir et al., 2019). The sense of gratification pertains to leisure and time utilization, hedonic gratification relates to enjoyment and fantasy, social gratification involves social presence and interaction, and utilitarian gratification is closely tied to achieving specific goals (Chae et al., 2018). Additionally, investigations have scrutinized the impact of task performance on metacognitive experiences and the correlation between task performance and metacognitive experiences in problem-solving scenarios (Dhir et al., 2019). **Figure 1** shows relationship between Internet usage, social isolation, and Internet addition.

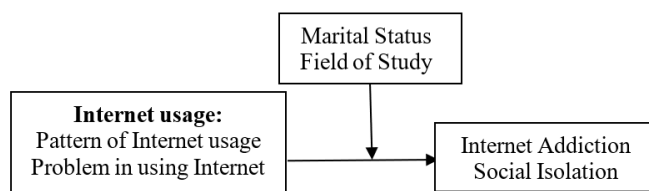


Figure 1. Relationship between Internet usage, social isolation, & Internet addition (Source: Authors)

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The study utilized questionnaires as primary method of data collection. Questionnaires were distributed among local male and female university students between the ages of 17 and 40, with simple random sampling used to select participants from 16 faculties at University Putra Malaysia. We employed stratified testing to determine the sample size, with data collected from 440 students. Questionnaire addressed topics such as problems of using the Internet, patterns of using the Internet, social isolation, and Internet addiction, as well as demographic information such as marital status, age, and field of study.

Based on the Malaysia definition of youth the age of the participants is between 18 to 40 years old (Daruis et al., 2008). The students older than 40 years old were deleted from the analysis. Furthermore, 32.30% of the respondents were male and 67.70% were female. Students participated from the following faculties: agriculture (10.70%), biotechnology and biomolecular science (2.00%), computer science and information technology (3.20%), design and architecture (3.40%), economic (8.90%), education (2.30%), engineering (4.50%), environment (1.10%), food science (4.10%), forestry (2.30%), graduate study management (5.00%), human ecology (7.30%), medicine (8.90%), modern languages and communication (9.10%), science (25.70%), and veterinary (1.60%). Most of the respondents were single 93.20% and just 6.80% were married.

Measurement

To measure the relationship between Internet usage as an independent variable, Internet addiction and social isolation as dependent variables among students, the study used 57 questions. The "problems in using the Internet" variable was measured by 12 items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree," with the data coded from one to five for analysis.

Patterns of Internet usage were measured by five items on a 5-point Likert scale, addressing years of Internet usage, frequency of Internet usage per week, hours spent online per week, location of Internet usage, and search engine usage. These variables were operationalized as ordinal measurements.

Internet addiction was measured by 19 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "not at all" to "always", being measured by interval scale. Internet addiction mostly included "stay online more than intended", "lose your sleep", "grade decrease at school", "feel moody and depressed when you are offline". Range of scores for this dimension was from 19 to 95. If a student had high score in the Internet addiction dimension, it meant that she had a high risk of addiction to the Internet.

Social isolation was measured by 19 items using 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Most of the items asked about "pretend to be someone else", "prefer to communicate online", "share intimate online", and "anonymity". Demographic of the respondents were measured by the two items of marital status and field of study. This study is part of project measuring the impact of Internet usage on negative and positive youth development among university students in Malaysia.

Data Analysis

The study used statistical package for social science to analyze the data and employed descriptive and inferential statistics to determine the relationship among the variables. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the 'problems of using the Internet', 'patterns of Internet usage', 'social isolation', and 'Internet addiction', while demographic information was interpreted using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

Inferential analysis was employed for the correlation analysis of the relationships among patterns of using Internet, problems in using Internet, social isolation, and Internet addiction. t-test was applied to measure the mean differences between field of study and marital status, social isolation, and Internet addiction. A pilot study was conducted to measure the validity and reliability of the questionnaires, which were distributed among 30 students. The results of Cronbach's alpha showed that the reliability of the instrument was higher than 0.70, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 for problems of using Internet, 0.960 for Internet addiction dimension, and 0.823 for social isolation. Before analyzing the data, all the data were subjected to the normality test, which showed that the data was normal.

RESULTS

Problems in Internet Usage

The study found that the most common complaint about problems of using the Internet was slow connection (mean [M]=3.58, standard deviation [SD]=0.96), followed by "overload information on the Internet" (M=3.50, SD=0.91) and "it takes too long to view or download

pages" ($M=3.44$, $SD=0.92$). The least common complaint was "Internet is too complicated to use" ($M=2.28$, $SD=0.91$). These findings are consistent with previous research on information overload, which has shown that people often struggle to cope with the constant streams of messages and images that they encounter online.

Patterns of Internet Usage

The study included participants from three major races, including Malay, Chinese, and Indian. More females than males completed the survey, with 67.00% of the respondents being female and 33.00% male. The majority of the participants (44.50%) had been using the Internet for five to eight years, while 28.20% had been using it for nine to 12 years. Respondents with more than 16 years of Internet usage constituted the smallest part of the sample. The majority of the students used the Internet less than 10 times per week (87.00%), followed by 11 to 20 times a week (9.30%). 63.00% of the respondents used the Internet for less than 23 hours per week, while 22.70% used it for 24 to 43 hours per week, and 9.30% used it for 44 to 63 hours per week. 40.00% of the respondents used the Internet at the university, and 35.00% used it in hostels and dormitories. Almost all of the students (96.40%) used Google as their default search engine.

Internet Addiction

The study found that the most common indicators of Internet addiction among the participants were staying online longer than intended ($M=3.50$, $SD=1.17$) and saying "just a few more minutes" when online ($M=3.28$, $SD=1.10$). The least common indicators were feeling depressed, moody, or nervous when offline and feeling annoyed or snapping at someone who bothers them while online, with mean scores of ($M=2.48$, $SD=1.03$) and ($M=2.45$, $SD=1.11$), respectively. These findings are consistent with previous research on Internet addiction, which has shown that compulsive Internet use can lead to negative outcomes such as social isolation and addiction.

Social Isolation

According to the students' responses, the most important mean belonged to the item "I have pretended to be somebody of the opposite sex while online" ($M=3.24$, $SD=1.04$), indicating a significant level of engagement in online role-playing. This was followed by "I feel less connected interpersonally when I communicate online" ($M=3.10$, $SD=1.11$), suggesting a potential negative impact on students' social relationships. The last mean, based on the responses of the students, was "Most of my friends I know from online" and "Going online has made it easier for me to make friends" ($M=2.19$), indicating that students are increasingly relying on online platforms for social interactions. Additionally, the item "I prefer telephoning to communicating online" had a relatively low mean ($M=2.06$, $SD=1.05$), suggesting that students generally prefer online communication over traditional phone calls.

Mean Difference Between Marital Status, Internet Addiction, & Social Isolation

H1. There is relationship between marital status, social isolation and Internet addiction.

The study used an independent t-test to compare Internet addiction levels between married and single students. The results showed no significant difference in Internet addiction between the two groups, and this lack of difference also applied to social isolation (see **Table 1**).

Therefore, the initial hypothesis (**H1**) was not supported. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that being married does not necessarily prevent Internet addiction. However, other studies have suggested that marital problems can contribute to Internet addiction and affect family life negatively.

Table 1. t-test between marital status & Internet addiction & social isolation ($n=440$)

Marital status	Internet addiction			Social isolation		
	Mean	t	p	Mean	t	p
Married	49.9000	1.377	0.169	49.7333	0.468	0.640
Single	53.4390			48.6390		

Note. * $p<.05$

Relationships Among Problems in Using Internet, Patterns of Internet Usage, Internet Addiction, & Social Isolation

RQ1. What is the effect of problems of using Internet on Internet addiction and social isolation?

RQ2. Are there any relationships between patterns of using Internet, social isolation and Internet addition?

Results showed that there was a significant relationship between problems using the Internet and Internet addiction ($r=0.125$, $p<0.05$). Secondly, there was also a significant relationship between Internet usage problem and social isolation ($r=0.150$, $p<0.05$). This means that having trouble with Internet can lead to both Internet addiction and feeling socially isolated among students. But how students generally use Internet did not show any significant relationship with Internet addiction or social isolation ($p>0.05$) (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Pearson correlation between IVs and DVs ($n=440$)

Variables	Internet addiction		Social isolation	
	r	p	r	p
Problems in using Internet	0.125**	0.001	0.150**	0.002
Pattern of Internet usage				
Years of using	0.055	0.246	-0.002	0.965
Frequency of Internet usage	0.084	0.078	0.010	0.841

Note. * $p<0.05$ & ** $p<0.01$

Mean Differences Between Field of Study, Internet Addiction, & Social Isolation

H2. There is relationship between field of study, Internet addiction and social isolation.

The results of the t-test revealed that the mean differences between fields of study based on the science and social science field, social isolation, and Internet addiction were not significant (**Table 3**). Therefore, the relationship between field of study, Internet addiction and social isolation was denied, and the hypothesis **H2** was rejected. This suggests that the choice of field of study does not significantly influence Internet addiction or social isolation among students.

Table 3. Mean differences between field of study, Internet addiction, & social isolation ($n=440$)

Field of study	Internet addiction			Social isolation		
	Mean	t	p	Mean	t	p
Science	54.3830	1.208	0.228	52.5940	0.178	0.240
Social science	48.0255			49.6241		

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The current investigation had four main findings. The first finding revealed a significant and positive relationship between the problem of using the Internet, social isolation, and Internet addiction.

The second finding showed that there is no significant association between patterns of using the Internet, social isolation, and Internet addiction. The third finding indicated that there is no statistically significant relationship between marital status, social isolation, and Internet addiction. Lastly, the fourth finding showed that there is no relationship between field of study, social isolation, and Internet addiction. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have shown a link between Internet addiction and loneliness. Additionally, other studies have found that Internet addiction has increased in Malaysia and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings suggest that adequate social support should be provided to address the feelings of isolation and prevent Internet addiction.

The first main finding of the study on Internet addiction and social isolation revealed that students experienced social isolation, with the highest mean score pertaining to pretending to be somebody of the opposite sex while online, followed by feeling less connected interpersonally when communicating online. The lowest mean scores were for most friends being known online, going online making it easier to make friends, and preferring telephone communication to online communication. This finding is consistent with Cigna (2018) study, which found that almost half of adults aged 18-22 scored high on the loneliness test. Bakken et al. (2009) also reported that the majority of Internet addicts and at-risk Internet users used the Internet as a way of escaping their social problems or distress.

The second main finding of the study identified the most important items based on mean scores in the term "Internet addiction." The item with the highest mean score was "how often do you find that you stay on-line longer than you intended," followed by "how often do you find yourself saying 'just a few more minutes' when on-line." The last two mean scores pertained to "how often do you feel depressed, moody or nervous when you are off-line, which goes away once you are back on-line" and "how often do you snap, yell, or act annoyed if someone bothers you while you are on-line" respectively. These findings suggest that students in the study exhibited symptoms of being addicted to the Internet, which is consistent with Young's (1998, p. 238) study on Internet addiction. The results of this study are also consistent with the findings of Guan et al. (2012) and Haque et al. (2019) who reported an increase in Internet addiction in Malaysia. Additionally, Dong et al. (2020) and Ismail et al. (2021) pointed out that addiction to the Internet has dramatically increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Jaafar et al. (2021) also detected that IGD is highly pervasive among Malaysian undergraduate students.

The third main finding of the study highlights the most common complaints about problems of using the Internet. The findings reveal that 'slow connection' was the most common complaint, followed by 'overload information on the Internet' and 'it takes too long to view or download pages'. The least common complaint was 'Internet is too complicated to use'. These results are consistent with the findings of Waters (2005), who identified information overload as one of the types of Internet addiction. It is worth noting that the phenomenon of information overload has been a concern since the 1970s, and it has been suggested that the advent of the Internet has only exacerbated this

problem. While most Americans are comfortable with their abilities to cope with information flows in their day-to-day lives, those who are more likely to feel information overload have less technology and are poorer, less well-educated, and older. Additionally, digital overload can lead to negative consequences like irritability, difficulty sleeping, depression, anxiety, and high blood pressure.

The fourth main finding of the study reports the patterns of Internet usage among the respondents. Almost half of the respondents have used the Internet for five to eight years, followed by the second group who used the Internet for nine to 12 years. The majority of the respondents used the Internet less than 10 times per week, followed by 11 to 20 times a week. 63.00% used the Internet less than 23 hours per week, while 22.70% of the respondents used it from 24 to 43 hours per week, and 9.30% used it between 44 and 63 hours per week. Students mostly used the Internet at the university, and the majority of them chose Google as their default search engine. These findings are consistent with the Breakthrough Youth Research Archives (2003) study, which found an increase in the rate of Internet addiction. Additionally, other studies have found that dependent Internet users used the Internet almost 5 hours more than the control group (Kheirkhah et al., 2010), typical Malaysian users spent 7.57 hours online on average per week (Müller, 2020) and there is a significant correlation between ethnicity, Internet addiction, and having holidays (Azmi et al., 2019). However, it is important to note that the study did not investigate the patterns of Internet usage in other countries or cultures, and further research is needed to understand the patterns of Internet usage in different contexts.

The fifth finding of the study revealed that there were no significant mean differences between marital status and Internet addiction. This result is not consistent with the findings of Bakken et al. (2009) and Kheirkhah et al. (2010), who found a relationship between marital status and Internet addiction. However, Dahlberg et al. (2015), Kheirkhah et al. (2010), Menec et al. (2019), and Sally (2006) identified marital status as a key factor in relation to loneliness. On the other hand, Abdel-Salam et al. (2019), Bakken et al. (2009), Haque et al. (2016), and Oguz and Cakir (2014) found no relationship between marital status and Internet addiction.

Sixth, the study found no significant mean differences between fields of study such as social science and science, social isolation, and Internet addiction. These results are consistent with the findings of Abdel-Salam et al. (2019) and Sally (2006), who confirmed that there is no relationship between field of study and social isolation. However, the current results are not consistent with the study of Sepehrian and Lotfi (2011), who found that critical Internet addicts outnumbered in technical and science faculty compared to the faculty of art and humanities. Similarly, Ching et al. (2017) and Zhang et al. (2018) reported increasing cases of Internet addiction among medical students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Zhang et al., 2018).

Limitations & Recommendations

The present study was conducted in one university, so the results cannot be generalized to all universities in Malaysia. In addition, this study was carried out in the state of Selangor, therefore we cannot generalize the findings to the other provinces in Malaysia. For better understanding, it would be beneficial to conduct this research among other groups in society, such as housewives, secondary school students, and company employees, to obtain more comprehensive perspectives on the problems of Internet use and social isolation. It is also

recommended to carry out the survey in other provinces in Malaysia to ensure a more representative sample. Lastly, using a mixed method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, is suggested to other researchers for obtaining more comprehensive results.

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The role of staff engagement and satisfaction in the relationship between workplace spirituality and job performance: Evidence from Ghanaian tertiary institution

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine how staff engagement and satisfaction mediates the path between workplace spirituality (WPS) and job performance (JP) using Kumasi Technical University staff as a case study. A structured questionnaire was administered to 186 teaching and non-teaching staff of the university. Sobel mediation analysis was used to explore the relationships under study. The study revealed a positive relationship between WPS and JP. The study again showed that staff engagement significantly mediates the relationship between WPS and JP. Lastly, satisfaction was also found to significantly influence the relationship between WPS and JP. The study recommends that organizations should provide employees with an environment, which harnesses their inner life and develops a sense of belonging and purpose as they perform work-related activities. It is also recommended that management should provide training and development program to encourage staff in undertaking team building activity to enhance cohesion and increase their productivity.

Keywords: workplace spirituality, staff engagement, Sobel mediation analysis, job satisfaction, performance

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace spirituality (WPS) is characterized by an acute sensation of spiritual connectivity to something higher than oneself, for the common good of the society (Afsar & Rehman, 2015). It is a set of corporate principles realized via the development of culture in the workplace (Giacolone et al., 2016). To the employees, spirituality acts as a reinforcement mechanism (Bosch Rabell & Bastons, 2020). Spirituality at the workplace is a concept, which aims to strengthen people's collaboration skills (Hassan et al., 2022; Zaidi et al., 2019) and foster a feeling of involvement between employees resulting in a culture that promotes peace and expands the capacity of the firm (Liputra & Munawaroh, 2016).

WPS promotes employee's quality of work and again provides enjoyable and significant emotions at work (Margaretha et al., 2021), moral judgement (Otake-Ebiede et al., 2020) and causes them to be more sensitive to the workplace (Fatima et al., 2019). Behaviors such as job fulfillment, involvement, innovative behavior, and commitment are all dimensions of WPS (Margaretha et al., 2021). According to Bharadwaj and Jamal (2020), employees look for an environment, which resonates with their spirituality. Specifically, a spiritual work environment allows

employees to associate their inner life's in finding a sense of purpose while they are working to achieve company's goal (Singh, 2019). Therefore, WPS drives employee's performance in return for something more than simply material rewards (Sardana, 2018).

Engagement is defined as an individual entire self-investment in their professional job including cognitive, emotional, and physical aspects (Lee Whittington et al., 2017). The first factor is the employee's perception of the company, its leaders, and the working environment. The emotional aspect refers to their feelings for one another, as well as if they have favorable or beneficial sentiments towards the organization. The behavior equivalence is a company's important component that comprises of initiatives to give engaged employees more freedom of choice. Several studies (Lee Whittington et al., 2017; Schaufeli, 2014) have demonstrated that engagement is based on employees' work results. Employee engagement differs from organizational culture principles like job involvement, citizenship, and communication (Margaretha et al., 2018).

Job satisfaction is described as an emotional state resulting from an individual's view of what excites him or allows him to satisfy his highest values at work (Zeidi et al., 2019). Job satisfaction is an employee's feeling of content or discontent at work (Judge et al., 2017).

Job satisfaction has been linked to a variety of factors, including features of the individual's personality as well as contextual factors such as the environment setting in which employees perform their work (van der Walt & de Klerk, 2014). Within this diversity of explanations, there are unique views whose differences must be understood and analyzed if theoretical knowledge and research on job satisfaction are to be redirected (Houghton et al., 2016). Employees that are satisfied are more likely to talk positively of the company, are willing to aid coworkers and are more in line with task decisions (Husin & Nurwati, 2014; Vizano et al., 2021).

According to Sarkawi et al. (2016), job satisfaction that is well executed and closed can aid in increasing employee motivation and organizational loyalty, which will help the organization to perform better. Eliyana et al. (2019) stated that work performance refers to a person's capacity to carry out tasks that help the organizations technological core development. The degree to which a person has a good opinion of themselves is known as the individual self-esteem, which is associated to job satisfaction (Locke, 2015), stress management (Scherer et al., 2016), patience or tolerance and social trust (Feng et al., 2016). According to Ali and Anwar (2021), measures of job satisfaction include the work itself, supervision, and co-worker relationship.

Job performance (JP) is an employee's ability to achieve set objectives (Arifin et al., 2020). Pawirosumarto et al. (2017) highlight that employee performance includes the extent of employee's desire and efforts to accomplish his work. This is vital as it contributes to the competitive advantage and success of a company (Daniel, 2019). Thus far, work environment has been recognized to significantly impact employee performance (Amin & Majid, 2017).

Eliyana and Sridadi (2020) attempted to discover the relationship between spirituality at the workplace and work satisfaction in terms of productivity. They found that spirituality at the workplace has a significant influence on performance and job satisfaction. Zaidi et al. (2019) also conducted research on WPS and job satisfaction. The focus of the study was to see how spirituality in the workplace affected job productivity. The findings revealed that aligning values such as purposeful labor, tolerance and spiritual focus helps employees understand spirituality in the workplace. In a related study, conducted by Margaretha et al. (2021), engagement was influenced by spirituality in the workplace.

Another research conducted by Bantha and Nayak (2021) showed a link between employee creativity and spirituality at the workplace. Jeon and Choi (2021) also initiated a study on spirituality at work, corporate dedication, and personal satisfaction. Their findings revealed a positive link between spirituality at work and personal commitment and life satisfaction. Notwithstanding the above, there has not been any studies made on the impact of spirituality at work and employee involvement to enhance work fulfilment and involvement. As a result, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of spirituality at work on job satisfaction by determining the effect of performance management on productivity.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This study adopted a WPS questionnaire from a modified version of Eliyana and Sridadi (2020). The questionnaire was designed into five sections. The first one being WPS and wellbeing, which was measured on a Linkert scale of 1-7, where 1=strongly agree to 7=strongly

disagree. Examples are 'I feel am a member of the organizations team 'I want to achieve organizational goals together with my colleagues and 'there's mutual support from colleagues at work. The second was job satisfaction, which was also measured on a Linkert scale of 1-7. Examples are 'my boss is capable of his duties, and I feel satisfied with my job as an employee. The third talked about JP under which we have examples to be 'I can complete task assigned to me in accordance with the time set and there's support from leaders and colleagues in the organization. The fourth section is creative process engagement. Examples are I can bring new and creative ideas on board; I am willing and have the capacity to conduct continuous research. The last section is the demographics. Under it we have the gender, age, staff category and number of working years.

Procedure

Data was collected through in person delivery of questionnaires to the teaching and non-teaching staff of Kumasi Technical University. The questionnaire was targeted at 200 people and 186 out of the total gave out their responses.

Data Analysis

The hypothesized model was tested using Sobel's Mediation analysis. This allows for a simultaneous test of a complete relationship between variables in a hypothesized model, allowing for evaluation of the model's consistency with the data.

Hypotheses Tested

- H1.** WPS positively influences performance.
- H2.** Staff engagement mediate the relationship between WPS and JP.
- H3.** Satisfaction mediates the relationship between WPS and JP.

RESULTS

Demographics

Demographic statistics in **Table 1** illustrate the general information such as gender, age, staff category and number of working years of the study participants. Subsequently, the results showed that out of the 186 total responds obtained, 109 were males and 79 were females, which consisted of 58.6% and 41.4%, respectively. Participants from age 25-35 responded most to the questionnaire delivered, which constitute 38.7% and those from age 56-60 and above responded least to the questionnaire (2.7%). The staff category based on the 186 respondents, 54.3% were academic staff and 45.7% non-academic staff. According to the number of working years, respondents with a year between two-five years of work experience were the dominant respondents (34.4%), while those with more than 10years working experience were the least (17.7%).

Reliability Analysis

In this section, the items, which were used to measure the constructs were analysed to determine whether they were internally consistent with each other and valid. Based on the reliability test, items, which were not reliable were excluded. **Table 2** shows the results of the reliability and validity of the constructs. It is evident that the constructs (WPS, staff engagement, job satisfaction, and JP) are highly reliable since the Cronbach's alpha values ranges from 0.908 to 0.956. This means that the items were internally consistent with each other. The

Table 1. Demographic statistics

Variable	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	109	58.6
	Female	77	41.4
Age (years)	Less than 25	27	14.5
	25-35	72	38.7
	36-45	43	23.1
	46-55	39	21.0
	56+	5	2.7
Staff category	Academic	101	54.3
	Non-academic	85	45.7
	Below 1	64	34.4
Number of years	2-5	53	28.5
	6-10	36	19.4
	Above 10	33	17.7

Table 2. Reliability & validity results

	R	r critical	Valid or not
Workplace spirituality			
WPS1	.602	0.138	Valid
WPS2	.695	0.138	Valid
WPS3	.527	0.138	Valid
WPS4	.522	0.138	Valid
WPS5	.588	0.138	Valid
WPS6	.688	0.138	Valid
WPS7	.682	0.138	Valid
WPS8	.696	0.138	Valid
Cronbach's alpha	0.908		
Job satisfaction			
J3	.811	0.138	Valid
J4	.761	0.138	Valid
J6	.825	0.138	Valid
J7	.835	0.138	Valid
J8	.791	0.138	Valid
Cronbach's alpha	0.913		
Job performance			
JP1	.865	0.138	Valid
JP2	.832	0.138	Valid
JP3	.802	0.138	Valid
JP4	.811	0.138	Valid
JP5	.798	0.138	Valid
JP6	.847	0.138	Valid
JP7	.846	0.138	Valid
JP8	.852	0.138	Valid
Cronbach's alpha	0.955		
Staff engagement			
SE 1	.816	0.138	Valid
SE 2	.858	0.138	Valid
SE 3	.803	0.138	Valid
SE 4	.805	0.138	Valid
SE 5	.855	0.138	Valid
SE 6	.839	0.138	Valid
SE 7	.821	0.138	Valid
Cronbach's alpha	0.956		

validity test also shows that all the items are valid since the regression coefficient (r) provided by the test is greater than the r critical value across all the selected items.

Correlation Analysis

After obtaining the reliability and validity of the variables, the Pearson's correlation was used to see if there is a link between the

Table 3. Correlation results

Variables	1	2	3	4
Workplace spirituality	-			
Job satisfaction	.675	-		
Job performance	.620	.889	-	
Staff engagement	.610	.837	.902	-
Mean	2.3797	2.9720	2.7144	2.9396
Standard deviation	1.25380	1.59759	1.56281	1.48923

Table 4. Estimates for workplace spirituality & performance

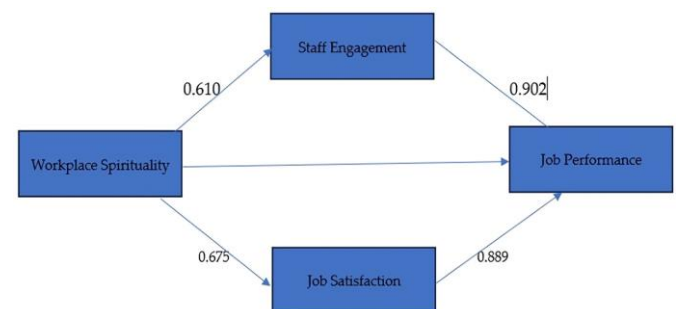
Variables	Estimates	Standard error	t-value	p-value
Constant	.875	.194	4.514	<.001
WSP	.773	.074	10.726	<.001
R ²	.385			

Note. p<.05** & Dependent: **Job performance**

Table 5. Sobel test results

Test	Test statistics	p-value
Sobel test 1	9.808	<.001
Sobel test 2	11.227	<.001

FooterWillBeHere

**Figure 1.** Relationship between variables (Source: Authors)

constructs under study. It can be seen from **Table 3** that there is a positive correlation between the constructs. But in all, there is a substantial link between JP and staff engagement.

Sobel's Mediation Analysis

To meet the study's goal, the Sobel's analysis was performed to determine whether the mediating variables (staff engagement and job satisfaction) significantly impact the link between the dependent variable (JP) and the independent variable (WPS). To investigate the link between the dependent and independent variables, regression analysis was first used. It is evident from **Table 4** that a unit increase in WPS increases JP. This change is significant with a p-value less than 0.001. This implies that WPS and JP have a significant relationship.

After establishing this relationship, two Sobel tests were performed to see whether the two mediating variables (staff engagement and job satisfaction) significantly impact WPS and JP. In Sobel test 1 (**Table 5**), staff engagement significantly mediates the relationship between WPS and JP. In Sobel test 2, job satisfaction was found to significantly mediate the relationship between WPS and JP. **Figure 1** shows the relationship between variables.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to examine how WPS, as developed by Ashmos and Duchon (2014), influenced organizational productivity. **H1** was to see if WPS has an impact on organizational performance and the results revealed a significant impact of WPS on performance.

The main implication drawn from these findings is that the sense of purpose obtained from spirituality at the workplace provides employees with internal cues and energy to keep their focus during the demanding and fast-paced working atmosphere (Kendall, 2019). Apart from highlighting instrumental values of work and their contribution, it is also imperative that organizations emphasize the spiritual values of their existence and link the organization's performance to non-financial needs (Latiff, 2021).

Benefiel et al. (2014) suggested that WPS does not only have personal benefits (joy, satisfaction, and commitment), but has organizational benefits, which is productivity, reduced absenteeism, and turnover. Karakas (2010) conducted a review of 140 papers on how spirituality in the workplace improves organizational performance and discovered that spirituality benefits both people and organizations because spirituality enhances the well-being and quality of life of employees. Therefore, the first hypothesis WPS and JP are positively related.

H2 confirmed that staff engagement significantly mediates the relationship between WPS and JP. This is consistent with the study of McKee et al. (2011), which revealed that engagement significantly mediates the relationship between WPS and JP. It was also supported by many researchers in the context of health (Corry et al., 2013; Mayo, 2009) and tourism. The findings were known to be consistent with previous studies (Baskar & Indradevi, 2020; Fogaça et al., 2018). It can be inferred that organizations that ensures cohesiveness towards their employees can identify problems, able to watch it from a different point of view to create solutions and carefully look for information to support problem solving (Fachrunnisa et al., 2014).

H3 aimed to test the connection between spirituality at work and performance using job satisfaction as a mediating variable. It was derived that cohesiveness at the workplace creates job satisfaction. Employees who feel that their job is part of their own life, their organization is their home, and the vision and mission is their own life vision, help put a high value to their job and organization. It then leads to a higher degree of job satisfaction. This finding was supported by Zerach and Levin (2018). Spirituality at the workplace and individual practical approaches used in the workplace are positively related to job satisfaction (Singer & Klimecki, 2014).

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The first findings revealed a positive impact on WPS and JP. The study again showed that staff engagement significantly mediates the relationship between WPS and JP. Lastly, job satisfaction significantly influences WPS and JP. The study recommends that organizations should provide employees with an environment, which harness their inner life, develop a sense of belonging and purpose while performing work-related activities and to assist them develop new ideas and strategy, which can help them solve problems to attain satisfaction and performance on their job. It can also be recommended that

management should provide training and development program to encourage staff practice team building activity to enhance cohesiveness and increase their productivity.

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Empowering youth leaders in B40 marginalized communities: An innovative approach to social entrepreneurship in alignment with national entrepreneurship policy 2030

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ABSTRACT

A robust and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes economic growth and job creation is what Malaysia's national entrepreneurship policy 2030 seeks to achieve. But in Malaysia, the B40 income group has a difficult time getting access to resources and possibilities for economic mobility (The World Bank, 2020). These disadvantaged groups frequently do not have access to the education, training, finance, and mentoring necessary to gain the knowledge and abilities necessary to succeed as entrepreneurs (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017). A paradigm that combines social responsibility, entrepreneurship, leadership, and education is needed to address this problem and build social entrepreneurs among marginalized youth leaders. This strategy should equip young people in B40 areas with the abilities, information, and resources necessary to establish long-lasting nonprofit organizations that meet the needs of their neighborhood while also generating cash. This concept could aid in developing a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Malaysia, where everyone has the chance to thrive regardless of their background or socioeconomic level by encouraging a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among marginalized youth leaders.

Keywords: marginalized youths, empowering communities, entrepreneurship, national policy

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INTRODUCTION

A robust and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes economic growth and job creation is what Malaysia's national entrepreneurship policy 2030 seeks to achieve (About DKN 2030, 2015). But in Malaysia, the B40 income group has a difficult time getting access to resources and possibilities for economic mobility (The World Bank, 2020). These disadvantaged groups frequently do not have access to the education, training, finance, and mentoring necessary to gain the knowledge and abilities necessary to succeed as entrepreneurs (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017). A paradigm that combines social responsibility, entrepreneurship, leadership, and education is needed to address this problem and build social entrepreneurs among marginalized youth leaders. This strategy should equip young people in B40 areas with the abilities, information, and resources necessary to establish long-lasting nonprofit organizations that meet the needs of their neighborhood while also generating cash. This concept could aid in developing a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Malaysia, where everyone has the chance to thrive regardless of their background or

socioeconomic level by encouraging a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship among marginalized youth leaders.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Supporting Theory for the Study

Addressing social and environmental issues is crucial in the modern world, especially in underprivileged groups. The creation of social entrepreneurs among disenfranchised youth leaders is one strategy that has gained popularity. These young people have original viewpoints, ground-breaking concepts, and a comprehensive comprehension of the difficulties that their communities face. They can become change agents that promote lasting solutions and significant social effect by being given the opportunity to realize their potential, being equipped with the required information and skills, and receiving support and resources.

This study will examine the theory of social entrepreneurship in order to comprehend and explain the phenomenon of social entrepreneurs emerging among disenfranchised youth leaders. This thesis clarifies how entrepreneurs contribute to social change by tackling societal issues with creative and long-lasting solutions. We can

learn more about how marginalized youth leaders might use their entrepreneurial skills to create social enterprises that integrate economic viability, social impact, and environmental sustainability by applying this theory to the setting of marginalized youth leaders.

We will investigate the main ideas and tenets that support the emergence of social entrepreneurs among marginalized youth leaders through an analysis of the theory of social entrepreneurship. This theoretical framework will serve as a basis for comprehending the elements that contribute to their success, the tactics they use, and the possible effects on their communities. By exploring this notion, we can learn important lessons about how to empower and support marginalized youth leaders as they pursue social entrepreneurship.

By tackling social and environmental issues, entrepreneurs can bring about societal change, according to the theory of social entrepreneurship (Mair & Mart, 2006). According to this view, social entrepreneurs are those who proactively identify societal problems and create creative, long-lasting solutions to address them (Dees, 1998).

According to theory of social entrepreneurship, underprivileged youth leaders who employ entrepreneurial ideas and methods to address particular problems faced by their communities qualify as social entrepreneurs. These young leaders have the chance to create and carry out social companies with a clear social objective as well as financial sustainability.

In addition, social entrepreneurship entails the triple bottom line's integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives (Elkington, 1997). By developing companies that make money, benefit society, and support environmental sustainability, marginalized youth leaders can align their social enterprises with the triple bottom line.

Furthermore, theory of social entrepreneurship also stresses the value of cooperation and community involvement. The development and implementation of marginalized youth leaders' programs must actively involve local stakeholders, such as community members, leaders, and organizations. They can gather insightful information, establish trust, and foster a sense of ownership and investment in the success of their social enterprises by involving the community.

In conclusion, theory of social entrepreneurship offers a framework for comprehending and explaining the phenomena of social entrepreneurs emerging among leaders from underserved young groups. It emphasizes the significance of recognizing social issues, coming up with creative solutions, adhering to the triple bottom line, and encouraging community involvement to bring about constructive social change.

Issues & Challenges

The resources and assistance required to launch and expand successful social enterprises are frequently inaccessible to marginalized B40 populations in Malaysia due to substantial hurdles. These communities frequently lack access to finance, education, and training programs, which are necessary for fostering social entrepreneurial abilities, claim Cheng and Mahmood (2017). Young people in B40 areas may find it challenging to obtain the funding necessary to start a social venture due to limited access to credit or a lack of collateral (The World Bank, 2020). Additionally, the absence of educational and training opportunities in areas like company management, marketing, and financial planning may prevent excluded B40 youth leaders from developing their social entrepreneurship talents (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017). Finally, it might be challenging for young people in B40

communities to traverse the difficulties of entrepreneurship and acquire the direction and assistance required to start and grow a successful social enterprise due to the absence of mentorship and support networks (The World Bank, 2020).

In order to tackle these issues, it is necessary to implement models that provide marginalised B40 groups with the necessary resources and support to thrive as social entrepreneurs. These models should prioritise providing finance options, educational and training programmes, and mentoring and support networks that are tailored to the needs of B40 youth leaders. Implementing these measures can enhance the growth of an entrepreneurial environment in Malaysia that is characterised by inclusivity and fairness, by tackling the scarcity of resources accessible to disadvantaged B40 groups.

A significant impediment faced by individuals in Malaysia's B40 communities when starting and growing successful social enterprises is a dearth of understanding regarding social entrepreneurship. According to Khairuddin et al. (2019), a significant number of individuals in B40 villages lack knowledge about the concept of social entrepreneurship and its potential benefits for their community. Individuals in B40 communities, particularly young people, may face difficulties in identifying prospects for social entrepreneurship as a result of their limited awareness. This lack of information can also hinder their access to the necessary resources and support required to initiate and grow a prosperous social enterprise.

There is a need for education and awareness-raising programs that highlight social entrepreneurship and its potential advantages for underserved populations in order to address this issue. These campaigns should be created to increase awareness of the opportunities and resources available for social entrepreneurs and should be targeted to the particular needs and difficulties of B40 communities. These campaigns can contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial environment in Malaysia by raising awareness of social entrepreneurship among excluded B40 communities.

In Malaysia's B40 neighborhoods, cultural hurdles can be a substantial impediment to social entrepreneurship. According to Ahmad and Ismail (2019), cultural and religious variables may have an impact on how people feel about social entrepreneurship and the kinds of social enterprises that are pursued. For instance, societal ideals and beliefs may place more emphasis on group accomplishment than on individual achievement, which can make it challenging for social entrepreneurs to strike a balance between financial viability and social effect. Aziz and Abdullah (2018) also point out that cultural influences, including pressure on some young people to adhere to traditional gender roles and expectations, can affect social entrepreneurship intention among Malay youth in Malaysia. For women in B40 communities, who may experience prejudice and have less options for education and professional growth, this can be especially difficult (Mohd Ariffin & Hassan, 2020). Initiatives that support gender equality and give women in B40 areas the tools they need to undertake social entrepreneurship are required to break down these cultural barriers. These programs should put an emphasis on making education and training opportunities available to women as well as mentorship and support systems that can assist women in overcoming bias and discrimination in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In Malaysia's B40 communities, a lack of networking possibilities can be a major obstacle for social entrepreneurs. To succeed, social

entrepreneurs must establish networks and collaborate with stakeholders, yet individuals in B40 communities may have few networking possibilities because of their remoteness or lack of access to technology (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017). B40 villages might, for instance, be found in remote rural locations some distance from the urban areas that host networking functions and conferences. This can make it challenging for social entrepreneurs working in B40 neighborhoods to find collaborators, clients, and investors. Additionally, residents in B40 villages might not have easy access to technology, including fast internet or social media platforms, which might make it challenging to create online networks and meet other businesspeople (The World Bank, 2020). Initiatives that give B40 communities access to technology and generate chances for social entrepreneurs to engage with other stakeholders are required to address these networking hurdles. These programs must be created with rural residents in mind, be open to them, and concentrate on creating networks that are suited to the special requirements and difficulties of Malaysia's B40 villages.

In Malaysia's B40 communities, government policies may play a significant role in fostering social entrepreneurial activities. However, policies may not always be in favor of social entrepreneurship, making it challenging for these businesses to receive the help they require to be successful. Government policies might, for instance, favor economic growth over social effect, which could leave social companies that do not adhere to conventional business models with a funding vacuum (Mohd Ariffin & Hassan, 2020). Furthermore, it's possible that government policies are not adapted to the particular requirements and difficulties of B40 communities, which can make it challenging for social entrepreneurs in these communities to access the tools and assistance they require to establish and expand successful social enterprises (Khairuddin et al., 2019). Initiatives that support social entrepreneurship and foster an environment conducive to the success of social companies are required to solve these policy obstacles. The goals of these projects should be to foster collaborations between social entrepreneurs and other stakeholders, develop policies that encourage social entrepreneurship, and provide finance and resources for social companies.

An important challenge for aspiring entrepreneurs in B40 areas is the dearth of role models who have achieved success as social entrepreneurs. Role models can be crucial in encouraging and motivating people to pursue entrepreneurship by offering instances of success and highlighting the possibility for making a good difference (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017). Aspiring businesspeople may find it challenging to picture themselves as successful social entrepreneurs in B40 areas due to a dearth of role models who have achieved success in this field. Due to cultural and gender conventions, women in B40 areas may have additional impediments to entrepreneurship, making this lack of representation particularly difficult for them (Mohd Ariffin & Hassan, 2020). Initiatives that showcase the success stories of social entrepreneurs in B40 neighborhoods and offer chances for prospective business owners to engage with successful social entrepreneurs are needed to overcome this dearth of role models. The promotion of role models who are representative of the particular needs and difficulties faced by Malaysia's B40 communities should be a priority of these activities, along with diversity and inclusivity.

Education & Social Entrepreneurship

Programs for education and training may play a significant role in fostering social entrepreneurial ventures in Malaysia's B40 areas. These courses can equip future social entrepreneurs with the abilities and information necessary to start and develop flourishing nonprofit organizations that will benefit their local communities. But in B40 villages, there can be a lack of access to education and skills, which could be a barrier to entrepreneurship. As a result, initiatives that offer comprehensive and accessible education and training programs for social entrepreneurship are required.

The development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills—all of which are necessary for social entrepreneurship—should be the main focus of education and training programs if they are to be effective (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017). Aspiring social entrepreneurs should have the chance to interact with mentors and role models who may offer advice and assistance through these initiatives (Mohd Ariffin & Hassan, 2020). For instance, the youth entrepreneurship program in Malaysia trains and mentors young company owners, including those from B40 neighborhoods, to help them gain the knowledge and abilities necessary to establish profitable enterprises (Khairuddin et al., 2019).

Promoting collaborations between universities and business, giving funds and resources for social enterprises, and developing social entrepreneurship-friendly regulations are other measures that could promote education and training programs for social entrepreneurs (Ismail & Ahmad, 2019; Kamaruddin & Ismail, 2020). These programs must be created with rural residents in mind, be open to them, and concentrate on creating networks that are suited to the special requirements and difficulties of Malaysia's B40 villages.

In conclusion, education and training initiatives are essential to fostering social entrepreneurship in Malaysia's B40 areas. These programs can assist in bringing about positive change in communities by supplying aspiring social entrepreneurs with the abilities and information need to start profitable social enterprises. In order to meet the diverse demands of many groups, there is a need for ongoing investment in education and training programs that are inclusive, efficient, and specialized.

Supporting social entrepreneurship projects in Malaysia's B40 communities can be largely dependent on cultivating an innovation-friendly culture. By giving kids the chance to explore and apply their ideas, the model might promote innovation and creativity. The model can aid in developing an atmosphere, where social entrepreneurship can flourish and result in good change in B40 communities by encouraging an innovation-oriented culture.

The concept may give young people the chance to take part in hackathons, innovation challenges, and other occasions that foster idea generation and teamwork. This would boost innovation and creativity. The focus of these events may be on tackling social and environmental issues that are significant to B40 communities, and they could be tailored to the particular requirements and difficulties of these communities. Hackathons, incubator programs, and accelerator programs are a some of the initiatives that the Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Center (MaGIC, n. d.) organizes to promote innovation and creativity in young people.

In addition to these occasions, the model might offer young people mentoring and training to assist them acquire the knowledge and skills

necessary to transform their concepts into prosperous social enterprises. Training in topics like design thinking, prototyping, and business strategy may fall under this category. The model can assist young people in overcoming obstacles to innovation that may exist in B40 communities, such as restricted access to resources and money, by offering these resources.

In conclusion, building an innovative culture is crucial to helping social entrepreneurial projects in Malaysia's B40 areas. The model can help establish an atmosphere, where social entrepreneurship can flourish and bring about positive change in these communities by giving young people opportunities to develop and implement their ideas.

In Malaysia, boosting social entrepreneurship efforts can be greatly aided by offering mentorship and assistance to young people in underserved groups. Young people may receive guidance and support from the model, which would enable them to develop their ideas and overcome the difficulties of beginning a firm. The concept can assist young people in overcoming obstacles to entrepreneurship that may exist in underprivileged groups, such as restricted access to resources, finance, and networks, by offering mentorship and support.

Peer support networks, group mentoring, and one-on-one mentoring are just a few of the different ways that mentoring, and support can be provided. These programs can offer help and advice to young people on issues including marketing, financial management, and company development (Ismail et al., 2019). Mentorship and support programs can help young people develop the confidence and resiliency necessary to succeed as entrepreneurs in addition to offering practical assistance (Cheng & Mahmood, 2017).

For instance, MaGIC academy program and MaGIC accelerator program are only a couple of the initiatives that MaGIC offers to help young entrepreneurs in Malaysia (MaGIC, n. d.). These programs offer training in areas like company planning and financial management, as well as access to mentors, investors, and industry experts for young business owners.

In conclusion, fostering social entrepreneurial activities in Malaysia requires mentorship and assistance for young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Mentorship and support programs can assist young people in overcoming any barriers to entrepreneurship that may exist in these places by offering helpful advice and counsel as well as fostering confidence and resiliency.

Forming alliances with governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other groups can be essential to advancing social entrepreneurship efforts in Malaysia. The model might collaborate with these institutions to give young people from underserved neighborhoods resources and support. The strategy can assist young people in overcoming obstacles to entrepreneurship that may exist in these places, such as restricted access to resources, finance, and networks, by forming partnerships.

Partnerships can take many different forms, such as working with NGOs, government organizations, and other groups to support young entrepreneurs with funding, mentorship, and training. Social enterprise accreditation program (SEAP, n. d.) and MaGIC (n. d.), for instance, are two recent efforts the Malaysian government has established to encourage social entrepreneurship (Kamaruddin & Ismail, 2020). These initiatives offer young entrepreneurs mentoring, training, and financial assistance to ethical companies.

In addition to these government programs, Malaysia is home to a sizable number of NGOs and other organizations that promote social entrepreneurs. For instance, Biji-Biji Initiative (n. d.) is a social venture that focuses on sustainable development and offers mentoring and training to young businesspeople in Malaysia. The model can give young people access to resources and support that they might not otherwise have by collaborating with groups like these.

In conclusion, for Malaysia to encourage social entrepreneurial ventures, relationships with government institutions, NGOs, and other groups are crucial. These relationships can aid in removing any barriers to entrepreneurship that may exist in underrepresented communities by offering finance, mentoring, and training to young businesspeople there.

Developing sustainable social enterprises in Malaysia is essential for addressing the needs of marginalised populations. The concept could aid young individuals in these communities in establishing lucrative and sustainable social enterprises that simultaneously address environmental and social issues. The model's focus on sustainability can facilitate the creation of enduring solutions that are advantageous to the community. In order to accomplish this, the model might provide guidance and support to young individuals in several domains such as evaluating social effect, promoting environmental responsibility, and implementing sustainable business strategies (Budinich & Davenport, 2019).

Incorporating sustainability into the design and execution of social entrepreneurship projects, claim Budinich and Davenport (2019), can assist young people in underrepresented communities in starting enterprises that are both profitable and ethical. In order to implement this strategy, training must be given to aspiring business owners on ethical supply chains, responsible resource management, and creative marketing tactics. The model can also provide advice on how to gauge social impact, allowing business owners to evaluate and maximize the social benefits of their ventures.

The model should also place a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship in order to inspire young businesspeople to create enterprises that prioritize eco-friendly practices and support sustainable production techniques. Entrepreneurs may reduce waste, implement sustainable resource management, and contribute to favorable environmental outcomes by instilling a sense of environmental consciousness.

Access to capital is crucial for supporting social entrepreneurship activities in Malaysia, especially for those from disadvantaged groups. By providing financial resources for aspiring entrepreneurs who lack the requisite funds to launch their enterprises, the model can act as a catalyst. The concept successfully empowers young people and drives them toward business success by overcoming this important barrier.

The model can create strategic alliances with numerous organizations, including governmental bodies, NGOs, and other pertinent groups, in order to achieve this goal. By working with these stakeholders, the model may access current financing sources and take advantage of their knowledge to provide financial assistance to social entrepreneurs (Kamaruddin & Ismail, 2020). These collaborations can make it easier to find funding options, to offer grants or loans, and to start mentorship programs that will help entrepreneurs along the way.

In addition to cash, the approach emphasizes the value of giving young people the information and abilities they need to manage their

money wisely and find other funding options. As a result, it provides extensive mentoring and training programs that cover financial management, fundraising techniques, and long-term financial viability. The strategy makes sure that these entrepreneurs can start and run sustainable firms that can generate money while bringing about positive change in their communities by offering insights into budgeting, financial planning, and investment methods.

In conclusion, the model is committed to fostering social entrepreneurship in ways that go beyond merely offering financial support. The model generates possibilities for young people in underrepresented communities to get the capital required for entrepreneurial activities by forming partnerships with key stakeholders and utilizing their resources. The availability of training and mentoring programs in financial management and fundraising helps these company owners to create sustainable and significant enterprises that improve their communities (Kamaruddin & Ismail, 2020).

ENCOURAGING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

For social entrepreneurship ventures in Malaysia to be successful, encouraging community involvement is crucial. By include local stakeholders in the conception and implementation of social entrepreneurship programs, the approach may promote community participation by fostering a sense of ownership and investment in the program's success. The model can guarantee that social enterprises be tailored to the particular requirements and difficulties of each community by involving local stakeholders. The model could include conferences, workshops, and other gatherings to solicit input and feedback from regional stakeholders (Sarstedt et al., 2019). The concept

can assist in the establishment of enterprises that are not only financially viable but also socially responsible and responsive to the needs of their communities by incorporating community engagement into the planning and implementation of social entrepreneurship initiatives.

Suggested Model

The necessity for the new model (**Figure 1**) is driven by a number of crucial issues that emphasize how crucial it is to give marginalized youth leaders the tools they need to succeed as social entrepreneurs. These arguments are addressed by this critical approach:

1. **Unleashing untapped potential:** Youth leaders from marginalized groups frequently have untapped potential, creative ideas, and a thorough awareness of the problems that their communities face (Goyal, 2018). Unlocking their potential as social entrepreneurs will allow them to use their distinctive insights to create significant changes (DuBois et al., 2011).
2. **Economic empowerment & poverty alleviation:** Creating social entrepreneurs among marginalized youth leaders can help marginalized communities achieve economic empowerment and poverty eradication. Opportunities for income production, job creation, and economic growth are created by social entrepreneurship (Bacq & Janssen, 2011). The economic climate of underprivileged young leaders' communities can be improved by fostering their entrepreneurial talents and giving them access to resources (Abdullah et al., 2019).
3. **Resolving social & environmental issues:** Marginalized communities frequently deal with a wide range of social and



Figure 1. Model for developing social entrepreneurs among marginalized youth leaders (Source: Author)

environmental issues. In order to solve these issues, social entrepreneurship offers a distinctive strategy that focuses on creating novel and sustainable solutions (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Developing marginalized youth leaders as social entrepreneurs enables them to address neighborhood-specific problems like social inequality, healthcare access, environmental sustainability, and healthcare access (Abdullah et al., 2019).

4. **Fostering social inclusion & equity:** Promoting social inclusion and equity is essential to sustainable development. The proposed model seeks to close the gap between mainstream business ecosystems and excluded populations (Goyal, 2018). The concept aims to establish an inclusive and equitable business ecosystem that gives voice and opportunities to those who have historically been disadvantaged by empowering marginalized youth leaders to become social entrepreneurs (DuBois et al., 2011).
5. **Strengthening local community engagement:** Local stakeholders must be included in the planning and execution of social entrepreneurship programs in order for them to be successful in the long run (Goyal, 2018). The suggested methodology encourages community ownership, ensures cultural relevance, and creates social capital by actively involving marginalized young leaders and neighborhood residents (Abdullah et al., 2019). The sustainability and effect of social businesses within the communities they want to serve are improved by this strategy (Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

In conclusion, the need to unleash their untapped potential, foster economic empowerment, address social and environmental challenges, promote social inclusion, and strengthen local community engagement underscores the necessity for the proposed model of developing social entrepreneurs among marginalized youth leaders. This concept has the ability to enable marginalized youth leaders to become change agents who will promote sustainable development and positive social impact in their communities by giving them the appropriate assistance, chances, and resources.

A suggested strategy for creating social entrepreneurs among excluded youth leaders is, as follows:

1. **Performing a needs analysis:** To begin, carry out a thorough needs analysis to comprehend the unique difficulties marginalized communities and the youth leaders inside them are facing.
2. **Education development:** Based on the results of the needs assessment, create a specialized curriculum that combines social responsibility, entrepreneurship, leadership, and education. Include courses on marketing, financial management, leadership development, and other pertinent subjects.
3. **Offering mentorship & assistance:** Provide mentoring and support to young people in underserved communities by putting them in touch with successful business owners, experts in their field, and civic leaders. Ongoing assistance, resources, and advice are provided as they embark on their business path.
4. **Establishing partnerships:** Create partnerships with government organizations, non-profits, and other pertinent groups to give disenfranchised youth leaders access to resources, funding opportunities, training, and other forms of

support. Utilize these alliances to improve resource access and promote cooperation.

5. **Promoting community engagement:** Promote community involvement by enlisting local organizations, leaders, and community people. For the purpose of gathering suggestions, comments, and encouraging a sense of ownership and involvement in the program's success, create forums for open discussions, community forums, and workshops.
6. **Experiential learning opportunities:** Provide experiential learning opportunities for marginalized youth leaders, such as internships, apprenticeships, or project-based initiatives, so they can get real-world experience and apply their knowledge. Encourage them to work on initiatives that support social impact and solve local issues.
7. **Monitoring & evaluation:** To gauge the program's impact, put in place a reliable monitoring and evaluation mechanism. To evaluate the performance of the program and make data-driven modifications, keep track of measures like the number of successful social enterprises formed, employment rates, income levels, and educational attainment.
8. **Continuous improvement:** Continually improve the model based on user feedback, test findings, and evolving requirements. Review the curriculum, mentoring initiatives, alliances, and community engagement tactics frequently to make sure they continue to reflect the context and ambitions of underrepresented youth leaders.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The urgent need to empower these people and promote a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem in Malaysia is addressed by the suggested model of social entrepreneurship development among underprivileged youth leaders in B40 areas. The concept attempts to give marginalized youth leaders the tools, support, and chances they need to succeed as social entrepreneurs by acknowledging their distinctive potential, views, and difficulties. The essential components and ramifications of the suggested paradigm are critically discussed in this section.

Conducting a needs assessment to fully understand the unique difficulties encountered by marginalized communities and the youth leaders within them is one of the essential components of the strategy. This step makes sure that the interventions and activities of the model are specifically designed to address the special requirements and situations of these communities. The approach can concentrate its efforts on delivering targeted solutions by identifying the individual issues, such as restricted access to education, money, and networking opportunities (Abdullah et al., 2019; Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

For marginalized youth leaders to have the requisite knowledge and abilities in social responsibility, entrepreneurship, leadership, and education, the model's curriculum development component is essential. By combining these factors, social entrepreneurs are created who can successfully address social and environmental issues while promoting economic viability. Young entrepreneurs should be able to apply their knowledge to their social enterprise initiatives immediately thanks to the curriculum's accessible, practical, and relevant design (DuBois et al., 2011; Goyal, 2018).

In the suggested paradigm, mentoring and assistance are crucial components that give disenfranchised youth leaders direction, counsel, and inspiration as they embark on their entrepreneurial journeys. The concept builds helpful networks and support systems that can aid in overcoming the obstacles and problems faced by these young entrepreneurs by linking them with seasoned business owners, industry experts, and community leaders. Programs for mentoring and support should be long-term and comprehensive, providing entrepreneurs with ongoing direction and assistance as they build and expand their social enterprises (Abdullah et al., 2019; Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

Another crucial element of the approach is forging alliances with NGOs, government organizations, and other groups. For marginalized youth leaders, these alliances may offer crucial tools, financial possibilities, educational chances, and support systems. The model has the potential to greatly improve the resources and assistance accessible to young entrepreneurs by utilizing the knowledge, networks, and resources of these stakeholders. In order to ensure that the marginalized youth leaders receive the required support and contribute to the larger objectives of the collaborating organizations, these collaborations should be cooperative and mutually beneficial (Ismail et al., 2019; Kamaruddin & Ismail, 2020).

A key component of the approach is community engagement, which guarantees that local stakeholders are actively involved in the creation and execution of social entrepreneurship activities. The strategy fosters a sense of ownership, investment, and relevance within the communities through involving community members, leaders, and organizations. Social enterprises can better align with the unique needs and goals of the communities they serve thanks to community engagement programs like forums, workshops, and events that offer forums for conversation, feedback, and co-creation (Abdullah et al., 2019; Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

The model also emphasizes the value of chances for experiential learning that enable underprivileged youth leaders to get real-world experience and apply their knowledge. These chances, like internships, apprenticeships, or project-based initiatives, not only help young leaders develop their entrepreneurial abilities but also provide them the chance to actively participate in addressing local needs and fostering social impact. The teenage leaders can hone their concepts, create networks, and obtain insightful knowledge about the difficulties and potential of managing a social company by participating in practical experiences (Abdullah et al., 2019; Bacq & Janssen, 2011).

A strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be put in place to track the model's effects in order to assure its efficacy. This entails keeping tabs on important indicators including the quantity of successful social companies that have been formed, employment rates, income levels, and the amount of education attained by marginalized youth leaders. The information gained from monitoring and evaluation initiatives enables evidence-based decision-making and continual development by revealing the model's strengths and limitations (Ismail et al., 2019; Kamaruddin & Ismail, 2020).

In conclusion, the suggested strategy for nurturing social entrepreneurs among underprivileged youth leaders in B40 neighborhoods is intended to address the unique difficulties these people confront and build a more inclusive and fairer entrepreneurial ecosystem in Malaysia. The concept offers a complete framework for empowering underprivileged youth leaders to act as change agents and promote sustainable development in their communities by merging

social responsibility, entrepreneurship, leadership, and education. Needs assessment, curriculum development, mentorship and support, collaborations, community participation, experiential learning, monitoring and evaluation, and other crucial model elements all work together to foster an environment that fosters social entrepreneurship. Malaysia can use this concept to tap into the unrealized potential of its underprivileged youth.

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Data availability: Data generated or analyzed during this study are available from the authors on request.

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