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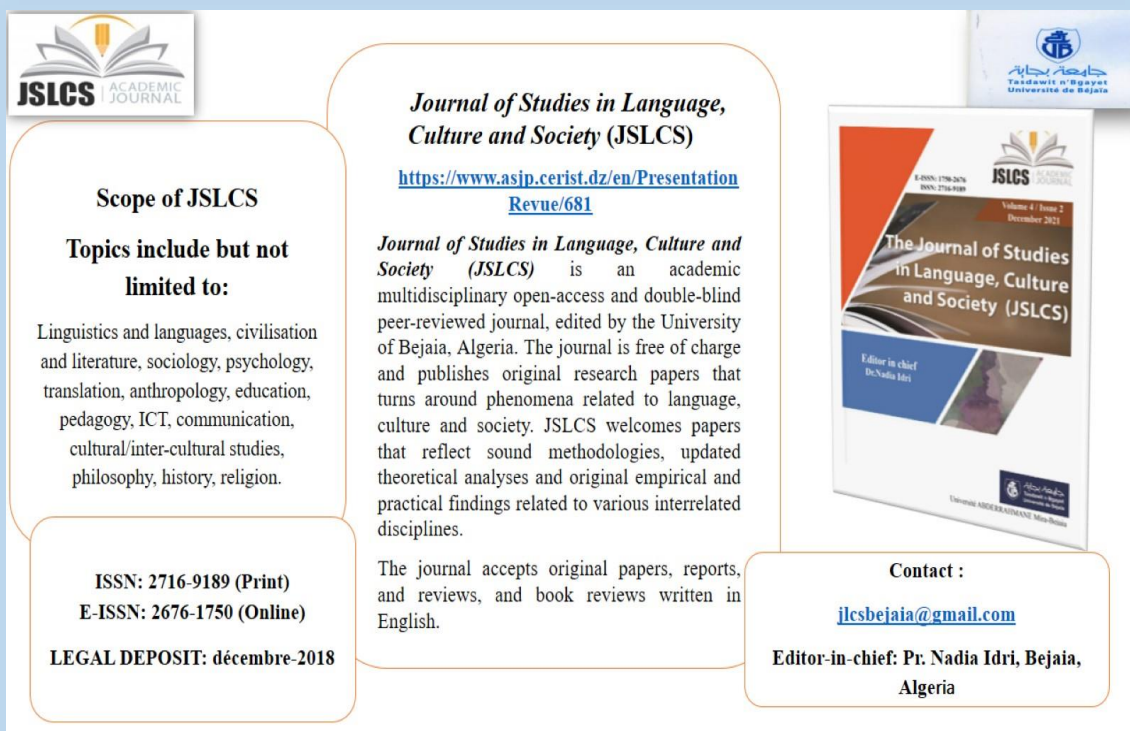
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Journal of Studies in Language, Culture and Society (JSLCS) is an academic multidisciplinary open-access and double-blind peer-reviewed journal, edited by the University of Bejaia, Algeria. The journal is free of charge and publishes original research papers that turns around phenomena related to language, culture and society. JSLCS welcomes papers that reflect sound methodologies, updated theoretical analyses and original empirical and practical findings related to various interrelated disciplines.

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ANALYTICAL STUDY OF STYLISTIC DEVICES IN FOUR SELECTED FRENCH AND ENGLISH POEMS

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Abstract

Communication plays a major role in the affairs of man and the development of societies. The number one purpose of communication is understanding. Every writer or speaker often tries to make his/her belief, ideas, thoughts, emotions, and desires among other things comprehensible. A communicator does this through the use of words, collocations or expressions that vividly and precisely capture the context and content of his/her field of discourse. Quite a good number of scholars have worked and are still working on style of writers and speakers around the world. However, less attention has been paid to stylistic devices in texts. This study, therefore, examines issues such as register, figures of speech, allusion, symbolism, enjambment and mood in Four French and English poems. Quantitative research method which allows descriptive presentation of research findings is applied. The study is premised on the theory of Functionalism of text. The choice of the four selected poets is influenced by the fact that the authors are African writers of the colonial and the postcolonial periods. Niyi Osundare and Gbemisola Adeoti write in English while Léopold Sédar Senghor and David Diop write in French. Findings suggest that lexico-semantic interpretation of a text requires the understanding of a writer's poetic devices The study concludes that the knowledge of stylistic devices in a particular text will enhance its interpretation and its internalization.

Keywords: Stylistic devices, communication, African writers, Ogundokun, Lawal

1. Introduction

The ability to speak and use a language is one major thing that makes man a higher animal. It is a bond among the people of a linguistic community. Man has the faculty to acquire and learn as well as maintain more than one language at the same time. There are several things man can do with a language. Gimson (1980) as cited by Balogun (2017, p. 2) says language is:

> a system of conventional symbols used for communication by a whole community, the pattern of conventions covers a system of significant sound units, the inflection and the arrangement of words and the association of meaning with words.

As a follow up to Gimson's view on language, Osisanwo (2013, p. 1) sees language as: "human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication."

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However, language can be described as a system of communicating or expressing ideas, experiences, feelings and desires among other things; verbally or non-verbally through the use of certain symbols by a group of people. Apart from communicative/informational function, language performs other functions such the expressive function, aesthetic, metalinguistic, directive, phatic, conative, emotive, poetic and referential functions (cf. Geoffery, 1974)

An attempt to treat the register of a communicator will involve the understanding of lexicon and stylistics as well as the concept of a text. The lexicon specifies the peculiar features of a word. These subsume its morphological, syntactic, categorial and contextual features. The categorial and syntactic components are said to constitute the base component (cf. Lamidi, 2000, p. 61). Stylistics, written as *stylistile* in German and *stylistique* in French, is a branch of linguistics that enables linguists to explain the studies of style, especially in works of literature (cf. Daramola, 2001, p. 160). Any language that is functional in a given context is a text (cf. Halliday & Hasan, 1985, p. 10; Bloor & Bloor, 1995, p. 86). It is, however, important to add that a text could be in spoken or written form.

Now, what is a register? As applied in this study, a register is the feature of a text which indicates the particular occupational activity the language-user is engaged in (cf. Okoro, 2001, p. 222). There are many registers such as the language/register of advertising, agriculture, banking and finance, engineering, law, literature, military, medicine, politics, sports, technology and the language/register of transportation only to mention a few. According to Salami (2014, pp. 42 – 43), the term register is used in sociolinguistics to refer to:

> languages or language varieties according to use. Registers are sets of vocabulary usage associated with occupational or social groups. For example, computer scientists, medical doctors, bankers, engineers and so on use different vocabulary items. A computer scientist will talk about "template" while a civil engineer or a design engineer may refer to the same concept as "frame".

Simply put, registers are specific terminologies associated with a given vocation, calling, occupation or profession. Every register is the vocabulary of a particular discipline/profession. It is a pertinent feature of a text. Register is a way of presenting or painting similar idea/concept differently in accordance with the occupational perception of various vocations. For instance, a lawyer uses the word *client* while a medical doctor prefers to say *patient* and a banker goes for the word *customer*. As a matter of fact, the three word – client, patient and customer are referring to the same concept, in different situational contexts. Contextual classifications which produce different variations/varieties of text is known as register (cf. Gregory & Carroll, 1978, p. 64). Foregrounding the assertions above, Kamalu (2018, p. 102) observes:

> Writer and speakers select words and expressions that best communicate their intentions in context. Some scholars in stylistics, study lexical choices under vocabulary while some others integrate it into semantics or grammar.

In this study, however, lexical items are treated as part of vocabulary because our focus is more importantly on register.

2. Theoretical Framework

Since the issue of register can be associated with functional stylistics, this study is situated within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics. Functionalism theory holds that every language either verbal or non-verbal is performing some roles in a given context. This idea of language being functional is postulated by scholars in the field of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The idea of Systemic Functional Linguistics is viewed as "ethnographic" and "anthropological" approach by Butler (1985, p. 4). According to Pride (1971, p. 1), "the study of language as part of culture and society is a task that defies neat delimitation". Hence,

there is an interrelationship between a society and its language. The utterance, *context of situation* is developed by Bronislaw Malinowski. Kamalu (2018, p. 71) points out that the systemic functional model is:

> The interdependence of meaning and context of situation. It is a linguistic model that combines the formal properties of language with its situational dimensions thus recognizing both the linguistic and extralinguistic forms and functions of language.

From all these affirmations above, one can note the connections among what a communicator says (subject-matter), how he/she says it (style) and why he/she says it. Therefore, the choice of a communicator's register is guided by the subject-matter at hand, the situational and sociocultural contexts that surround the subject-matter or field of discourse. As there is a relationship between society and its language, there is also a correlation between register and the profession that uses it. It is obvious that systemic fictional linguists believe that language use is said to be functional because it is meant to produce meaning which is controlled by situational and sociocultural (formal and informal) contexts. Significantly also, such a meaning depends on a process of choice.

3. Discussion

3.1.0   *Niyi Osundare's "Ours to plough, not to plunder"*

The Earth is ours to plough and plant
the hoe is our barber
the dibble her dimple

Out with mattocks and machetes
bring calabash trays and rocking baskets
let the sweat which swells earth root
relieve heavy heaps of their tuberous burdens

let wheatfields raise their breadsome hands
to the ripening sun
let legumes clothe the naked bosom
of shivering mounds
let the pawpaw swell and swing its headward breasts
Let water spring
from earth's unfathomed fountain
let gold rush
from her deep unseeable mines
hitch up a ladder to the dodging sky
let's put a sun in every night

Our earth is an unopened grainhouse,
a bustling barn in some far, uncharted jungle
a distant gem in a rough unhappy dust
This earth is ours to work not to waste
ours to man not to maim
This earth is ours to plough, not to plunder

3.1.1   In **"Ours to plough, not to plunder",** Niyi Osundare advocates for orderliness, rectitude and restraints towards how human beings treat nature and the resources there-in. The poet suggests that the earth needs to be treated with care. The advantages of the earth to mankind underscore the need to protect it jealously. The sustainability of man depends largely on the

mother earth in terms of food supply, shelter, clothing and the supply of oxygen. Even upon death, human beings are kept inside the earth.

Register and the figures of speech are the stylistic devices that shall be considered in Osundare's **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"**

3.1.2 *Register.* The register of Agriculture is the dominant term employed by Osundare in his poem titled **"Ours to plough, not to plunder".** Words such as "earth" (land), plough (tilling of the land for planting), farm tools like hoe, calabash trays, baskets, dibble, mattocks and matchets are mentioned. Other terminologies that are associated with Agriculture in the poem include heaps (ridges), grain house, wheatfields and plants like legumes (vegetables or cover crops) as well as pawpaw. The poet writes:

The **Earth** is ours to **plough** and **plant**
the **hoe** is our barber
the **dibble** her dimple

Out with **mattocks** and **machetes**
bring **calabash trays** and rocking **baskets**
let the sweat which swells earth root

relieve heavy **heaps** of their tuberous burdens…

From the extract of the poem, one finds at least ten terms that are associated with the language/register of Agriculture in the first two stanzas alone. Before, the arrival of the Whites in Africa and the discovery of crude oil some years later, agriculture (farming and animal husbandry) was the major occupation of the Africans and people value the earth then. However, the discovery of crude oil and its exploration have caused a lot of environmental destruction, degradation and deforestation. As a matter of fact, this calls for caution and restraints for human sustainability and peaceful co-existence. The choice of the words for this poem is appropriate, informative, instructive and educative in its descriptive nature.

3.1.3 *Figures of Speech.* In his effort to create mental pictures and vivid descriptions of situations and what he intended, Osundare uses some literary devices that include alliteration, metaphor, repetition and personification.

a) Examples of Alliteration:

"**P**lough and **p**lant" (line 1); "**d**ibble her **d**imple" (line 3), "**m**attocks and **m**atchets" (line 4), "**s**weat which **s**wells" (line 6), "**h**eavy **h**eaps" (line 7), "**b**ustling **b**arn" (line 20), "**w**ork not to **w**aste" (line 22), "**m**an not to **m**aim" (line 23) and "**p**lough…**p**lunder"

The use of these alliterations brings about a perfect melodious sound effect that lace up the aesthetic value of the poem as a piece of art. When you plough, you plant, and the plant eventually provides food for human beings. Heavy heaps imply good yield; ridges with big tubers. The expressions: "**w**ork not to **w**aste", "**m**an not to **m**aim" and "**p**lough…**p**lunder" are instructive. They warn the inhabitants of the world to work on the earth but not to waste the resources there-in; to take good care of the earth and not to destroy it and to till the soil but not to raid or rape the earth of her goods.

b) Examples of Metaphoric expressions in Osundare's **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"**

"The hoe is our barber", (Earth as the) "Bread-some hands" of the wheatfields" and the "shivering mounds", the "earth's unfathomable fountain"; With these metaphoric expressions, the poet sees the earth as a reservoir of inexhaustible resources. Also, the earth is seen as an

"opened grain-house ". This means that the earth still has untapped resources in spite of several human activities. However, apart from calling the earth those beautiful names, the poet described the earth as "a bustling barn" and "a rough unhappy dust" because of the carelessness of man occasioned by his callous activities and the reckless use of technology which destroy the mother earth. As a stylistic device, the poet employs the metaphors to make mankind appreciate the reason for preserving the earth and its resources from collapsing.

    c)   Examples of Personification:

"…legumes clothe the naked bosom" (line 10). Legumes are personified as if they were human beings who could cover their nakedness with cloth. Another instance of personification is "… the pawpaw swell and swing its headward breasts". The pawpaw fruits are treated as if they were women endowed with breasts. Through the use of personification, the writer is able to transfer the attributes of person to non-human being. This has created concrete images in the minds of readers and gives out aesthetic values and even erotic feelings.

    d)   Repetition

The poet employs repetition for the purpose of emphasis and to underscore his motive to educate readers as regards the need to protect the earth and use the resources there-in wisely. For instance, the word earth is repeatedly used in the poem and the title of the poem, **"Ours to plough, not to plunder"** is also repeated in the last line.

    e)   The use of enjambment

Enjambment is a run-on-line technique which is often used as a stylistic device in poems. This technique of poetic writing is applied to make a poem flow like the flute and achieve a musical nature. The lines of such a poem are interwoven and run into one another. For example, see the fourth stanza of the poem under review:

Let water spring
from earth's unfathomed fountain
let gold rush
from her deep unseeable mines
hitch up a ladder to the dodging sky
let's put a sun in every night

3.2.1.   Gbemisola Adeoti's "Ambush"

The Land is giant whale
That swallow the sinker
With hook, line and bait
aborting dreams of a good catch
Fishers turn home at dusk
blue Peter on empty ships
all Peters with petered out desires

The land is a saber-foothed tiger,
That cries deep in the glade
While infants shudder home
the grizzled ones snatch their gut
from bayonets of tribulation
Halting venturous walk at dust

The Lord is a giant hawk
That courts unceasing disaster
as it hovers and hoots in space

The land lies patiently ahead
awaiting in ambush
those who point away from a direction
where nothing happens
toward the shore of possibilities.

3.2.2. Adeoti's **"Ambush"** captures the hostility experienced by many African States after the attainment of self-rule in the 60s; the military incursion and its oppressive tendencies that dashed the expectations of the average Africans. Since the first coup d'état in Togo in 1963, there were several military invasions in governance in West African States like Nigeria, the home country of the poet. This sordid experience occasioned by incessant violent overthrow of legitimate government has impoverished the citizens psychologically, socioeconomically and politically. As stylistic devices, register and literary devices like metaphor, symbolism, allusion, alliteration, repetition and pun shall be examined.

3.2.3 ***Register.*** There are two major registers employed by the poet in the poem; namely the register of military and the language of fishery (by extension, agriculture). The subject-matter of the poem will be better understood and appreciated with an appreciable knowledge of the vocabularies which are associated with military and agriculture; especially fishery and/or hunting. For example, as a military term, "**ambush**" is a military strategy that implies a sudden attempt on somebody's life. It is an unexpected attack on a person or a group of persons by those who are already waiting for them in a hiding place. The poem presents two classes of people; the hunter (the fisher man) and the hunted (the fish). The hunter symbolizes the people in the corridors of power that manipulate and control the destiny of the less privileged. Unfortunately, the downtrodden who appear to be nonchalant and docile about taking charge of their destiny are the hunted (the fish or the game). The hunters, in the poem, are the postcolonial African leaders who ambushed the poor Africans socioeconomically, politically and otherwise. On the other hand, the following terms; "the land", "giant whale", "the sinker", "hook", "line", "bait", and "fishers" confirm the language of fishery or hunting in the poem.

3.2.4. ***Literary Devices.*** Again, a stylistician who interrogates how and why a writer has adopted the use of a given technique in his/her writing should be interested in the application of figures of speech in a particular piece of writing, most importantly if such a text is a poem. The use of metaphor, personification, symbolism, allusion, alliteration, repetition, pun and run-on-line technique attract our attention in Adeoti's "**Ambush**".

a). Metaphor and Personification

With the use of these two poetic devices, the poet is able to consolidate the military cum fishery images in the poem. For example, he described the hunter as "giant whale", "saber-toothed tiger", "bayonets of tribulation", "Lord" and "giant hawk". All these descriptions connote the fact that the hunter (African postcolonial leaders) is oppressive, wicked and dangerous. In other words, these rulers and their associates are vultures and, or terrorists that lay ambush for their fellow Africans.

The word "land" is not only a metaphor but also a personification in the poem. The land is painted as "giant whale" that swallows the sinker… out desires" (first stanza). "The Land…walk at dusk" (second stanza) and the poet says again that "The Land is a giant hawk…hoots at dusk." These expressions illustrate the use of metaphor and personification at the same time in the same utterances. Apart from calling the land other names directly (metaphor), attributes of person are given to it (personification). Land is believed to actually have the attributes of human being and that is why it is often referred to as "the mother earth" who provides sustainability for all its inhabitants as a mother does for her children.

b)   Symbolism

In the poem, "giant whale", "saber-toothed tiger", "bayonets", "giant hawk", represent fear, confusion, war, impasse, oppression, force, uncertainty and death that come from the hunters, the oppressors of the downtrodden which often characterized unconstitutional and/or dictatorial rule. Contrary to the universal belief that land has mother figure, "the land" as used in the context of this poem symbolizes the hunters which can be interpreted as the postcolonial dictatorial African rulers.

c)   Allusion

There is a biblical allusion in the first stanza of the poem where the poet makes reference to Peter:
       The Land is giant whale
       That swallow the sinker
       With hook, line and bait
       aborting dreams of a good catch
       Fishers turn home at dusk
       blue Peter on empty ships
       all Peters with petered out desires

The extract above reminds us of the biblical Peter, the fisherman who later became one of Jesus' disciples. Adeoti injects this biblical allusion as an element of his style either to underscore his religious affiliation or to demonstrate his knowledge of the scripture, as a student of Christian Religious Knowledge at some point, in the course of his studies.

d)   Alliteration
The use of a particular consonant letter/sound in an expression two or more times is indicated in the following examples from the poem under review as alliteration: The poet employs this literary device to enact a coordinated and pleasant sound effect.
       "that **s**wallow the **s**inker" (line 2)
       "all **P**eters with **p**etered out desires" (line7)
       "as it **h**over and **h**oots in space" (line 16).

e)   Repetition

The expression "The land (is)…" appears in three places in the poem (see lines 1, 8 and 17). The poet uses this poetic device for the purpose of emphasis in order to draw readers' attention to his subject-matter and his commitment to his chosen field of discourse.

f)   Enjambment

The use of enjambment which is also known as run-on-line technique is evident in the poem as the lines of the poem are interwoven and no comma or full stop is inserted throughout the poem. The poet engages this writing strategy to make his poem musical.

g)   Pun

This literary device allows creative writers; especially the poets, to play on words. In his poem titled "**Ambush**", Adeoti plays on the word "Peter" in line 7 where he says: "all **Peters** with **petered** out desires" This kind of construction in language, besides being exciting and aesthetic, has serious metalinguistic function.

By and large, through the use of the registers of military and fishery as well as other poetic devices which serve as his stylistic elements, Adeoti is able to illustrate the postcolonial sad experiences of the common people in most African States where leaders have become terrors and citizens' hope and expectations are dashed. There are evidently themes of oppression, social

inequality, and docile followership. However, the poet indicates a slim ray of positive future towards the end of the poem when he says: "where nothing happens / toward the shore of possibilities".

3.3.1 David Diop's "Un Blanc m'a dit…"

Tu n'es qu'un Nègre!
Un Nègre
Un sale Nègre
Ton Coeur est une éponge qui boit
Qui boit avec frénésie le liquid empoisonné du vice. Et ta couleur empoisonne ton sang
Dans l'éternité de l'esclavage
Le fer rouge de la justice t'a marqué
Marqué dans ta chair de luxure
Ta route a les contours tortueux de l'humiliation
Et ton avenir, monster, damné, c'est ton présent de honte
Donne-moi ce dos qui ruisselle de la sueur fétide de tes fautes
Donne-moi tes mains calleuses et Lourdes
Ces mains de rachat sans espoir pas!
Le travail n'attend
Et que tombe ma pitié de ton spectacle.
Devant l'horreur

3.3.2 David Diop's "Un Blanc m'a dit…". The poems of David Diop explore the socio-political climate of the colonial period in Africa; the human condition in Africa in the 40s and the 50s. Diop expresses his belief in the concept of Negritude and his bitterness for the colonial system in his poems. He is a militant African poet who denounces the colonial invaders and the colonial administration at the same time. He aggressively preaches revolt and violence to bring the colonial system to an end. He calls the colonial masters dirty names such as brutes, exploiters, cheaters, hypocrites, imperialists and vultures among other names. Diop's intention of attacking the Europeans and their associates is to stop colonial rule in Africa.

3.3.3 Register. The use of military terms dominates the poem. As it has been pointed out, David Diop is an unrepentant militant writer. Words such as "sang" = blood, "l'esclavage" = captivity, "tortueux" = tortuous, "l'humiliation" = humiliation, "monster" = monster and l'horreur" = horror attest to the use of the language of the military or war.

3.3.4 Stylistic Devices

a)   Vulgarity

There is the application of vulgar abuse; that is, an offensive language or obscene utterance to describe someone or something. In the poem, **"Un Blanc m'a dit…"** which can be literarily interpreted as "A Whiteman once told me…", the expression *"Un sale Nègre"* meaning a dirty Black is used to paint a Blackman. This utterance directed toward the Blackman is cruel and vicious. It is unfair and unacceptable. The use of vulgarity is evident in lines 1 to 3 of the poem.

b)   Symbolism

In the mentality of an average Whiteman, the word *Nègre* (Black) symbolizes filthiness, ill-fated and/ evil. They believe the black colour connotes worthlessness and hopelessness (lines 10 and 11).

c)   Metaphor

In line 3, the Blacks are called *Nègre* (inferior being). The Blackman's heart is also described as a sponge in lines 4 and 5: "Ton Coeur est une éponge qui boit. Qui boit avec frénésie le liquid empoisonné du vice. Et ta couleur empoisonne ton sang". The Europeans see Africans as people without hope morally and economically. As though that was not enough, in line 6, the Whiteman believes that all Blacks are slaves: "Dans l'éternité de l'esclavage"

d)   Allusion

Lines 13 to 15 of the poem make reference to the imperfection and sins of the black people. There is a biblical allusion to Noah's son who commits sin. The Europeans are of the opinion that Africans are the descendants of Noah's son who sinned against God. Hence, the Christian missionaries have come to Africa for the rebirth of Africans in order to redeem their souls. However, the poet does not believe in this narrative. He ends the poem by pointing out the hypocrisy of the Whites who claimed they are in Africa to win souls but ended up terrorizing the Blacks and syphoning African natural resources to their land. They do not pity or show mercy on the Africans. The Blackman's dignity does not mean anything to them. The Europeans humiliated, dehumanized and subjected the Blacks to unending forced labour.

e)   Grammatical Implication of the use of the personal pronoun "Tu"

The use of "Tu" to refer to the Blackman is derogatory. It connotes the European thinking that the black race is inferior. Instead of using the personal pronoun "Tu" which is singular and does not accord any respect to the addressee, one expects the colonial master to use the personal pronoun "Vous" which is you plural and at the same time shows a mark of respect. The implication of this element of style is that the poet captures the European mentality of seeing their race as being superior to the black race.

f)   Form

The poem is a narrative blank verse. The use of first-person narrative technique is evident in the title of the poem, **"Un Blanc m'a dit…"**. The speaker narrates his personal encounter with a Whiteman. Hence, he is an I-narrator. The personal pronoun in object form, "me" which is contracted to "**m'**" because of the two vowel letters: "e" and "a" standing together supports our argument with regard to the application of I-narrative style in the poem.

In brief, David Diop's **"Un Blanc m'a dit…"** (A Whiteman once told me…) is a militant poem that invites the Blacks to fight against the colonial imperialism. The poet undoubtedly condemns the activities of the colonialists and their associates, especially the White missionaries as regards racial oppression and segregation.

3.4.1   *Leopold Sédar Senghor's "Priere aux masques"*

Masques! O Masques!
Masque noir masque rouge, vous masques blanc-et-noir
Masques aux quatre points d'où soufle l'Esprit
Je vous salue dans le silence!
Et pas toi le dernier, Ancêtre à tête de lion
Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane
Vous distillez cet air d'eternité où je respire l'air de mes Pères.
Masques aux visages sans masque, dépouillés de toute fossette comme de toute ride
Qui avez composé ce portrait, ce visage mien penché sur l'autel de papier blanc
A votre image, écoutez-moi!
Voici que meurt l'Afrique des empires – c'est l'agonie d'une princesse pitoyable
Et aussi l'Europe à qui nous sommes liés par le nombril.
Fixez vos yeux immuables sur vos enfants que l'on commande

Qui donnent leur vie comme le pauvre son dernier vêtement.
Que nous répondions présents à la renaissance du Monde
Ainsi le levain qui est nécessaire à la farine blanche.
Car qui apprendrait le rythme au monde défunt des machines et des canons?
Qui pousserait le cri de joie pour réveiller morts et orphelins à l'aurore?
Dites, qui rendrait la mémoire de vie à l'homme aux espoirs éventrés.
Ils nous disent les hommes du coton du café de l'huile
Ils nous disent les hommes de la mort.
Nous sommes les hommes de la danse, dont les pieds reprennent vigueur en frappant le sol dur.

3.4.2   *Leopold Sédar Senghor's "Prière aux masques"* is a Negritude poem that celebrates the Black history, culture and traditional core values. The poet's idea deconstructs the European mentality that the Blacks around the world have no history not to think of them having culture or civilization. The poet practically accepts being black and he also demonstrate being a proud African. The poem is a form of response to the issue of identity. The writer does not shy away from whom he is despite the fact that he is abroad at the time.

3.4.3   *Register.* The language of religion is the dominant terminology in L. S. Senghor's **"Prière aux masques"**. Senghor explores a religious aspect of the African people which is centred on ancestor worship to put it on record that the Blacks have their own way of offering prayers. The following terms from the poem evocatively connect readers with religion; traditional or foreign: "Prière" = prayer, "quatre points" = four cardinal points", "l'Esprit = (holy) sprit, "salue" = greet", "Ancêtre" = Ancestor, "gardez" = guide/protect, "eternité" = eternity, "vie" = life, "commande" = commandment or to instruct/order, "enfants" = children, "orphelins" = orphans, "Monde" = world, "espoirs" = hope, "l'huile" = (anointing) oil, "la mort" = death, "vêtements" = garments, "joie" = joy and "danse" = dance.

The terms show that religion is universal and it has global appeal. Religion in whatever form is an act of worship. It is a rite and its purpose includes to seek help from God, a spirited or superior being whom the worshippers believe can help them in one way or another. It is also established that religion can make one attain eternity and access unending happiness. Apart from offering prayers, many religious activities are often accompanied with songs, dance and merriment. From the title, **"Prière aux masques"** which can be literarily translated as "Prayer to the masquerade" it can be deduced that the poet has inclination towards religion.

3.4.4   *Poetic Devices*
a)   Symbolism

In the title of the poem, **"Prière aux masques"**, the word *"masques"* symbolizes the ancestors or the gods. The words "Vous" and "mes Pères" (my fathers) as used in the context of this poem are also referring to the ancestors: Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane / Vous distillez cet air d'eternité où je respire l'air de mes Pères. The use of "Vous" rather than "Tu" for the ancestors denotes that the speaker has respect for them. "Nous" as used in the poem represents the Blacks, especially the Africans. The pronoun "Ils" in lines 20 and 21, stands for the Europeans (the Whites): Ils nous disent les hommes du coton du café de l'huile / Ils nous disent les hommes de la mort.

b)	Metaphor

There are metaphoric expressions in the poem where the poet directly calls the ancestors other names. For instance, in line 3, the speaker in the poem says: "Masques aux quatre points d'où soufle l'Esprit"

In line 5, he qualifies the ancestors with the phrase – "Ancêtre à tête de lion". He goes further in line 8 to paint them as "Masques aux visages sans masque" meaning the ancestors are all-seer that nothing can be kept away from them. The writer uses the expressions of metaphor in this poem to x-ray his respect for the ancestors and indeed for the African cultural heritage.

c)	Apostrophe

The entire poem is a piece of writing addressed to the ancestors that are not physically present. Lines 1 –10 illustrate the writer's use of the technique of calling on a person or something in absentia with the intention of seeking assistance.

> Masques! O Masques! / Masque noir masque rouge, vous masques blanc-et-noir / Masques aux quatre points d'où soufle l'Esprit / Je vous salue dans le silence! / Et pas toi le dernier, Ancêtre à tête de lion / Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane / Vous distillez cet air d'eternité où je respire l'air de mes Pères. / Masques aux visages sans masque, dépouillés de toute fossette comme de toute ride / Qui avez composé ce portrait, ce visage mien penché sur l'autel de papier blanc / A votre image, écoutez-moi!

Apostrophe shows the strong tie between the speaker and the addressee which is premised on faith. The speaker sincerely holds that the addressee has an extraordinary power to help him/her or to solve his/her problems. The speaker in the poem sees the ancestors as his forefathers who should come to his aid because they have the spiritual potency to do so.

d)	Personification

In lines 6 and 13, attributes of person are transferred to the dead; that is, the ancestors as if they were still alive: "Vous gardez ce lieu forclos à tout rire de femme, à tout sourire qui se fane" / Fixez vos yeux immuables sur vos enfants que l'on commande" The writer presents the ancestors as security agents that guide the citizenry all the time.

g)	Simile

Lines 8 and 14 contain indirect name callings and descriptions of the ancestors. "…, dépouillés de toute fossette comme de toute ride" and "Qui donnent leur vie comme le pauvre son dernier vêtement". The word "*comme*" which means "like" in English language is a marker of simile in the two examples. The use of simile in texts performs the same function as metaphor.

h)	Rhetorical Questions

These are questions that do not require answers. Senghor uses rhetorical expressions in lines 17 and 18 to reflect his emotional feelings and mood that are often associated with one's affective domain. The questions are: "Car qui apprendrait le rythme au monde défunt des machines et des canons? / Qui pousserait le cri de joie pour réveiller morts et orphelins à l'aurore?"

i)	Other poetic Devices in the poem

A critical study of the poem reveals that the poet also uses alliteration; "…une **p**rincesse **p**itoyable" (line 11) to describe the sorry state of Africa. The references to Africa (line 11) and Europe (line 12) are contemporary allusions. There are repetitions of a particular sentence pattern in lines 20 and 21: "Ils nous disent les hommes… / Ils nous disent les hommes" for the

purpose of emphasis and to draw readers' attention. The use of pronouns such as "Je", "Nous" and "moi" (I, We and me) by the poet confirms the adoption of the first-person narrative technique which is also called I-narrator. In other words, the writer is narrating a story in which he is involved.

In this free or blank verse poem, Senghor has attempted to educate the world that blacks, especially Africans do have history and culture and one such cultural heritage is religion. Africans worship their ancestors because they believe their help can come from those ancestors no matter where they (the offspring) are on the surface of the earth. This belief is in line with the omnipresent nature of the Almighty God in religions like Christianity and Islam.

4. Conclusion

In poetic analysis, the examination of stylistic devices allows one to explain the manner in which a text is constructed and the reason such a text is so constructed. This study is an eye-opener to how and why some African poets employ certain elements of style in their literary compositions. As a stylistician, one has been able to x-ray how and why the selected poets in this study apply register and other stylistic devices in their selected poems. With the application of register, figures of speech, allusion and symbolism, the poets fight against racial segregation, oppression and European superiority on the black race. It is therefore, evident that African writers are capable of decolonizing minds and deconstructing wrong perceptions not only through the contents of their literary works but also via the elements of style they employ in such literary works.

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LANGUAGE MATTERS IN A PANDEMIC: PRAGMATIC ACTS ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SPEECHES OF MINISTER OF HEALTH, OSAGIE EHANIRE

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Abstract

Communication plays a crucial role in the facilitation of growth and development in every society. Language matters during the pandemic as it is employed as a tool to communicate, sensitise and organise awareness campaigns on preventive measures and response activities. This study investigated the various practs employed by Nigerian Honourable Minister of Health (HMH), Dr. Osagie Ehanire to connect with his audience with the intention of curbing the coronavirus pandemic. The objectives were to examine the frequencies of pragmatic acts performed in the speeches of the HMH; and determine how the identified practs project his message. Three speeches were purposively retrieved from the official website of the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health. The study adopted a mixed method approach, while Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory served as the theoretical underpinning. At the end of the study, it was discovered that the minister deployed 67 practs across the three speeches to achieve five pragmatic goals, namely: to reveal intentions, achievements and further actions (50.7%); to commend and appreciate (19.4%); to give instructions and directives (11.9%); to encourage/motivate (11.9%); and to express concern or worry (6%). It was also discovered that pragmatic tools such as reference, inference and shared situational knowledge enabled the masses to understand better the pragmatic intentions of the minister. It can therefore be concluded that through the analysis of different practs in the selected speeches, the pragmatic goals of the minister are revealed and the principal themes of the speeches are determined.

Keywords: Coronavirus; HMH Osagie Ehanire; language; practs; pragmatic acts

1. Introduction

Coronavirus disease 2019 "COVID-19", a deadly contagious disease, emerged in Wuhan, China at the end of 2019. Since then, it has spread to 200 countries (Azlan, et al, 2020, p. 2), and as of August, 2021, World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) reports that there have been more than 200 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 4.3 million deaths globally. Consequently, the virus has been declared a global pandemic by WHO. A pandemic is defined as occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population (Lexico, n.d.), the first known use of the term being in 1666 (Woods, 2020). It is imperative to clarify that "coronavirus" represents any virus whose structure presents crownlike spikes. The virus was given an official name: Severe Acute

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Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the name of the disease which causes COVID-19 (WHO, 2020 cited in Woods, 2020).

To curb the alarming rate of transmission and reproduction of the virus across the populace, and in the absence of a COVID-19 vaccine as of 2020, Ferguson, et.al (2020, p. 3) note that non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) aimed at reducing contact rates in the population were quickly imposed by affected countries. Examples of the measures adopted during this time included closing schools, religious centres, event centres, bars and other social venues. Other NPIs recommended by WHO to governments and public worldwide was to practice hand-hygiene, exercise social distancing, and to impose a shelter-in-place order. Accordingly, most governments adopted this intervention as a policy to curtail the transmission of the virus by declaring some degree of lockdown, and suggesting the notion of a new normal for the immediate future.

It therefore becomes imperative for the citizenry to be aware of the lethal nature of the virus and comply with safety measures. Since communication plays a crucial role in the facilitation of growth and development in every society, humans therefore communicate especially through the distinctive use of language. Language matters during the pandemic as it is employed as a tool to sensitise and organise awareness campaigns on preventive measures and response activities. As rightly observed by the UNESCO (2020) language is "an intrinsic part of human rights and fundamental freedoms of their users, including access to accurate life-saving information and healthcare (p.1)."

In Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari, on 9th March, 2020 established a Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 saddled with the responsibility of coordinating and overseeing the country's multi-sectoral efforts to contain the spread and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The twelve-member task force, chaired by the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Mr. Boss Mustapha, is made up of top political leaders and health experts in the country. One of the key members of the team is the Honourable Minister of Health, Dr. Osagie Ehanire. With the intention of keeping the public abreast of strategic progress with Nigeria's response, and emerging developments regarding preparedness, the Honourable Minister of Health (HMH, henceforth) gave different speeches at various times during press briefings of the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19. The import of these speeches, which revolve around coronavirus pandemic, cannot be overemphasised as they become "an effective tool for the management of the virus all over the world" (Ugoala and Israel, 2020, p. 741). Hence, three speeches delivered by HMH, Dr. Osagie Ehanire at the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 press briefings are selected for this study. The aim of this research is to investigate the various practs employed by Dr. Osagie Ehanire to connect with his audience with the intention of curbing the coronavirus pandemic. The specific objectives are to: identify the pragmatic acts employed in the selected speeches of the HMH; examine the frequencies of pragmatic acts performed in the speeches of the HMH; and determine how the identified practs project the message of the HMH in the speeches.

2. Brief Biography of Dr. Ehanire

Osagie Emmanuel Ehanire was born on 4th November, 1946 in Warri Town, Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. He is a Nigerian medical doctor and politician. Ehanire studied Medicine at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in Germany, qualifying as a surgeon. He worked in Germany at various hospitals. On his return to Nigeria in 1982, he worked at the University of Benin Teaching Hospital as Senior Registrar in the Department of Surgery. He also served at various times on the Medical Review Board of Edo State Hospital Management Board. As the Edo State Coordinator for the Buhari Support Organisation (BSO),

he was a key player in ensuring the victory of President Muhammadu Buhari at the 2015 presidential election. Following the beginning of a new administration led by President Buhari in May 2019, Ehanire was appointed the Minister of Health in August 2019. (Source: *Wikipedia*)

3. Empirical Review

There have been many scholarly works which employ the tools or elements of pragmatics to analyse speeches of various personalities. Abuya (2012) subjected President Goodluck Jonathan's inaugural speech to pragma-stylistic analysis. He employed the framework of Austin's (1962) Speech Acts Theory to identify and analyse the various speech acts that manifested in the inaugural speech of the president. Ubong and Sifonde (2012) undertook a comparative study of President Jonathan's and President Obama's inaugural addresses with the intent of analysing the speech act types, the sentence structure and the politeness principles of face acts employed by the presidents. Using Speech Acts Theory, Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) focused on the pragmatic functions of locution, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts of victory and inaugural speeches of President Yar'Adua. Maretha (2014) examined the kinds of speech acts employed in the two apology speeches of President Clinton, *I Misled* and *I Have Sinned* using Searle's theory on illocutionary forces.

Wangatiah, Ongarora and Matu (2016) carried out a pragmatic analysis of selected political speeches in Kenya using Wilson and Sperber's (2004) Relevance Theory with the aim of demonstrating the extent to which political speeches weaken the spirit of national integration. Odogwu and Akpojisheri (2018) subjected President Buhari's Independence Day Speech of October 1st, 2017 to pragmatic analysis. They sought to unravel all the pragmatic acts embedded in the speech. Ugoala and Israel (2020) employed Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory to examine the first official speeches of presidents of Nigeria and Ghana on coronavirus pandemic. The review of this body of works reveals that the authors adopted either Speech Acts theory or Pragmatic Acts theory in their analyses of their respective speeches, except Wangatiah, Ongarora and Matu (2016), who also employed Wilson and Sperber's (2004) Relevance Theory. Nevertheless, this study is a learning paradigm in the pragmatic field as it attempts to examine the various practs employed in the speech of Ehanire using the Pragmatic Acts Theory of Mey (2001).

4. Theoretical Framework: Pragmatic Acts Theory of Mey (2001)

The theoretical stance of this study is Pragmatic Acts Theory propounded by Mey (2001). The Pragmatic Acts Theory is a response to some inadequacies of Austin's Speech Act Theory. As observed by Fairclough (1998, p. 9), speech acts theory "is best thought as atomistically". According to Mey (2001), speech acts theory lacks a theory of action; it concentrates on 'speech' while excluding other phenomena of language use such as writing since language manifests both in written and spoken forms. Mey (2001) further notes that speech acts can be considered as adapting oneself linguistically and otherwise to one's world. As a result of this critique, linguists such as Mey (2001) have suggested that the term 'speech act' can be replaced by a more 'general' one, such as 'act of language'. Mey (2001) is therefore more interested in seeing language in use manifesting as situation-bound dependent phenomenon. He is of the view that the typical way of looking at an individual's use of language is to see him/her as performing pragmatic acts. The pragmatic acts always comprise an agent and an act. Mey (2001) avers that "as far as the individual agent is concerned, there are his or her class, gender, age, education, previous life history, etc." (p. 214). These identified variables are regarded as "member resources (MR)"; that is the resource that people dispose regarding communication. This individual's history, according to Fairclough (1998), is often referred to

as "background knowledge", which is the shared, apriori knowledge and naturally facilitates the meaning making process.

In Pragmatic Acts Theory, Mey (2001) argues that emphasis should be placed on the importance of the situation, environment and extra-linguistic factors in meaning construction and comprehension. He opines that human activity is not the privilege of the individual; rather the individual is situated in a social context, which means that he or she is empowered, as well as limited, by the conditions of his/her social life.

Besides, Mey (2001) asserts that a speech act never comes alone but carries with it a bevy of other acts on which it essentially depends for its success; these inclusive acts include a conglomeration of the member resources of the activity part and the textual part of a pragmeme, also known as pragmatic act. Mey (2001) claims that "there are no speech acts, but only situated speech acts or instantiated pragmatic acts" (p. 218). This is because speech acts, in order to be feasible, have to be situated in a particular context of situation, as no speech act can be properly understood unless it is situated within the environment in which it was meant to be understood. The environment creates the 'affordance' by which language users oriented towards a correct interpretation of what they say as well as what they hear.

Therefore, pragmatic acts "involve adapting oneself to context as well as adapting context to oneself" (Mey, 2001, p. 218). Pragmatic acts are situation-derived and situation constrained. They do not explain human language use by starting from the words uttered by the speaker. Instead, they focus on the interactional situation in which language users realise their aims. Mey (2001) explains further by stating that:

> The theory of pragmatic acting does not try to explain language from the inside out; that is from words having origin in a sovereign speaker and going out to an equally sovereign hearer. Rather, its explanatory movement is from the outside in, the focus is on the environment in which participants find their affordance; such that the situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said. (p. 220)

This view is considered as the pragmeme which according to Odebumi (2008) is the only force behind the production of utterances. Hence, pragmatic acts theory is an attempt to explain the way pragmemes are represented in pragmatic acts in relation to speech situations, where the emphasis is not on conditions and rules for an individual speech act, but on characterising a general situational prototype, that is, a pragmeme that can be executed in the situation.

For better comprehension of the Pragmatic Acts Theory, Mey (2001) came up with the schema represented in Figure 1 below:

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                      PRAGMEME

ACTIVITY PART                    TEXTUAL PART
(INTERACTANTS)                   (CO(N)TEXT)
Speech Acts               INF REF REL VCE SSK MPH M…
Indirect Speech Acts
Conversational ('Dialogue') Acts
Psychological Acts (Emotions…)
Prosody (Intonation, Stress…)
Physical (Non-verbal) Acts:
        Body Moves (Incl. Gestures)
        Physiognomy (Facial expressions)
        (Bodily Expressions of) Emotions

        …
        Ø (Null)
                         Pract
                       Allopract
                  Pragmeme, Pract, Allopract
```

Figure 1: Mey's Model of Pragmatic Act (Mey, 2001, p. 222)

The model above shows that a pragmeme has two parts: activity part and textual part. The central part in the concept of "pragmatic act" is pragmeme. A pragmeme is the generalised pragmatic act; it is regarded as an abstraction. A pragmeme can be instantiated through individual pragmatic act (Mey, 2001). This is what Mey referred to as "practs". An "allopract" or "pract", according to Mey is "a concrete and different realization of a particular pragmeme" (2001, p. 221). Odogwu and Akpojisheri (2018, p. 107) note that a pract is "determined by participants understanding of the situation and the effect such pract will have in a particular context." The activity part of a pragmeme as shown in the model shows options that are available to participants (interlocutors) in a text. These include speech acts, indirect speech acts, dialogue or conversational acts, psychological acts, prosody, physical acts, body moves, facial expressions or physiognomy, and body expressions. A speaker can choose any or combine several concepts in interaction. The textual part "contextual features that influence communication" is exhibited through concepts of inference, reference, relevance, voice, shared situation knowledge, metaphor and metapragmatic joker (Mey, 2001). The activity part depends on textual part for its realisation; and both sides of pragmeme depend on context for meaning realisation. Hence, the interaction between activity part and textual part of a pragmeme produces a pract.

Pragmatic Acts Theory of Mey (2001) is suitable for this study since the theory is capable of unravelling the underlying situated acts in a discourse, be it a monologue, dialogue or multilogue. Dr. Osagie Ehanire's speeches are monologic texts which have targeted audience. As pointed out by Ugoala and Israel (2020, p. 744), "though speeches are written, the ultimate goal is for it to be read out, so that people can listen and respond by acting on the content of the speech…speeches, just like any utterance in any communication event, have the ability to spur listeners into actions and reactions." Hence, this linguistic theory is suitable in discovering the pragmatic acts employed by the HMH to connect with the citizenry

5. Methodology

The data for this study are three speeches, named Appendix A, Appendix B, and Appendix C, and uploaded on Nigerian Federal Ministry of Health official website (www.health.gov.ng) on 12th, 15th and 21st May, 2020 respectively. This specific timeframe was chosen because it reflects the period when Coronavirus was at its peak, which has forced the country into a lockdown. With the exclusion of the speech titles as written in the downloaded manuscripts, Appendix A has a total of 14 paragraphs with 815 words; Appendix B has 12 paragraphs with 745 words; while Appendix C has 13 paragraphs with 730 words. The study adopts a mixed method approach which includes both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory serves as the theoretical underpinning for this study with the aim of revealing the special ways in which language has been used by the HMH to convey his intended message(s) to the Nigerian citizenry so as to curb the coronavirus pandemic. Pragmatic analytical tools of reference (REF), inference (INF) and SSK are used in the analysis. Tables are presented to illustrate the frequencies and percentages of pragmatic acts embedded in the selected speeches for clear and easy interpretation.

6. Results

Adopting Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, the speeches are analysed with the aim of unravelling the minister's use of language to convey his intentions to the masses in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria, and consequently, mitigate the impact of the virus on the country's economy. To get the quantitative result of the analysis, the number of occurrence of each pract is divided by the total number of practs in each speech, and then multiplied by 100.

$$\frac{\text{Number of occurrence of each pract}}{\text{Total number of practs}} \times 100$$

The frequency distributions of the pragmatic acts discovered in the analysed speeches are presented in the tables below:

Table 1.

Pragmatic Goals and Acts and Their Individual Frequencies of Appendices A, B and C

Pragmatic Goals	Practs	Appendix A		Appendix B		Appendix C	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
To reveal intentions, achievements and further actions	Informing	9	39.1	10	50	9	37.5
	Asserting	1	4.3	1	5	1	4.2
	Assuring	1	4.3	1	5	1	4.2
To commend and appreciate	Thanking	2	8.7	3	15	2	8.3
	Praising	4	17.4	1	5	1	4.2
To give instructions and directives	Instructing	2	8.7	1	5	3	12.5
	Advising	0	0	0	0	1	4.2
	Requesting	0	0	0	0	1	4.2
To encourage or motivate	Promising	2	8.7	1	5	3	12.5
	Encouraging	1	4.3	1	5	0	0
To express concern or worry	Lamenting	1	4.3	1	5	2	8.3
Total	11 practs	23	100	20	100	24	100

Table 1 depicts the frequency of the pragmatic goals and the practs employed by the HMH in each of the selected speeches. As seen in the table, eleven (11) pragmatic functions – informing, asserting, assuring, thanking, praising, instructing, advising, requesting, promising, encouraging, and lamenting – are used in the three speeches to achieve five (5) pragmatic goals. Appendix C has the highest number of practs (24; 35.8%); and this is followed by Appendix A (23; 34.3%), and Appendix B (20; 29.9%).

Table 2.

The Overall Frequencies of Pragmatic Goals and Pragmatic Acts in Appendices A, B and C

Pragmatic Goals	Overall Frequency	%	Practs	Frequency Per Practs	%
To reveal intentions, achievements and further actions	34	50.7	Informing	28	41.8
			Asserting	3	4.5
			Assuring	3	4.5
To commend and appreciate	13	19.4	Thanking	7	10.4
			Praising	6	9
To give instructions and directives	8	11.9	Instructing	6	9
			Advising	1	1.5
			Requesting	1	1.5
To encourage or motivate	8	11.9	Promising	6	9
			Encouraging	2	3
To express concern or worry	4	6	Lamenting	4	6
Total	67	100	11 practs	67	100

Table 2 reveals the total frequencies of the pragmatic goals and the practs employed altogether in the three speeches analysed in this study. Sixty-seven (67) practs are discovered, and these practs have eleven (11) pragmatic functions as identified in the previous table. Practs expressing the pragmatic goal of revealing intentions, achievements and further actions are largely used in the speeches, accounting for (50.7%). This is followed by the pragmatic goal of commending and appreciating (19.4%). The pragmatic goals of giving instructions and directives, and encouraging/motivating have the same percentage, each taking up (11.9%) of the total percentage. The pragmatic goal with the least number of practs is the goal of expressing concern or worry, accounting for (6%).

7. Discussion

From the analysis of the Nigerian HMH's COVID-19 related press briefings, sixty-seven (67) practs are discovered, with eleven (11) pragmatic functions: informing, asserting, assuring, thanking, praising, instructing, advising, requesting, promising, encouraging, and lamenting. These pragmatic functions are marked with certain pragmatic analytical tools such as reference (REF), inference (INF) and shared situation knowledge (SSK). The practs are employed to achieve different pragmatic goals such as to reveal intentions, achievements and further actions; to commend; to give instructions; to encourage and motivate; and to express concern or worry. This section discusses the pragmatic goals with its distinguishing practs embedded in the selected HMH's speeches.

Goal 1: To reveal intentions, achievements and further actions

This pragmatic goal accounts for the highest number of frequency in the three speeches, occurring thirty-four (34) times (50.7%). To achieve this pragmatic goal, the HMH deploys three practs. Informing pract (41.8%) is predominantly used, occurring 28 times; and this is followed by asserting (4.5%) and assuring (4.5%) practs; each appearing three (3) times.

Informing: The speaker predominantly employs informing pract in his speech to give sufficient information to the citizenry regarding the situation of the coronavirus pandemic in

the country. The minister informs the masses about Buhari-led administration's plans and policies towards combating the deadly virus, as well as the administration's achievements hitherto. The analysis reveals that the minister employs informing practs in the first couple of paragraphs in each of the three speeches to give the masses an update regarding the total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Nigeria; the total number of COVID-19 patients treated and discharged; and total number of COVID-19 related deaths recorded. An instance of this is seen in paragraph 1 of Appendix A:

> *As at this morning, 12th of May 2020, 242 new covid-19 cases were confirmed in Nigeria, giving a total of 4641 in 34 States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, with unfortunately 150 fatalities recorded. 902 cases have happily been cured and discharged from care. The 242 new cases reported are from Lagos 88, Kano 64, Katsina 49…*

This pract also gives the minister the opportunity to share with the masses the steps the government had taken and is still taking towards curbing the spread of COVID-19 in the nation. Evidence of this is seen in paragraph 4 of Appendix A and paragraph 2 of Appendix C:

> *We had responded to the situation in Kano by dispatching a team of medical experts to provide technical support to the State Ministry of Health. I am happy to inform that the team has done well in their assignment and has reported a lot of success…* (p. 4; Appendix A)

> *We now have 26 laboratories spread in 17 states. This has increased our testing capacity…* (p. 2; Appendix C)

The minister deploys this pract to identify the various actions the Nigerian government is taking to curb the transmission of the deadly virus. Such actions include: partnering with various agencies and organisations; dispatching a team of medical experts to provide technical support to the Kano and Bauchi States Ministries of Health; printing the mandatory institutional quarantine guideline for returnees from diaspora; stabilising the COVID-19 situation in Kano State; developing a strategy document of National Primary Healthcare Development Agency; establishing more laboratories; increasing daily testing capacity; developing new Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track surveillance strategic directions and programmes; among other actions. Through INF, these various actions as identified by the HMH in his speeches inform the masses that the government is making genuine efforts in tackling the virus; hence, among the masses, the pract generates a sense of confidence and hope in the Buhari-led administration.

Asserting: Asserting pract, which appears only once in each of the three speeches, making three times (4.5%) in all, is also deployed by the speaker. The minister makes different assertions in the speeches to reveal measures that will reinforce government's fight against coronavirus in the country. For instance, in paragraph 11 of Appendix A: *The laboratory services in this centre is no doubt a great boost to our testing capacity in Abuja and with the treatment centre will enhance our capacity to handle confirmed positive cases,* the minister asserts that the new COVID-19 treatment centre in Abuja which provides various medical services will play a significant role in combating the spread of the virus. Another instance of asserting pract is seen in paragraph 3 of Appendix B:

> *Adherence to advisory against interstate travel and compliance with other simple measures like use of masks and avoiding crowds will significantly mitigate the burden.*

In this instance, the minister employs asserting pract to reiterate the precautionary measures which are pivotal towards controlling the transmission of coronavirus, such as restriction of movements, use of face masks, and social distancing.

Assuring: Assuring pract occurs three times (4.5%) in the speeches; appearing once in each of the three speeches. Due to the panic that is associated with the coronavirus pandemic among the populace, it therefore becomes imperative for the minister to assure and pacify the masses that the government is working round the clock to combat the spread of COVID-19. Evidence of this pract is seen in paragraph 2 of Appendix A:

> *The Federal Ministry of Health is working with its agencies, other organs of Government and multinational organizations in continuous efforts to control transmission with tried, tested and innovative measures.*

The minister deploys this pract to assure the citizenry that his ministry is partnering with other important stakeholders within the country to curb the spread of the deadly virus. Another instance of assuring pract is seen in paragraph 4 of Appendix C:

> *We are careful about our numbers to ensure that the figures we announce are accurate. Sometimes, there are errors, but we correct them as soon as they are noticed...*

The minister, speaking on behalf of the Nigerian Ministry of Health, assures the masses of carrying out their responsibility of publicly announcing the number of COVID-19 cases in the country with more painstakingness and accuracy in order to avoid needless mistakes. Assuring pract is importantly used in the speeches to gain the confidence and trust of the masses towards the government.

Goal 2: To commend and appreciate

The overall frequency of this pragmatic goal is thirteen (13), accounting for 19.4% of the total percentage. To achieve this pragmatic goal of commending, the Health Minister employs two practs across the three selected texts: thanking (10.4%) and praising (9%) practs. The minister deems it imperative to express gratitude to various stakeholders in Nigeria for channelling their efforts and resources towards halting the continuous spread of coronavirus in the country.

Thanking: The pract of thanking is used by the minister seven times (10.4%) across the speeches. He uses this act to appreciate certain individuals who have contributed towards ensuring the nation is free from the perils of COVID-19. For instance, in paragraph 4 of Appendix B: *The situation in Kano has largely stabilized, thanks to the good relationship between the visiting Federal task team and Kano State Task force on COVID-19...,* the Health Minister commends the Federal task team and the Kano State Task Force on COVID-19 for collaborating harmoniously in combating the spread of the deadly virus in Kano State. Through the pragmatic tool of inference, it is revealed that Kano State was battling with the deadly effect of coronavirus prior to the intervention of the Federal Government. The Minister goes further in paragraph 6 to thank the Governor of Kano State, Abdullahi Ganduje, for providing required support to the task force sent by the Federal Government to the state with the responsibility of curtailing the spread of the virus in the state. In the same vein, the Health Minister also thanks the Governor of Cross River State, Ben Ayade, in paragraph 9 of Appendix C for his quick response towards combating COVID-19 in his state. This appreciative gesture exhibited by the Minister can be seen as a strategy of issuing a clarion call to other governors in the country to brace up and take the fight against coronavirus pandemic more seriously.

It is discovered that the Health Minister concludes his speeches by deploying thanking pract to appreciate his audience for paying attention to his messages. An instance is seen in the last paragraph of Appendix A – *Thank you for your attention.* This act, which allows the Minister to connect with his audience, is evident in the three speeches analysed in this study; hence, it has the effect of eliciting a positive response or attitude in the audience towards the messages conveyed by the Health Minister.

Praising: Pract of praising appears six times across the selected speeches, accounting for 9%. The HMH deploys this pract to express his admiration for certain individuals who are tirelessly working hard to ensure the deadly virus is curtailed in the country. Among those persons (or groups of persons) praised by HMH are organs of states maintaining vigilance at various borders in the country, a team of medical experts, Nigeria Governors' Forum, private sector (Appendix A); Kano State government (Appendix B); and doctors and other health workers (Appendix C). An instance of praising pract is seen in paragraph 4 of Appendix A:

> *We had responded to the situation in Kano by dispatching a team of medical experts to provide technical support to the State Ministry of Health. I am happy to inform that the team has done well in their assignment and has reported a lot of success in helping to stabilize the State's Health system…*

The HMH relishes the success achieved by the team of medical experts dispatched to Kano state to help in stabilising the health system of the state. SSK reveals that Kano state's health system was heading towards utter devastation as result of the coronavirus pandemic; this has therefore prompted the Federal Government to come to the aid of the state in restoring her health system. The success attained in Kano state, however, instigated a feeling of hope and confidence among the masses regarding the competence of the Buhari-led administration in tackling COVID-19.

Goal 3: To give instructions and directives

The overall frequency of this pragmatic goal is eight (8), accounting for 11.9% of the total result. To achieve this pragmatic goal of giving instructions and directives, the minister employs three practs across the three selected texts: instructing (9%), advising (1.5%), and requesting (1.5%) practs. The HMH instructs and admonishes the masses as regards what they should do in order to assist in achieving the overall aim of the speeches – the need to curb the spread of coronavirus.

Instructing: The pract of instructing is used by the minister six times (9%) across the three selected speeches. The minister employs this pract to give specific instructions to all the stakeholders who are actively involved in combating the spread of coronavirus in the country. For instance, in paragraph 12 of Appendix A: *I use this opportunity to again enjoin State Governors to continue to ensure they reach the isolation capacity target of 300 beds..., while calling on Philanthropists to support their efforts…*, the HMH directs the state governors to continually sustain their efforts to curb the Coronavirus in their respective states by providing isolation capacity target of 300 beds; he also calls on philanthropists to support the efforts of the state governors by expanding the capacity for tracing, testing isolation and treatment. In the same speech (paragraph 13; Appendix A), the minister also instructs the citizens to always take measures to curb the spread of the virus by wearing their facemasks when in a public space.

Another evidence of instructing pract is seen in paragraph 11 of Appendix B: *Finally, I shall reiterate again the importance of adhering to public health advisories (wearing our face masks, observing social distancing, practicing hand washing or sanitizing, standard*

respiratory hygiene, avoiding crowds and all non-essential travel… Through inference, Dr. Ehanire highlights some directives which he expects the citizens to abide by in order to curtail the Coronavirus pandemic; such directives include the use of facemasks, observing social distancing, practicing hand washing, avoiding non-essential travel, etc. The minister finds it important to sensitise and encourage the citizens about the Coronavirus to ensure that there is social behavioural change in hygiene practices which will ultimately curb the spread of the virus. That way, every citizen can better prepare for the threat imposed by the disease.

Advising: Advising pract, which appears only once all through the three speeches (1.5%), is also deployed by the HMH. This pract is used in paragraph 6 of Appendix C: *I would also advice* [sic] *those who have taken the test and are awaiting result to heed the advisory to self-isolate from friends, wear face masks and observe hand and respiratory hygiene until your result is released.* There is shared situation knowledge (SSK) about the ravage of the coronavirus pandemic in the country, and consequently, tests are being conducted on the citizens to ascertain their status vis-à-vis the disease. The minister therefore admonishes those who have taken the test and are awaiting the outcome to adhere to the directives of self-isolating, wearing facemasks and maintaining proper hygiene.

Requesting: Pract of requesting appears only once across the selected speeches, accounting for 1.5%. The HMH deploys this pract to task the state governments with providing more laboratories and increasing the number of surveillance teams which will enhance the number of testing carried out daily across the country. The evidence of this pract is seen in paragraph 3 of Appendix C: *As more laboratories come on board, I would like to use this opportunity to call on state governments to increase the number of surveillance teams so that more testing can be done in the laboratories.* By charging the state governments with this responsibility, the minister believes that such a task, if well implemented by the governments, will corroborate the efforts of the federal government towards curbing the spread of the virus.

Goal 4: To encourage or motivate

This pragmatic goal accounts occurs eight (8) times across the selected speeches, accouting for 11.9% of the total results. To achieve this pragmatic goal, the HMH deploys two practs: promising pract (9%), occurring 6 times; and encouraging pract (3%) pract, occurring 2 times.

Promising: The promising pract appears six times across the three speeches. On behalf of the federal government, the minister considers it important to commit himself to certain actions that would contribute towards combating the spread of the coronavirus in Nigeria with the intention to gain the support of the masses. An evidence of this is seen in paragraph 5 of Appendix A:

> *…The similar missions to Katsina and Jigawa identified needs in those States, which include the need for a molecular laboratory in Katsina to reduce the backlog of pending tests and the turn-around time for results. This will be looked into. Other high burden areas or States grappling epidemic control issues will be offered similar support.*

The minister promises the masses that the government will critically evaluate the specific needs in Katsina and Jigawa states with the aim of proffering solutions to those needs. He also promises to extend the hand of help to other states who are struggling to curtail the spread of the virus. Even though the minister has not mentioned the name of the virus in this extract, the shared situational knowledge (SSK) assists the audience to figure out that the minister is referring to the coronavirus pandemic.

Another instance of promising pract is seen in paragraph 9 of Appendix C: …*We shall work with the state teams to ensure that we scale up surveillance and contact tracing in the state. We shall explore the possibility of upgrading laboratories in the state to ensure ease of testing when suspected cases are identified.* The minister expresses the government's commitment towards helping the Cross River state (one of the states in Nigeria) curb the spread of the Coronavirus. The HMH promises to help in scaling up surveillance and contact tracing, and upgrading laboratories in the state. This technique has been adopted by the minister to win the confidence and trust of the citizens, convincing them that the Nigerian government is equipped and capable of curtailing the ravage of the Coronavirus in the country.

Encouraging: The pract of encouraging is used by the minister two times (3%) across the three selected speeches. The two instances are seen in paragraph 3 of Appendix A: *We therefore encourage the organs of State maintaining vigilance at our borders, including our Port Health Services, to keep up the good work and not to tire or relent…,* and paragraph 3 of Appendix B: *We implore States and partners not to relent, but to keep up with the pace, which, in some states will increase well before it begins to decrease…* The minister recognises the efforts various stakeholders have been making towards ensuring that the country is free from the shackles of the COVID-19 pandemic, and he goes ahead to encourage them not to relent their efforts, "but to keep up with the pace". The minister urges the security agencies stationed at the country's borders not to relax in their efforts of safeguarding the borders and preventing illegal immigration into the country. Through inference, the audience is made to realise that porous and unguarded borders can contribute to a spike in the number of COVID-19 infections in the country. Hence, there is a need to ensure that the borders are properly guarded to stop cross-borders activities of people who move from other countries to Nigeria. The minister also urges the state governments and other partners to ensure that the fight against Coronavirus is sustained.

Goal 5: To express concern or worry

This pragmatic goal accounts for the least number of occurrence in the three speeches, occurring only four (4) times, and accounting for 6% of the total results. It is not surprising that this goal appears the least in the data analysed since the government does not want to portray a weak or incompetent outlook to the masses which would make them (masses) express doubt in the ability of the government to curb the spread of the virus. The minister therefore minimises the pragmatic goal of expressing concern or worry in the speeches to show strength and confidence. To achieve this pragmatic goal, the HMH deploys only one pract: lamenting pract, which appears four (4) times.

Lamenting: The pract of lamenting is used by the minister four times (6%) across the selected speeches. The minister uses this pract to express grief as regards the upsurge of coronavirus cases in the country, especially as the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases increases consistently and fatalities are often recorded. This is evident in the first paragraphs of Appendices A and B, where the minister states categorically the exact number of confirmed cases recorded; number of deaths recorded; states in which the cases are recorded; number of cases that have been cured and discharged; and the case gender ratio. Also, in paragraph two of Appendix C: …*However, while our daily testing capacity is presently at 2,500, unfortunately, we are presently able to test less than 1,500. This is due largely to inadequate surveillance and contact tracing in the states,* the minister expresses concern as regards the government's inability to meet their daily testing capacity target, and for proper context, he gives the reason the government is experiencing such a difficulty, claiming it is as a result of "inadequate surveillance and contact tracing in the states". This excerpt reflects the SSK about the

Coronavirus pandemic and the need to conduct tests to ascertain those who have contracted the virus.

8. Conclusion

This study has investigated the various practs employed by Dr. Ehanire in three of his speeches delivered at the Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 press briefings. The speeches were analysed with the aim of unravelling the minister's use of language to convey his intentions to the masses in order to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria to consequently mitigate the impact of the virus on the country's economy. The analysis of the speeches revealed that the minister employed a total of sixty-seven (67) pragmatic acts to achieve his pragmatic goals. These pragmatic acts performed eleven (11) pragmatic functions: informing (41.8%), asserting (4.5%), assuring (4.5%), thanking (10.4%), praising (9%), instructing (9%), advising (1.5%), requesting (1.5%), promising (9%), encouraging (3%), and lamenting (6%). Additionally, it was observed that the analysed practs have certain pragmatic tools, such as reference (REF), inference (INF) and shared situation knowledge (SSK), with each contributing significantly to the overall meaning of the speech. All the practs in the three speeches point to the need for collective efforts in combating the Coronavirus pandemic. The minister, through his well-articulated speeches, has been able to spur the Nigerian citizens into actions that will help in preventing the pervasiveness of the virus. Generally, these speeches served the purpose for which they were intended, and this is evident in the five pragmatic goals identified in the analysis. This study concludes that through the analysis of different practs in the selected speeches, the pragmatic goals of the minister are revealed and the principal themes of the speeches are determined.

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THEMATIC CONTENTS OF NIGERIAN NATIONAL DAILIES: A CONTENT ANALYSIS APPROACH

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Abstract

The Nigerian media industry is one of the most vibrant and diversified media industries in the African continent. The industry has a relatively long history. This study aims to examine the focus of the print media in line with agenda-setting function of the mass media in the face of all of the challenges facing the country. The importance attached to subjects covered by the selected newspapers is determined by the frequency of coverage. Content analysis is the research method adopted for the study. It was discovered that that economy, politics, sport, and international news were regarded as the most important subjects with 26.5%, 23.6%, 7.4% and 5.9% of the newspapers' contents respectively. The share of newspapers' content on terrorism was 1.4% while corruption has a meager 0.9% share. There is a need for re-orientation of media practitioners in the face of the current challenges of Nigeria as a nation. The press.

Keywords: Corruption; crime; economy; politics; press

1. Introduction

The press is regarded as the mirror of the society because it reflects the true condition of the nation. Nigeria, just like most of the developing nations, is bedevilled by mirage of problems. The problems facing the country include under-development, political instability, acquit poverty, terrorism, dearth of infrastructural facilities, high crime rate, high level official corruption etc. It is therefore of interest to examine the level of attention the press accords specific problems of Nigerian society through the reportage of the issues. The press is indeed one of the most important institutions of the modern society and it plays a vital role in re-shaping shade of opinions in the society and it has tremendous influence on it. Dennis and Merill, 1999) cited in (Adeyemo, 2015, p.1) believe that the press is a carrier of culture, a source of information, education and entertainment and that the press affects us in so many ways.

The press is perhaps one of the few professions in Nigeria that the constitution of the country gives specific attention. Section 22 of the constitution provides that, "the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be freed to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people". (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999). Even though the press is not powerful without limit but the fact that it does has a measure of influence on the society is incontrovertible. The press is therefore expected to always contribute its quotas to the development of the country at all times.

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1.1 Historical Background of the Nigerian Media

Nigeria, (Federal Republic of Nigeria) is a federal constitutional republic comprising 36 states and Federal Capital Territory - Abuja. Nigeria is a developing country with a fairly vibrant and resilient mass media (Odunlami, 2004, cited in Oso, 2011, p. 6). The very first newspaper emerged in Nigeria in December 3, 1859 with the establishment of *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba*. Even though the development was rather slow and not steady for some decades, it was not too long before the Nigerian press established its vibrancy. The press has always been very vocal on issues pertaining to the development of the country starting from the attainment of independence to other areas of development of the country. Nigerian mass media is either government-owned or private-owned.

There is an enhanced awareness of the role of the mass media in development in Nigeria today. The mass media has indeed played a significant role in strengthening the society. Haruna, and Ibrahim, (2014, p. 102), emphasise "the important role of the mass media in achieving developmental goals and targets". Mass media is the mirror of the modern society, in fact, it is the mass media which shapes our lives.

1.2 The Current Challenges

Right now, Nigeria is at a crossroad as the general survival of the country is under constant threats from several quarters. Boko Haram terrorists, bandits, Fulani herders' militants are ravaging the northern part of the country and there exists constant incursion of these marauders in the southern parts of Nigeria (Ojo, 2020; Omitola, et al., 2021). Boko Haram terrorists that first surfaced in Nigeria in 2009 occupied 24 local Government Areas between 2011 and 2015.

The terrorists' violent activities reached the peak in 2014. And at that time, prices of crude oil (the mainstay of the Nigerian monoculture economy) had started falling in the international market in 2014. This tremendously compounded Nigerian economic problems. Activities of the press as well as issues that attracted its attention during the period covered by the study were of significant interest.

2. Literature Review

The importance attached to some of the topics identified in the statement of the problem, that is, economy, politics, corruption, government and terrorism could be determined by the review of pertinent literature.

2.1 Economy

The economy is an essential aspect of life in any society as it has a direct impact on people's well-being. There is a correlation between people's economic well-being and the level of citizens' economic information and enlightenment. In democratic societies, economy and economic perceptions are so important to the media of mass communication and their audiences at all times, especially during electioneering campaigns. Scholars have linked politics, voting patterns, and public opinions to a clear understanding of the economy and economic perceptions (Fogarty, 2005).

Economic news coverage is also essential to citizens as it determines the level of economic information available to them. The availability of such information could influence how citizens make informed economic decisions. The tone of economic news largely depends on the focus of the mass media. The tone may either be positive or negative depending on a lot of other factors which may include but are not limited to economic indicators and contextual influences. According to (Fogarty, 2005, p. 151), some mass media scholars argue "that the news media generally overemphasize the negative and downplay the positive"

2.2 Politics

Politics is a central focus of the press coverage any time any day. In Nigeria, press is linked with the attainment of Nigerian independence and of the development of democratic political culture. Ekeanyanwu (2007) affirms this notion by linking the development of the political culture of Nigeria with the press. Dr. Nnamidi Azikwe's newspapers were established to advance his political interest. Even though several scholars have argued against the positive role of the press in the entrenchment of democratic rule in society, nevertheless democracy can hardly survive without the press as they facilitate the seemly flow of information which happens to be an essential ingredient of democratic development (Coxall, Robins & Leach, 2003). Mass media is "a major weapon in the battle for public opinion" (Perloff, 2013, p. 5). Gandouz (2019) asserts that "media as an efficient tool for reshaping public minds of the citizens".

The fact that the mass media have a tremendous influence on public opinion is incontrovertible. In advanced democratic societies, political communication, quite often than not, has helped in mobilizing public opinion in support or against government policies. For example, this happened in America when President Bill Clinton tried to introduce "a sweeping plan to reform health care" a lobbying group representing 270 insurance companies employed the services of pollsters, pollical consultants, and advertising professionals. They bombarded the airwaves with advertising and other communication messages, and poll results that eventually defeated Clinton's health reform package (Perloff, 2013).

2.3 Corruption

Corruption is like a cancerous cell that spread fast across the body, it is multi-dimensional and it is very difficult to contain it. According to Jain (2001, p. 73) "Corruption refers to acts in which the power of the public office is used for personal gain in a manner that contravenes the rules of the game". In terms of types of corruption, Fadairo, Fadairo and Aminu (2014) identify the following: political, electoral, institutional, bureaucratical or cultural corruption. In terms of forms, the researchers listed the following: accepting and giving bribes, embezzlement, theft, extortion, all forms of abuse of power, favouritism, blackmailing, using influence or paying for it, nepotism, accepting undue advantage, document forgery, misappropriation of funds, etc.

No doubt, corruption has a devastating effect on the development of any nation. Countries with a higher-level of corruption are prone to high-level poverty and low-level economic growth. Corruption is the bane of Nigerian development. It is the major reason why the national economy has been at the low ebb. (Ogbeidi, 2012; Adeyemi, 2013, Transparency International, 2014; Amundsen, 2017).

Corruption has aggravated the poverty level among the populace. Over 70% of the Nigerian populace are living below the poverty line (Onyeizugbe & Onwuka, 2012). Nigeria is said to be having the largest number of people living in abject poverty in the world, as the country recently overtook India which previously occupied that position.

Mailafia (2015) opines that Nigeria is the current poverty capital of the world. Most of the problems facing the country could be traced to corruption. Nigerian democratic system which would have helped to fast-track development in the country is also corrupt ridding.

2.4 Government

Government and the press are two institutions, though inseparable but independent, they both work hand in hand. Government in a democratic system and indeed in any other system desires to carry the people along by proper management of information. (Although in a communist system, the government only releases whatever information they wish into the

public domain). Accountability and transparency are two essential ingredients of a democratic governance. Government in a democracy is required to be transparent and accountable to the people by making news and information about their activities available. Relationship in a democratic setting is expected to be tripartite in nature. The press serves as an intermediary between the government and the people.

Media freedom is ideal in any political system as it provides good ground for good governance but unfortunately, media bias in favour of the government is prevalent even in democratic societies (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2014). Public opinion is vital in any democratic setting and it is the people that play a major role in deciding who should govern them. Public opinion is one of the reasons why the government takes information management very seriously. In fact, public opinion is the target of the news management activities of the government (Pfetch, 1999).

On the one hand, governments at various levels in democratic system, are not always readily transparent as they seek to limit transparency. On the other hand, "media organizations face their own challenges in developing the skills and resources to explore open government on behalf of the public". (OGP, 2015, p. 4.). Government news takes a good chunk of the news stories in Nigeria's national dailies.

2.5 Terrorism

There is no one acceptable definition of terrorism except that terrorism is a criminal act perpetrated by an individual, group of people, or even a state, with the intention of forcing their desires on other people or another state. Cooper (2001, p. 884.) asserts that "terrorism is the intentional generation of massive fear by human beings for the purpose of securing and maintaining control over other human beings". The terrorists employ the instrumentality of violence with the intention of coercing others to succumb to their demands. The term 'terrorism' according to US Federal Law cited in Schinkel (2019, p. 180.) means:

> premeditated politically meditated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience.

Terrorism is an old phenomenon. In fact, it is as old as the world. Schinkel (2019, p. 176) posits that "…each era is characterized by its own type of terrorism". Terrorism has however taken a new dimension recently. 21st century terrorism is a world-wide phenomenon and it is widespread. In fact, no country is immune to criminal acts today. There are numerous active terrorist organizations that are widely recognized across the globe. The following are some of the world-dreaded terrorist organizations: Al-Qa'ida, ISIS, also known as ISIL (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant). These are two of the most ruthless terrorist organizations in the world operating in Bahrain, France, USA, UK, Iraq, Somalia, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and Palestine and they have killed 6,141 in 2015 alone (Global Terrorism Index, 2016, p. 54.).

This level of killings and destructions is second to none. Boko-Haram or Jama'atu Ahliss-Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal Jihad according to Global Terrorism Index (2016, p. 54) is the second deadliest terrorist organization in the world, killing 5,478 people in 2014. According to Leila, Amélie and Arnim (2020), Boko Haram terrorist group emerged in the North Eastern part of Nigeria and flourished under various names since 1990s before adopting the current name. Boko Haram has since transformed into an international terrorist organization rampaging the North Eastern part of Nigeria as well as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.

2.6 War against terrorism in Nigeria and the arm forces

The problem of insecurity is of great concern in Nigeria. The war against terror came to the front burner of national discourse in Nigeria in the year 2009 when the Boko Haram insurgency first struck the country. Ever since then, the insurgency has claimed thousands of lives as the armed forces are trying to put an end to the problem. Nigerian arm forces have engaged in full-blown war in the North Eastern States where Boko Haram activities domicile. Numerous people have been killed and up to 2.5 million people were said to have been displayed around the Lake Chad basin.

Access to information about what is happening at the "theatre of war" where military activities are taking place is pretty difficult as the military impedes the free flow of information to the public. This is so because the military is one of the most under-reported organizations anywhere in the world because of the popular doctrine of national security. The situation is more pronounced during the war period.

This sort of situation makes the military a restricted news area with obvious implications for military-civilian relationships. Deliberating on the widening gap between the military and society, (Ricks, 2009) cited in Caldwell IV, Stroud and Menning, (2009, p. 10.) believe that the gap is born out of a genuine desire of the army to maintain operations security by controlling the flow of information. To this end, with the military, one can actually say that the more we look the less we see.

2.7 Other categories of newspapers contents

Quite a number of other categories of newspaper content were examined in the study. These include the following: International news, sport news, news on science and technology, art and culture, entertainment, education, judiciary, religion, health matters, human interest stories, and crime.

3. Statement of the problem

The mass media is undoubtedly an important institution in society. Its role is of great importance and significant interest. It is interesting also to examine the subjects of its focus so as to determine whether or not the press is adequately giving adequate coverage to issues considered to be germane to the development of the nation. Most especially during the period covered by this study. It is believed in many quarters that all is not well with Nigeria. Corruption is considered to be a serious problem (Transparent International, 2014), insecurity is another serious problem, the economy is in shamble, low-level infrastructural development, and democracy is still at the infant stage. There is a mirage of other problems. The level of attention given to all of these issues is of significant importance.

3.1 Research objectives

i. To identify the most dominant as well as the least dominant issues/topics covered by Nigerian newspapers.
ii. To determine the most important as well as least important genres.
iii. To examine the level of objectivity of journalists.
iv. To find out the tone of the materials published in the selected newspapers.

3.2 Research questions

i. What are the most dominant and the least dominant issues covered by Nigerian newspapers?
ii. What are the most important as well as the least important genres?
iii. Could the news content be adjudged fairly objective or subjective?
iv. What was the tone of the materials published in the selected newspapers?

4. Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Theory is selected for this study. Agenda Setting theory is all about the ability of the press to determine what the media users think about. The mass media are impactful in agenda setting as they possess the ability to select or emphasize certain topics thereby causing the public to perceive such topics as important (Umechukwu, 2001 & Folarin, 2002, as cited in Ekeayanwun, 2007, p. 71.). The treatment meted to issues by the mass media determines the level of importance society ascribes to such issues, McQuail (1993).

Lang and Lang cited in McCombs and Shaw, (1977, p. 177.) affirm that the mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures, they constantly present objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, and have feelings about.

However, the media has no power to force people to think and act in a certain way or manner, its influence ends with its ability to attach importance to issues people get to read, hear and watch at any given time. The critics are of the opinion "that the mass media's influence may be minimal and it is actually the public which somehow influences what the media cover" Wanta (1988, p. 107.)

5. Methodology

Content analysis is the research method selected for this study. Content analysis as a research design is the most effective method that can be adopted for studying the manifest content of any news and information record.

"Content analysis makes replicable and valid inferences on the basis of data derived from text or images" (Riffe et al., 1998 as cited in Jacobson, Langin, Calton & Kaid, 2011, p. 3.).

Two newspapers were randomly selected from the list of the following national daily newspapers: The Punch, The Vanguard, This Day, The Nation, and Guardian. These newspapers do have national spread. This is achieved by writing all the listed newspapers separately on pieces of paper which were thereafter squeezed and put in a bucket. The pieces of paper were then thoroughly shuffled and then someone was asked to pick two pieces of paper from the bucket.

5.1 Study Period

The study covers a period of one year five months i.e. January 2014 to May 2015. The interest in Former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's last one year and five months in office is not unconnected with the desire to understand the focus of the press at that period of time in a bid to examining the subjects that attracted press attention the most during the last one year five months of a regime that lost election as a result of perceived mis-governance and corruption. Nigerians were visibly fed up of Former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's regime.

The period covered by the study is quite significant because 2014 was pre-election year and the first quarter of 2015 was the election period. 2015 general elections happened to be very significant; the elections were considered historic because, in the history of Nigeria, the general elections happened to be the first civilian to civilian transition when political power shifted peacefully from the then ruling "People Democratic Party (PDP)" to the opposition "All Progressive Congress (APC)". Political activities were on the top gear as the electioneering campaigns were on the front burner of political discourse in 2014.

A total of 144 randomly selected copies of two newspapers covering one year five months were thoroughly examined and 17027 various newspapers contents were identified in the two newspapers. Issues of the two newspapers were picked with random start, one issue each per one constructed week. Out of the 17027 identified topics, 4516 or 26.5 % were published on economy, 4010 or 23.6% were on politics. Newspaper materials on corruption enjoyed the lowest coverage with a meagre 151 or 0.9%.

5.3 Unit of Analysis

Story headline, entire story, cartoon, graphics and any other illustration constitute units of analysis of this study.

5.4 Definitions of Terms

Prominence: This is about the placement of news stories on the pages of newspaper. Stories on the front page and the back page are considered more prominent than the stories buried in the inside page.

Genre: This is the story type such as news story, feature story, opinion, editorial, interview etc.

Slant: This is the general assessment of news story as to whether or not it generates feeling of sadness or joy. The story slant could either be positive if it generates feeling of joy or negative if it generates feeling of sadness. It is neutral if the feeling can neither be adjudged positive nor negative.

Story themes/issues/topics: These are various identified issues and story titles covered by the journalists. These range from politics, economy or business, science and technology, sports etc.

Press: This is basically print-based media but it is inter-changeably used in this paper to denote mass media (i.e. main stream media).

Objectivity: This is all about the treatment given to the piece of information by journalists. Objectivity is the hallmark of good journalism. It is an important attribute of journalists and it is expected to reflect in the story they submit for publication. Journalists are expected to be unbiased arbiter of an event.

6. Data Presentation

Data on this study is presented in tables 1 to 5.

Table 1.
Newspaper

		Frequency	Percent
	Punch	8936	52.5
Valid	Guardian	8091	47.5
	Total	17027	100.0

Data from the two selected newspapers shows that 17027 various items constituting newspapers content were gathered. The Punch had the highest share which is 52.5 percent while the Guardian share is 47.5 percent.

Table 2.

Issues/Topics

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Politics	4010	23.6
	Economy	4516	26.5
	Armed forces	355	2.1
	Government	984	5.8
	International news	1010	5.9
	Sport	1252	7.4
	Science and Technology	276	1.6
	Art/Culture/Entertainment	517	3.0
	Education	690	4.1
	Law/Judiciary	375	2.2
	Religion	330	1.9
	Health/Wellness	665	3.9
	Human Interest	751	4.4
	Crime	493	2.9
	Terrorism	240	1.4
	Corruption	151	.9
	Others	412	2.4
	Total	17027	100.0

Economy had the highest share with 26.5 percent, followed by topics on politics with 23.6 percent, while sport had 7.4 percent. Corruption had least attention of 0.9 percent. Corruption therefore had the least media coverage.

Table 3.

Genre

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	News Story	10251	60.2
	Editorial	151	.9
	Feature Story	2307	13.5
	Column/Commentary/Opinion	1152	6.8
	Advertisement	3008	17.7
	Others	158	.9
	Total	17027	100.0

News stories dominated the two newspapers selected for this study with 60.2 percent, followed by advertisements/advertorials with 17.7 percent. Feature stories constituted 13.5 percent of total newspapers content.

Table 4.

Tone

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Positive	7740	45.5
	Negative	3774	22.2
	Neutral	5513	32.4
	Total	17027	100.0

Overwhelming majorities of materials published in the two newspapers, that is 45.5 percent, were adjudged positive, 22.2 percent of all the materials were considered neutral while 32.4 percent were believed to be negative.

Table 5.

Objectivity

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Mostly Objective	11118	65.3
	Mostly Subjective	1198	7.0
	Can't say (appears balanced	4711	27.7
	Total	17027	100.0

A good chunk of the newspapers' contents i.e. 65.3% was regarded to be mostly objective, it was difficult to determine whether or not 27.7 percent of the contents was neither objective nor subjective, while 7 percent was said to be mostly subjective.

7. Results

i. *What are the most dominant as well as the least dominant issues covered by Nigerian newspapers?*

The economy happened to be the most dominant issue that the Nigerian press talked about during the period of this study. 26.5% of all the materials published in the selected newspapers were on the economy. This simply shows the premium the Nigerian press place on the economy. Next to the economy is politics with 23.6%. Corruption, terrorism, and science and technology constituted 0.9%, 1.4% and 1.7% respectively. Also, the least topics of the press coverage were in this order. This implies that the media agenda focuses more on the economy and politics.

ii. *What are the most important as well as the least important genres?*

News stories dominated the pages of the selected newspapers with 60.2% of the newspapers' contents, followed by advertisements with 17.6%, while feature stories constituted 13.3%. However, editorials, for obvious reason (that is, there is a limit to the number of editorials that can appear in an issue) constituted the least genre of the newspapers' content. This was followed by column, commentary, and opinion.

iii. Could the news content be adjudged fairly objective or subjective?

According to the data provided in table 4, 45.5% of the content was considered to have a positive connotation, 32.4% was neutral while as much as 22.2% of the content was seen as negative.

iv. What was the tone of the materials published in the selected newspapers?

Table 5 provides answer to this question can be found in table 5. The overwhelming majority of the news content, that is, 65.3% was adjudged objective. It is however difficult to determine whether or not 27.7% of the news contents were neither objective nor subjective while 7% of the contents were adjudged mostly subjective.

8. Discussion

Nigeria is faced with numerous challenges of lack of basic infrastructural facilities. Added to these challenges are the problems of corruption and insecurity. These are some of the issues that are adversely affecting the well-being of the people of Nigeria.

Insecurity is an existential threat to Nigeria as a nation. However, one expects to see these issues adoring the pages of national dailies. Unfortunately, that seems not to be the case. Economic news constitutes 26.5% while the share of political news is 23.6% of the newspaper content. Newspapers' content on education which was supposed to play a pivotal role in the development of the country was just 4.1%, and content on science and technology was 1.6%. Newspapers' content on corruption are a meager 0.9%. Corruption is considered the bane of the Nigerian developmental agenda. Corruption is the reason why nothing seems to work in Nigeria (Ogbeidi, 2012; Adeyemi, 2013; Transparency International, 2014; Amundsen, 2017)).

Though the maxim - he who pays the piper calls the tune (O'Connell, 2021) is quite true. Media owners in the capitalist country such as Nigeria are more concerned about profit than any other thing. Media content that appeals to the advertisers mostly catch their attention, while materials on fight against corruption, science and technology, education, and health/wellness are off the mark for the selected newspapers. In terms of genre, the story types account for 91.1% of all the content published in the selected newspapers.

They are news stories with 60.2%, this is followed by advertisements and feature stories with 17.6% and 13.3% respectively. It has been argued that advertisers substantially influence media content. Scholars believe that advertisers, to a large extent, shape media content (Morissan, 2016). This is because advertising plays a major role in the survival of the media industry as it is the source of substantial mass media revenue. Media owners will more likely create room for advertisements than any other newspaper's content. Advertisers, therefore, have a tremendous influence on the contents of newspapers.

9. Conclusion

Out of more than 17 topics that constitute newspapers' content as identified in this study, only four topics, (that is, economy, politics, sport and international news) have a 63.4% share of the media content. All other topics attracted less media attention. Agenda set by the press is such that politics, economy, sport, and international news were the four items given serious attention by the press (Ekeayanwun, 2007). Going by the level of coverage given to other topics, one can only conclude that the Nigerian press is less concerned about opening wide its editorial gates to more content on education (Edho, 2009), the development of the health sector (Osibogun, 2004), as well as security (Folarin, & Oviasogie, 2014), corruption (Onwuka, Okoh, & Eme, 2009) and other issues of national importance.

Take corruption as a good example, the past Nigerian leaders are known to have stolen a huge amount of money that ought to have been spent on the development of infrastructure. For instance, monies stolen by the late Head of State General Sani Abacha who ruled Nigeria between 1993 and 1998 are still been repatriated back to the country up till now. $311.7 million of such monies was repatriated to Nigeria from the United State of America in 2020. http://saharareporters.com/2020/05/04/just-nigerian-government-receives-311m-abacha-loot-

united-states. More of such illicit monies belonging to the people of Nigeria are cooling off in various bank accounts overseas.

Unfortunately, more than ever before, the country is at a crossroads today as insecurity and corruption threaten the existence of the nation. The economy cannot grow because no serious investors would put their monies into the Nigerian economy in the face of a threatening security situation and politics cannot be adjudged stable in the face of incessant terrorist attacks.

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MARRIAGE AND FINANCIAL GREED IN POST INDEPENDENT AFRICA: A REVIEW OF SEMBÈNE OUSMANE'S *XALA*

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Abstract

Literature is the projection of the civilization where it emanates. It explores all human activities: social, educational, economic and political. Marriage and several other areas of human activities are not left out of the concerns of literature. Marriage, the union of two people drawn together by love, is a dynamic aspect of human beings. It continues to be a field of interest to scholars across several fields of studies with different points of view. Before the advent of foreign cultures and religions in Africa, marriage was much valued by Africans. The worth of any man was measured by the number of wives under his roof in the traditional African life. This paper investigates marriages in African societies and reviews the deviations and advances in marital choices. Adopting the practice literary theory. *Xala*, a novel written by Sembène Ousmane is used to depict this cultural syndrome. In the novel, Sembène uses a symbol of sexual impotence, xala, inflicted on a nouveau rich, El-Hadji Bèye who thought money is everything by the less privileged ones to expose the hidden traits in this cultural ailment. Xala is inflicted to ridicule El-Hadji Bèye and was unable to consummate his wedding as a result of his perceived traditional cultural ailment. He betrayed the confidence reposed in him by the society. The changes brought about by the modern life industry and western cultures to African marriages and the roles in matrimonial homes are also x-rayed. The paper reveals African marriages in the present days and some reasons for being polygamous such as personal motives, economy, prestige and competition for power. The consequences of polygamy on the society, both traditional and modern, and some plausible ways to curtail the negative effects in the contemporary days are proffered.

Keywords: African marriage, Cultural syndrome, Practice literary theory, traditional ailment.

Introduction

Literature is considered as mirror of the society. It reflects the social-political and cultural life of people. Literature is also seen as an artistic activity that is deeply entrenched and comparatively persistent patterns of emotion and comportment of the society from which it is melded. It is interpreted as imitating customs and beliefs, as well as illuminating the code of values and behaviours. Kolawole, Kehinde and Mbipon (2001) corroborate this point of view that literature is not only an imitation of life, but also a concept which derives from certain sustainable principles. They conclude by saying that, a multifaceted relationship therefore exists

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between literature and society, and the diverse conceptualizations of the relationship remain overt. The cultural ideas and happenings in societies have been factors that constitute major themes in literary writings. There are times when a collection of events arises and provokes literary leitmotifs. Writers put pen to paper to react for or against such a situation.

Considering the written African literature since inception, topics have been varying with time and events. From the pre-independence era to the writing for independence, the post-independence writings till present era, the era of contemporary African literature is worried majorly about happenings in society. Waugh (2006, p. 10) opines that

> Literature has traditionally been seen as that mode of writing which seems, most completely, to allow us to converse with the past and to enter imaginatively and sympathetically the minds of others. How to speak with the dead/ so that not only/ our but their/ words are valid.

These contemporary topics in literary oeuvres are concerned with conducts of the society. It could be said to be premised on the nagging varying instabilities, socio-political and socio-economic uncertainties of the contending transformation. In the post-independence African literary writings; poems, plays and novels, francophone, Anglophone or any other language(s), similar themes are treated. These themes are treated to conform with the realities in such a society. The effects of cultural contact, the traditional and modern, have greatly influenced the customs. These traditions cannot be the same any longer. This diversified culture remains a problem and constitutes some nuisance in these communities. African literature could be branded into 5 major themes; colonialism, liberation, nationalism, displacement and rootlessness. The present themes in African literature witness expression of social changes across societies. Mazrui et al (1993) on African literature,

> …. mention seven conflicts as themes: the clash between Africa's past and present, between tradition and modernity, between indigenous and foreign, between individualism and community, between socialism and capitalism, between development and self-reliance and between Africanity and humanity.

Fraser (1980) agrees with Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah that independence is a source of disillusionment to most Blacks because it has failed to deliver on the key objectives that spurred the quest for independence. The legacy of capitalism which was inherited from the colonial encounter could no longer be discarded. This leads to the exploitation; the black man then replicates the white men's forms of expression. The aspirations of Africans remain unsatisfied. These constitute topics for writers who expose the relationship between Europe and Africa and the consequences of this socio-political/cultural meeting on contemporary daily life after the so-called independence.

Christianity and Islam constitute another prominent factor that adversely affects the Africans, their cultures and socio-political life. The adoption of any of these religions has turned many Africans against their cultures and traditions. This then creates a major theme of concern to some other literary writers. These writings among other intentions are to intimate the greater community of happenings in his or her milieu. These oeuvres also serve as instrument that corrects, entertains or educates the citizenry among several other roles of literature. Sembène Ousmane, a Senegalese writer who is widely known for his contributions to literary writings on social issues from the pre-independence period to date wrote many novels in French language. Some of these novels are translated to his language of immediate community, (Wolof) and later to English language. The purpose of using this indigenous language is for his immediate audience/community to maximally benefit from the various themes and moral lessons being

passed across. Many of those people he wrote for could not understand the language of the colonizer, the French language. Presenting the message in the native language, Wolof, makes it to get to the desirable audience. Several themes are treated by authors, ranging from the family ways of life, the societal engagements and that of the entire nation where such a work of art emanates. Example of such themes are; the case of nouveaux rich Africans in *Xala*, by Sembène Ousmane. The situation of women in the traditional and Islamic dominated countries, *Une si longue lettre* by Mariama Bâ. The bureaucratic African that intends to get rid of the nationals who are handicap for foreigners to be interested in their nations, to attract tourism. *La grève des battù* by Aminata Sow-Fall and several other writers with varying themes of the day-to-day events in African nations. Ramonu Sanusi in his novel, *Un Nègre a violé une Blonde à Dallas*, exposes contemporary societal vices of the younger generations efforts to get rich at all cost. The protagonist, Ajanaku, travels across continents without any particular job aside pick-pocketing. He demonstrates this seamlessly before he returns to his home town with affluence acquired from this treacherous job.   Some writers write to condemn the injustices perpetrated in the education of children. Most societies prefer the male child while the female child does not enjoy the same privilege. The case of Juliette in the *Trois prétendants…un mari* by Guillaume Oyono Mbia is a good example. Juliette was sent to school so as to fetch her parents more money in marriage. Several themes to correct, to expose, to satirize or to condemn social vices in societies constitute literary topics in Africa and most human civilizations.

2.1 Marriage

Marriage is a journey through life which enhances and enriches entire communities. Marriage promotes sharing, tolerance, consideration, empathy, selflessness and several other virtues. Marriage is an important step in the life of every human being on earth. It is a societal institution that is dynamic and subject to change over time. Different cultures have different formalities and beliefs about marriage. Love, economic status, religious principles, and social acceptance are just a few reasons individuals marry across different cultures. Marriage is a public institution governed by overt rules and laws about the rights and responsibilities of its members. African cultures are very diverse and full of traditions based on social norms that have been all over the places for generations. African marriage systems do not share several characteristics with others. They cherish parental background and good names than any other factors. Parental history is usually the intrinsic element that must be properly investigated. After which the transfer of bride price- cash, goods or services- from the groom or his family to the bride's family. This exchange is both real and symbolic, as it marks the woman's passage from one social group to the other.

For Africans, marriage is a matter between families as much as between the bride and the groom. Many families even arrange the marriages of their members. Social life is arranged around a strong clan and extended family ties. This plays a vital role in the marriage process. The heterogeneity of societies coupled with significant regional differences suggests that individuals of different ages and backgrounds may have quite varied perceptions of marriage. Those partners we may consider appropriate or inappropriate, and those characters or comportments considered suitable or unscrupulous are the products of multiple factors including our families, culture, religion, media, social contacts, and various other pervasive factors such as technology and globalization. Societies in Africa attempt to maximize rewards and minimize costs. This is done by comparing what one gives up compared to what they receive in marriage. A husband may receive social status, sexual enhancement, increased labor, and the knowledge that his bloodline will continue, while giving up some sort of economic compensation to the family of the wife. The wife may receive resources, adult status as wife,

and protection in return for her labor and obedience to her husband. Traditional African marriages with a homemaker wife and a breadwinner husband serve to reinforce the patriarchal order; prevent women from being acknowledged for their contributions to the family, the community, and the larger society; and often have negative consequences for women with respect to financial, emotional, and physical factors (Blaisure & Allen, 1995). In the Islamic perspectives, when a man marries, he has fulfilled half of his religious obligations. It is left for such an adherent to fear Allah to achieve the remaining (Hadith). This shows that marriage is an obligatory thing in the Islamic and traditional African settings.

2.2 Sembène Ousmane's Xala at a glance.

The novel, *Xala* written in the year 1970 is a post-independence novel. It concentrates on the effect of culture contact and the aftermath of the European exit. This constitutes major themes for most literary writers of the period. Writers of the period concentrate on the legacies left behind by the colonizers and how Africans administer themselves socially, politically, economically and culturally. Like all other writers, Sembène, uses this novel to expose the nouveau-rich African that exploits others. These new African leaders accumulate wealth by manipulating others. They make use of ill-gotten wealth to oppress the masses in the society. Sembène uses the Marxist approach to present his views and to condemn this vice in Senegal as in other African nations after independence in this novel. The oppressed masses are seen revolting against the injustice perpetrated by the oppressor. The reason for the Marxist idea by the writer, is for an egalitarian society; things must be shared equally, irrespective of sex, economic status or any factors. It represents the emancipation of the oppressed. During the rule of the Whites in Senegal, EL-Hadji Beye is an activist who condemns the actions of the Whites. He was victimized and dismissed from the teaching appointment he engaged in to make ends meet. Later, he became the first indigenous president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Senegal. This post is to oversee the affairs of buying and selling food stuffs and other consumables. To the amazement of every person in the community, El Hadji Beye turned out to be a rich person who cared only for his immediate family. He dispossesses several families of their landed properties. He oppressed at will and turned to a different person who had no mercy for the less privileged in the society. Babatunde Ayeleru agrees with Bestman, M.T. (1981. p. 107) on this set of nouveaux riches Africans:

> Ils sont les escrocs et voire (les oiseaux noirs qui ont occupé le nid abandonné par les oiseaux blancs). Ils volent et détournent les fonds publics en laissant la masse en état de pauvreté. Les nouveaux riches de l'Afrique postcoloniale n'ont pas l'intérêt de la masse africaine au cœur. Ils montent au pouvoir pour satisfaire aux besoins de leurs familles immédiates.

> They were cheats, black birds that occupy beds abandoned by the white birds. They steal and divert public funds and leave the masses at the poverty level. The post-colonial nouveau riches Africans do not have interest of the masses at heart. They get to position of authority only to benefit themselves and their immediate families. (Translation).

This accounts for corruption that continues to thrive in the African community after independence and is affecting the development of the continent excessively. El Hadji Kadir Beye finds it difficult to give even a little to the beggars in his vicinity and uses this post, the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, to dispossess these people of their belongings. An illustration is the case of his relative he dispossessed of landed property. He knows quite well that the land belongs to the entire family, but because of his position, he fraudulently asserts himself ownership of the land to the disadvantage of others. This member of the family who is handicapped, causes the ruin of El Hadji Beye. El Hadji Beye plans to have

the third wife, Ngoné, during this wedding, Beye demonstrates fortune. Both necessary and unnecessary items were procured with public funds. The family of this new wife also marries N'goné to Beye because of his affluence, this will allow them to be sent on pilgrimage to Mecca and their financial burden will be taken care of by their rich in-law, El Hadji Beye. Despite the fact that the money belongs to the entire society, El Hadji Beye continues to spend it the way he likes. Several others are denied of reaping the fruits of their labour. Justice is not done amidst his wives. There's no equal treatment as stipulated by the Islamic religion he practices. These wives receive impartial treatment, financially, sexually and morally from the husband, El Hadji Beye. His motive for marrying the third wife is just to be reckoned with as an affluent person in the society. He already has eleven children from his two wives of which some of these children are already in the university. This is to show that it is not lack of children from the previous wives that made him to marry the third wife. The case of partiality could be seen in many areas. For example, he doesn't buy a car for the second wife, while the third wife is provided with a Mercedes Benz and 10,000 litres of petrol for its running. This looks ridiculous as such a privilege is not enjoyed by his other wives. Islam frowns at this type of treatment among wives. Economically, the hero lavishly spends the money that belongs to the entire community. This brings about financial difficulty to the community; the poor remains poor while the privileged continues to cheat them. This shows how the nouveaux riches dissipate collective resources on all categories of unnecessary things at the expense of the masses. This handicapped person later inflicts El Hadji Beye with xala, impotence and he is unable to consummate his marriage. This was revealed on the night of his third marriage. Unable to consummate a marriage is considered a disgrace. Attempt to solve this problem, exposes Beye, and also constitutes the beginning of his ruin, politically, economically, and socially. In the end, he discovers that the xala resulted from a curse sent by a Dakar beggar whose land El Hadji had expropriated. The protagonist finally recovers his manhood by submitting to the beggar's demands that he strips and be spat upon; the story ends with a freeze-frame of his spittle-covered body

2.3 Theoretical framework

Practice literary theory is adopted in this study. Practice theory is derived from many theories and many theorists made contributions to its limelight. It is derived from works of Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, Latour, Garfinkel and Butler. It is said to be linked to post structuralism, ethnomethodology, structuralism, actor-network theory (and science studies), and performativity. Practice theory according to Reckwitz, (2002, p. 251) is one of a variety of 'cultural theories.' Other cultural theories focus on mental qualities, while practice theory focuses on pre-theorical assumptions on human conduct. Biernacki attaches four concepts to this theory. The body, the mind, things and knowledge. The body according to Biernacki, is controlled by rational choices, norms and values. The mind entails the use of the body in various ways and engagement in mental activities, we think and act accordingly. Things, according to Biernacki, involves using things in a particular moment and for certain purposes. Knowledge, entails ways of understanding knowing how ways of wanting and of feeling are linked to each other within a practice. Reckwitz (2002, p. 253).

This practice literary theory is used as the framework for this study as it is an established fact that human beings generally use what they possess to seek and obtain other new things. The body, mind, things and knowledge are mingled to accomplish people's desires. Money is a factor for many achievements in human society. Most crimes and actions are premised on money which is purposely to satisfy the mind, the body or the knowledge. The protagonist of

the novel *Xala*, El Hadji Beye, uses his position of authority and public money to acquire his desire, third wife.

3.1 Contextual explanation of marriage in the novel

There is no great civilization that has ever existed that abstain from marriage as one of its core fundamentals of nation building. Marriage is cherished in Africa and beyond, because it solidifies relationships that enrich our communities and nations by bringing forth new life and new hope. In the Islamic religion, polygamy is a lawful relationship between a man and more than one woman though this practice should not exceed four wives at a time. Quran 4: 3 states that:

> And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of (other) women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then (marry only) one or those your right hands possess (i. e. slaves). That is more suitable that you may not incline (to injustice).

It is worthy of mention that there are some stringent conditions attached to this practice. The major protagonist in the novel, *Xala*, El-Hadji Beye, is a Muslim who follows the tenet of the religion. He has gone to Mecca, reason for being addressed as El-Hadji. He has already two wives before embarking on marrying the third one, N'goné. He exhibits his affluence in the preparation for this third wife. The Islamic religion's acceptance of this practice, polygamy, coupled with the African ways of living that accept polygamy could be said to be the motivating factor that led El-Hadji to his willingness to marry more than one wife. He is also interested because of the financial status of the who would be in laws. He is to lord them financially.

Using practice literary theory to examine the concept, it is an established fact that human beings generally use what they possess to seek and obtain other new things. The body, mind, things and knowledge are mingled to accomplish such. The bride's parents make use of their daughter to achieve their desired religious ambitions of performing the holy pilgrimage to Mecca and satisfy other economic exigencies. El-Hadji Beye commits himself financially to satisfy the needs of the bride's parents and achieve his aim of marrying N'goné even at the detriment of his other wives. Weddings can be very elaborate, involving feasting and dancing for days within a community. They can be very simple, or even be performed as huge ceremonies involving many different couples. The marriage between El-Hadji Beye and N'goné is performed amidst very elaborate ceremonies. El-Hadji Beye, uses his influence and affluence as the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to divert public money for his personal comfort and exhibition. This is to make him gain more popularity and to be considered a well-to-do person in the community. This marriage is not the first as he has two wives already. It is an established fact that polygamy is permitted for many social reasons. However, it is by permission and not an obligation or recommendation in the Qur'an that a Muslim male should indulge in polygamy. It is revealed in the novel, *Xala*, that Beye does not follow the laid down principles on polygamy.

This Qur'anic verse expresses above clearly Allah's purpose concerning polygamy. Marrying more than one, two, three or four is subject to equity in man's dealing with these wives. The husband has to be just in treating these wives especially in the areas of accommodation, expenditure, and food, clothing and kind treatment. If a man feels that he will fail to observe such equity, then he is not allowed to practice this choice. Considering the way El-Hadji Beye comports himself before, during and after his marriage, it is glaring that he lacks the knowledge of basic things required of him amidst his wives.

4. African beliefs and philosophy

Africans have their life patterns before the cultural contact with the Western World. They lived a communal life. They cherished good virtues and protect their names irrespective of their economic status. Good character is the most cherished aspect of life in Africa. In every community, virtuous life is taught. In this part of the world, you may be wealthy, have many children, and build several houses, all come to nothing if you lack good character. A life without moral rectitude is nothing but vanity. Covetousness is not part of their character. They tend to be satisfied with their economic status. They work harder to acquire more at the expense of greediness and stealing. They don't believe in short cut to riches.

Sembène in the novel *Xala* presents El Hadji Beye as a greedy individual who cheats others including his immediate family members. He dispossesses them of their parcel of land. These people in return ridicule him and drag his reputations in the mud. Traditional African method is used to deal with this man that constitutes himself to a charlatan. Despite that he has the means to finance an elaborate wedding and he demonstrates it during the marriage ceremony with N'Goné, these people with the aid of African traditions render the expenses a waste. Of what benefit is a wedding that the bride cannot consummate? Efforts to reap the fruits of this elaborate spendings on the marriage proved abortive. Despite his affluence and position of authority, he was unable to realize his goal. El Hadji Beye demonstrates some traits inherit from the white masters. He fought against this exploitation during the colonial era. He becomes an oppressor at the exit of these same people he condemned. Inflicting xala on El Hadji Beye by the immediate family member is to show that African cherish good names and always ready to reject any act of disgrace at any time.

5. Conclusion

The paper investigates the trend of things in post-independence Africa especially as it happened in Senegal and by extension in many other African nations. Many pro-self-government advocates turn to oppressors. In a way to reject these bad attitudes, African masses wage different hostilities against these sets of leaders. Such is the case of El Hadji Beye in this novel that is examined. This is part of the problems in contemporary African societies and all hands must be on deck to correct such anomalies in each society. The yearning for material things is now constituting a great menace and should be frowned upon by every person. Every person in any position of authority should do the needful, should be just and act unaffectedly. When justice is established peace and improvement will grow ane society will be able to forge ahead in all areas of endeavours.

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REALITY TV AND THE PROMOTION OF THE INDIVIDUALISM THESIS: MBC'S *TOP CHEF 2* AS A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Format localisation is one of the recent trends in media production. MBC, the most watched Arab channel, has achieved much success thanks to its adapted factual entertainment programmes. *Top Chef*, the US-based programme, has been one of MBC's most successful reality TV productions, running for five seasons. Based on Lévi-Strauss's binary-opposition theory, the study at hand attempts to prove that this programme contributes to the promotion of the American cultural tenet of individualism. Through applying a qualitative textual analysis to the thirteen episodes of *Top Chef 2*, the current paper seeks to uncover the interplay between the thesis of individualism and the antithesis of collectivism in the programme, revealing the conflict established between these two opposing cultural dimensions. The synthesis to the contradiction between the collectivist nature of Arabs and the individualistic narrative of the made-in-America *Top Chef* is reflected through valorising individualism and encouraging the Arab chefs to embrace different Individualistic tendencies, from the quest for uniqueness to self-interest and self-reliance in order to achieve success in the programme.

1.   Introduction

Ever since its emergence in the year 2000, reality TV, the form of programming that displays ordinary people or "non-actors under constant surveillance reacting in spontaneous and unscripted ways to their environment" (Handfield, 2012, p. 3), has been able to secure its place as "the most exorbitantly noticed form of programming in television's history" (Deller, 2020, p. 1). Although the most commercially successful formats originated in the Netherlands, the UK as well as in the US (Bechtold, 2013, p. 458), the Western-born genre of reality TV was popularised in the United States of America, mainly in the year 2000 with the broadcasting of CBS's *Survivor* (Yahr, 2015). From that moment on, Americans have become enthralled with the factual entertainment programming, which is revealed by Danielle Ligocki, faculty member at Oakland University, when she notes that "from 2000 to 2010, the number of reality television shows on the air increased from 4 to 320" (n.d., p. 1). Owing to their low-production costs and their entertaining nature, reality programmes have witnessed extensive proliferation and producers, from every corner of the globe, have raced to purchase and adapt reality TV formats to benefit from the high revenues they could garner (Handfield, p. 8). As a result, many formats,

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like *Idol*, *Got Talent*, *the Voice*, *Top Chef* and others, have turned into global phenomena and have managed to attract viewers worldwide (Nwafor & Erike, 2015, p. 4).

The high popularity of reality TV programmes has spurred many researchers to study the factual entertainment genre. The American scholar Jeffrey Weiss employs Gerbner's cultivation theory to uncover the influential role played by reality TV in shaping Americans' perceptions of gender, race and wealth (Weiss, 2020). Further probing into the impact of reality TV on the US is offered by Kristin Michael Barton (2007), who based on the same theory of cultivation, proves that exposure to competition-based reality TV leads to the embrace of anti-social behaviour. Other researchers, on the other hand, try to uncover reality TV's contribution to the promotion of certain cultural tenets, from neoliberalism (Couldry, 2008) to materialism (Opree, 2016) and individualism (Wood & Skeggs, 2008).

Given that the reach of reality TV goes beyond the confines of the US, interest in reality TV programmes is shared by third-world scholars. Several Indian researchers choose to investigate the cultural influence of the Indian adaptations of American and Western reality TV content on the Indian youth and reveal the glocal programmes' shaping of young people's mannerisms, dress codes, language and behaviour, etc (Shamala, Davas & Barclay, 2019; Kader and Parveen, 2019). A similar concern with reality TV's promulgation of Western and American ideals in Africa is expressed by Igbinoba (2014) and Nwafor and Onyekachi (2015) in their examinations of *Big Brother Africa*. In the Arab world, localised reality television shows are seen as means of modernising the region (Kraidy, 2008), bringing about social change, political engagement and democracy (Kraidy, 2005; Miladi, 2015) or menacing traditional Arab cultural principles (Macfarquhar, 2004).

The studies dealing with Arab reality TV either focus on the political values disseminated through the glocal reality programmes or adopt a generalised negative stance towards the genre, accusing it of posing a threat to Arab culture, without offering a thorough investigation of specific cultural principles that are promulgated through reality TV programming. Therefore, the paper at hand will address this gap by canvassing the value of individualism that is advanced in Arab reality TV. It also aims at contributing to the body of literature on reality programming in the Arab region by offering an examination of an under-researched programme, which is the Arab version of the American reality programme *Top Chef*.

The selection of *Top Chef*, in particular, stems from its popularity and success. Indeed, *Top Chef* is one of the most successful US formats that ran for 19 seasons in the United States (Wellen, 2022), becoming "part of the pop culture firmament, permaculture," in the words of the journalist Joshua David Stein (2022). This culinary show has equally managed to give birth to various spinoffs, such as *Top Chef Junior*, *Top Chef Masters* and *Top Chef Family Style*, to name a few (Wellen), and it has about 24 clones and adaptations over the world (Prensario, 2020). In the Arab world, Bravo's *Top Chef* was purchased and localised by the Arab world's most popular broadcaster MBC (Aliouat et al, 2016, p. 129). In recent years, MBC has sought to maintain dominion over the Arab market by resorting to entertainment-oriented programming, namely reality TV (Al sharif, 2014). One of MBC's reality hits is the Arab adaptation of *Top Chef*, named *Top Chef Moch Ayi Chef*. This programme, which was produced for 5 consecutive years, between 2016 and 2021, proved to be a winning formula for MBC, drawing a large number of Arab viewers to the MBC1 channel. In this paper, focus will be put on the second season of the programme (2017-2018), a season that was quite popular and that entailed many aspects of individualism. In addition, the above-mentioned season included contestants from all the regions of the Arab world: the gulf (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain), the Maghreb (Algeria and Morocco), the Levant (Lebanon, Syria and Palestine) as well as Egypt, which allows for the analysis of the reaction of multiple Arabs to the thesis of individualism inherent to *Top Chef*.

This study's probing of *Top Chef* will be carried out using a qualitative textual analysis. Jason A. Smith (2017) describes this method as:

> [An approach] interested in gathering information about how individuals in particular contexts make sense of the world around them. This approach recognizes the variety of ways that a text can be interpreted and utilized by those who view it. Invoking interpretive research, the focus is on how meaning is revealed and experienced, with an emphasis on sense-making, description and detail (p. 3).

According to this statement, a qualitative textual analysis revolves around understanding, describing and interpreting a given text, which is the reality TV programme *Top Chef*, in the present case. In its analysis of this culinary programme, the paper at hand strives to investigate the actions and speeches of the 15 Arab participants who take part in the 13 episodes of the programme and discern the individualist values they embody, with special emphasis on three basic principles, which are self-interest, self-reliance and uniqueness. The interpretation and examination of *Top Chef 2* will be accomplished in light of the collectivism- individualism paradigm. To be able to showcase the opposition between the programme's individualism and the collectivism of the Arab participants, Lévi-Strauss's theory of binary opposition will be employed.

2. Lévi-Strauss's Binary Opposition Theory

Binary opposition is a theoretical framework that was developed by the French thinker Claude Lévi-Strauss. Influenced by the work of structural linguists such as De Saussure, who considers linguistic opposition as "the means by which the units of language have meaning or value," (cited in Solikhah 2015, p. 8), Lévi-Strauss manages to adapt the principle of binary opposition to the domain of anthropology. For him, binary opposites can be applied to different fields because they form the basic structure of the human mind, which is communicated by Lévi-Strauss in the following statement:

> Specialized cells in the brain cortex carry over a kind of structural analysis … According to its kind, each cell either in the retina, in the ganglions or in the brain, only responds to a stimulus of a given type: opposition between motion and immobility, presence or lack of colour, changes in light or dark, objects with positively or negatively urged curves, direction of motion either straight or oblique, from left to right or the reverse, horizontal or vertical, and so on. Out of this roster of information which becomes remarkably well registered in the brain, the mind rebuilds, so to speak, objects which were never actually perceived as such (Lévi-Strauss, 1972, pp. 20-21).

The latter argument asserts that the human mind thinks in opposites and that most of life-experiences are structured around pairs that have opposite meaning to one another.

Lévi-Strauss's binary opposition framework finds expression in his study of three Salish myths where he purports that myths are constructed around setting sets of binary opposites against each other, such as earth and sky, raw and cooked, light and dark, man and woman, etc. His probing of the opposing terms that build up the mythical narrative enables Lévi-Strauss to derive much knowledge about Salish economic, cosmological and social realities (Aplin, 1981, p 16).

Indeed, in Lévi-Strauss's perception, understanding the individual culture of any group of people should necessarily imply breaking up the opposing elements that constitute that culture because all the people, whether they are educated or primitive, tend to think in terms of structural "dualism" (Lévi-Strauss, p. 22). Culture, in Lévi-Strauss's view, is best understood

through the thesis, antithesis and synthesis framework. Any conclusion is necessarily reached after juxtaposing the thesis and antithesis and exploring the various relationships that bind them together. In every binary opposition between thesis and antithesis, one element is delineated in a more positive light (Wordpress, 2017). The synthesis acts as the resolution to the opposing relation (Messer, 1986, p. 11).

Lévi-Strauss's thesis, antithesis and synthesis triad, which was originally used in the study of mythical narrative, will be used in the present paper to investigate a media narrative, which is the reality TV programme *Top Chef 2*. The analysis of the reality show will examine the binary opposition between the individualistic tenets that are inherent to the American-based format *Top Chef* and the collectivist nature of the participants in MBC's Arab version of the format and will unveil the programme's resolution of the conflict between Arab and American core values.

3. The Opposition between American Individualism and Arab Collectivism

The concepts of individualism and collectivism, which serve to explain the behaviour of individuals in different cultural contexts, are perceived by Rebecca LeFebvre and Volker Franke "as opposite ends" (LeFebvre and Franke, 2013, p. 133). While individualism "pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose [and] everyone is expected to look after himself or herself" (Hofstede 2001, p. 76), collectivism refers to "societies in which people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetimes continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (ibid). Hence, it can be suggested that individualism is tied to independence and the pursuit of self-interest, whereas collectivism is associated with dependence. In collectivist societies, loyalty to the group is given priority over personal goals and individual fulfilment is maintained by the success of the group (Al-Issa, 2005, p. 153).

Between 1968 and 1972, the Dutch researcher Geert Hofstede carried out his cultural dimension survey in 72 countries, where he investigated several cultural elements, including individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, pp. xix- 351). The results of Hofstede's research confirm the cultural opposition between the individualist nature of Americans and the collectivist tendencies of Arabs. While American people turn out to be the most individualistic in the world, Arabs are declared as the most collectivist. Hofstede's findings are corroborated by Richard Buda and Sayed M. Elsayed-Elkhouly (1998) who assert that "differences exist in individualism-collectivism between Americans, Egyptians and residents of the Gulf states. The US sample scored higher on the individualism scale than either the Egyptian or the Gulf state sample" (p. 491). The work of Buda and Elsayed-Elkouly equally suggests that Arab countries do not have the same degree of collectivism, arguing that people of the Gulf are more collectivist than Egyptians. Yet, regardless of varying levels of collectivism, Arabs remain collectivist in nature.

Indeed, collectivism has for long been an integral part of Arab culture. This point is expressed by Jon B. Alterman (2019) when he states that "ties of obligation, often through family and tribe, have been a consistent theme in Arab history" (p. 3). One of the early pioneers of Arab collectivism is the Tunisian thinker Abdulrahman Ibn Khaldun who writes that in-group ties are cultivated through "social intercourse, friendly association, long familiarity, and the companionship that results from growing up together, having the same wet nurse, and sharing the other circumstances of death and life" (cited in Alterman, p. 8). For Ibn-Khaldun, maintaining harmony with the social group is necessary for the well-being of individuals and for their success in life, especially that most of their history, Arabs lived as Bedouins in the desert. They relied on social bonds and kinship for hunting food, protection and survival (ibid,

p. 1). Having to live in clans and tribes made Arabs preoccupied with maintaining group unity more than pursuing personal goals and with preserving tribal and social traditions more than opting for change (Rohm, 2010, p. 9).

Early Americans, on the other hand, lived on the frontier, which is described by the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner as follows:

> The frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control and particularly to any direct control. The tax gatherer is viewed as representative of oppression (cited in ibid, p. 2).

From the frontier experience, Americans learned to care only for themselves and their immediate families. The difficult conditions on the frontier also pushed Americans to become independent from all social pressures and to rely only on the self for success and prosperity. As a result of the frontier trials, valuing self-interest, working independently and standing out from the crowd became major markers of American individualism (Rohm, p. 8).

Another factor that determines people's orientation towards individualism or collectivism is language. A study carried out by Kashima and Kashima (1998) outlines that speakers of English, a language, which necessitates the use of the pronoun "I," are more inclined towards individualism, whereas Arabs whose language allows for the drop of the "I" pronoun tend to be more collectivist. For Kashima and Kashima, employing the "I" in speech signifies that the individual "is highlighted as a figure against the speech context that constitutes the ground; its absence reduces the predominance of the speaker's person, thus reducing the figure-ground differentiation" (p. 465). The claims of Kashima and Kashima are further consolidated by the Lebanese scholar Huda Ayyach-Abdo (2001) whose analysis of Lebanese students' cultural dimension shows that the students who attend the Lebanese American university, which employs English as the language of instruction, demonstrate a higher individualist propensity than Lebanese students who go to the Lebanese University and Arabic University and who use Arabic as the major medium of communication (p. 513).

Apart from language, Arab collectivism is weakened by the growing urbanisation. According to Jon B. Alterman (2019), due to Arabs' movement to urban centres, "people are more mobile, families are more scattered and economic rewards come as a result of what you do, not who you are." Moving to cities has limited young Arabs' reliance on the hierarchical tribal networks, which, in their perception, no longer served them (ibid). Alterman suggests that:

> urbanization not only allows individuals to live more anonymous lives in cities, but it also allows people to live far away from members of a network who might seek to control their actions, and it creates greater opportunities for individual success and failure, absent group support (pp. 9- 11).

Alterman's statement unveils the city's contribution to creating favourable conditions for the development of individualism in the Arab world. Distance from the tribe and family makes Arabs more self-reliant and in control of their lives, which gives them more room to make their own choices and advance their personal interests. Yet, what Alterman fails to mention is the role played by exposure to American media products, such as reality TV, in degrading Arab collectivism.

4. Reality TV and the Promotion of Individualism

Made-in-American reality formats are built around the idea of individualism. Delineating the factual entertainment programming, Elliot and Lemert (2006) stipulate that "individualism serves as one of the main values among RTV [reality TV] genres…not only are the shows broadcasting an individualist value, but also most of the characters seen on a RTV show possess individualistic personalities" (pp. 217-218). For Elliot and Lemert, the "participants of RTV shows are individuals who place themselves first before anyone else" (ibid, p. 217). The culture of individualism that fills American reality TV is well nurtured in light of the capitalist work ethic, which is communicated by Tamar Salibian (2020) as she notes that "[under the auspices of capitalism], individualism rests within two coexisting notions: the capitalist receives the benefits of the worker individual, and the individual must conduct themselves as a self-commodifying entity in order to succeed within capitalism" (p. 111). What can be concluded from the latter statement is that the individual is highly valued in capitalist societies as a worker and as a commodity, which is evident in the reality programmes that make use of the free labour of the individual participants and encourage them to sell themselves as commodities to the audience to gain popularity and acclaim. Additionally, capitalism's emphasis on competition has transpired in a spirit of competitive individualism "which has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war on all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self" (ibid, p. 110), features that are quite observable in competition-based reality formats, where each participant has to engage in a war against others to reach the finale, be branded the winner and be able to claim all the prizes and benefits.

The preponderance of individualistic messages in American reality programmes has led many scholars to deem the genre as a promoter of individualism. An article by the Columbus Dispatch blames reality TV for the increase in individualistic narcissism in the US as the ""Me Generation" and those that followed redefined individualism to favour "me" over "we"" (The Columbus Dispatch, 2020). Similar worries are communicated by Suzanna Johanna Opree and Rinaldo Kuhne (2016) as they note that the "more reality TV adolescents view, the more…narcissistic they are" (p. 1). American youth cultivate more narcissism and selfishness after viewing reality TV due to the individualistic messages that permeate reality TV programmes, especially competition-oriented ones like *Top Chef*.

5. MBC's *Top Chef* and Individualism

5.1. *Individualism as the Thesis in MBC's Top Chef 2*

Top Chef is an American culinary programme. It is a competition-based format, whereby multiple participants have to embrace the spirit of competitive individualism and compete weekly in the quickfire and elimination challenges. The weakest contestant usually goes home at the end of each weekly episode and the most skilful participant is crowned Top Chef and goes home with a decent monetary prize.

Despite being adapted to the Arab world, MBC's version of *Top Chef* retains the individualistic values of the American format creators. In fact, *Top Chef 2* is predicated on individualistic tenets that range from reliance on the self to pursuit of uniqueness and personal interest.

Throughout their journeys on *Top Chef 2*, the participants have to be self-reliant. First, they step into the programme as individuals, stripped off their familial and tribal connections. On the programme, they have no one to count on but themselves. Therefore, they are supposed to display a high degree of autonomy and independence to be able to complete the weekly

quickfire and elimination challenges. Perfect management of one's time and realising personal weaknesses are prerequisite for success. On the second episode of the season, the injured Algerian chef Chahrazed, who is unable to finish her dish on time, is criticised by her colleague Mahdi who states that Chahrazed has put herself in trouble by choosing to prepare a complicated recipe, that requires many ingredients, especially that she suffers from a hand injury. He mockingly adds she can't expect the angels to come and help her (Sokar, 2017-2018). Mahdi's remark mirrors well the individualist approach of the programme where each contestant is responsible for accomplishing the tasks given to him and completing his dishes alone.

On *Top Chef 2*, the participants are also required to stand out from the crowd and mirror a degree of uniqueness. In the opening episode of the season, the chef judge Bobby Chinn stresses the importance of distinctiveness in the culinary programme by saying "I advise you to go to your roots, to the dishes that inspired you but make it unique" (ibid). On episode six, chef Bobby reiterates the same message by noting that "creativity is a key ingredient for all great chefs" when presenting the week's quickfire challenge that implies preparing unique and creative dishes without the use of kitchen utensils (ibid). The necessity of uniqueness is highlighted in several other challenges and episodes as well. The elimination challenge of week six involves modernising a traditional dish and presenting it in a unique way. Similarly, on the season's finale, the three remaining participants are asked to offer unique and creative interpretations of three classics, which are stew, ceviche and cheese cake. *Top Chef 2*'s stress on uniqueness is acknowledged by the programme fans as well. Assil Omrane, Saudi TV presenter and fan of the culinary show who entrusts the *Top Chef* contestants with cooking for her personal guests in episode seven, states the drive for uniqueness as the main reason behind choosing the programme's chefs for the mission.

The last individualistic tenet that is inherent to the *Top Chef* culinary programme is self-interest. Given that *Top Chef 2* is a competition-based reality show, based on the winner-takes-all scenario (Abdallah, 2017), the Arab participants are supposed to do their best to reach personal success through winning the title of Top Chef the Arab world and acquiring all the material benefits associated with the title , including the cash prize of 375,000 SR (Sobhi, 2018). To ensure continuity on the programme, the participants have to prioritise themselves and make sure to advance their personal interests and goals through fighting their orientation towards collectivism.

5.2.   Collectivism as the Antithesis in Top Chef 2

As opposed to the dominant thesis of individualism, collectivism is projected as the anti-thesis in *Top Chef 2*. Helping others and showing loyalty to competitors are shown in a negative light in this reality programme. In the quickfire challenge of week three, the Palestinian chef Assil runs out of time and is unable to plate his dish. As a result, he asks for help. The Algerian chef Mahdi and the Syrian chef Mahmoud run to his rescue and assist him in plating the dish. Thanks to their aid, Assil manages to win the challenge and receives immunity as a reward, which angers both chefs. Consumed with remorse, chef Mahmoud says if I had not assisted Assil, I would have guaranteed immunity for myself. In a similar vein, chef Mahdi decides that from that day, he will not help anyone. Yet despite the decision he makes, chef Mahdi's collectivist nature prevents him from pursuing his self-interest. His loyalty to his friends Mahmoud and Mustapha push chef Mahdi, who is the only pastry chef in the programme, to share his ice-cream recipe with them in the quickfire challenge of episode seven, a deed that proves to be unwise. While Mustapha and Mahmoud present delicious and successful ice-cream flavours to the judges, chef Mahdi fails the challenge and ends up in the bottom three, despite his expertise in ice-cream making (Sokar).

Additional corrosive outcomes of prioritising others over the self are underscored in the eleventh and fourth episodes. In week eleven, the Palestinian chef Assil plays head to head with the Egyptian chef Mustapha to prepare dessert. In spite of the competition between them, Assil chooses to help Mustapha by providing him with the chocolate recipe, which enables Mustapha to be the winner of the episode. Assil's collectivist behaviour is criticised by the Lebanese chef judge Maroun Chedid who blames Assil for contributing to Mustapha's victory and for putting himself in the bottom three, facing the danger of elimination at a critical point of the competition (ibid). Analogously, during the quickfire challenge of the episode, chef Ammar, from Saudi Arabia, helps his friend Abdallah clean his station after the latter spills the sauce and he also lends his grater to Selma. All the "charitable" deeds he performs consume much of his time and distract his attention from his dish. As a result, he ends up in the bottom with his rucola and avocado salad (ibid).

In fact, chef Ammar is one of the most collectivist chefs in the competition. He embodies with the Lebanese chef Serge the collectivist propensity towards group loyalty. On the eighth and ninth episodes of *Top Chef 2*, the participants have to work in groups in the restaurant-war challenge, on two separate episodes. Chef Ammar, who belongs to the second group, opens a restaurant with his group mates in the ninth episode. During this demanding challenge, the Saudi participant Ammar assumes many tasks. In addition to his complex and challenging dish, he volunteers to check the waiters and explain the menu to them, putting the interest of his team over his own interest. When his dish fails to impress the judges, he confesses that the multiple team-related responsibilities have weighted on his shoulders and have affected the level of his dish. Luckily for him, he is saved from elimination thanks to his team's victory. The same good fortune does not accompany chef Serge, though. As the leader of the first group that launches its restaurant in the eighth episode, chef Serge is expected to assume many duties. Apart from working on his dish, chef Serge has to check on the waiters, the tables, the decoration and make sure that everything is well done. These extra-cooking duties, which are fulfilled for the interest of the whole group, are done at the expense of Serge's dish. Ultimately, Serge does not find the time to finish his dish and when he requires help from his team mates, they refuse to assist him and choose to concentrate on perfecting their dishes. Serge's prioritisation of the group's success over his own personal fulfilment costs him much as he ends up with the worst dish and is, consequently, eliminated from the competition.

The second collectivist penchant that is negatively delineated in *Top Chef 2* is dependence on others. On episode seven, chef Selma fails her dish due to a lack of self-reliance. Feeling at loss during the elimination challenge, she relies on chef Mahmoud for inspiration and she accepts to work on a Baba Ghanoush recipe offered by him. Yet, her lack of mastery of the dish makes her in need of extra aid from her team mate Mahdi, who helps her finalise the dish. When her dish is judged to be one of the worst of the week, she blames her dependence on others for her failure. Just like Selma, chef Mahdi, from Algeria, fails during the same challenge and leaves the programme due to his inclusion of Mhamara (walnut dip) in his appetiser, which is a Syrian recipe given to him by the Syrian chef Mahmoud, and which he has no command over its method of preparation. In the two above-mentioned instances, dependence on others and inability to accomplish one's tasks alone result in fiasco.

In fact, being dependent on others and failing at imposing one's preferences are also elements of non-success. On the eighth episode of *Top Chef 2*, chef Assil expresses his disinterest in making dessert and his desire for preparing a hot-kitchen specialty but his team mates insist on pushing him to make the dessert because he is good at pastry. By the end, Assil's inability to impose his preferences and desires and his surrender to the dictates of the group cause him to present the worst dessert he has ever made on the programme.

The last cause of failure in *Top Chef 2* is reflection of tradition and limited display of creativity and uniqueness. On the elimination challenge of the sixth episode, all the judges hate George's Kebba because it exhibits no creativity. They equally do not appreciate Chahrazed's Algerian Hamis dish. The Lebanese chef judge Joe Barza thinks that there is nothing special about it and chef bobby comments on the dish, saying "I feel I'm eating ratatouille at my parents' house." The failure of Chahrazed's dish emanates from her copying of a traditional Algerian dish and her inability to add a creative touch to the Hamis recipe. On episode seven, Chef Maroun Chedid criticises Selma's decision to make a classical and traditional dish like Baba Ghanoush whose recipe is quite simplistic and does not give any chef room for adding her unique signature. On episode eight, chef Assil's Nutella sandwich is denounced by the Saudi chef judge Mouna on the ground that it is so plain and lacking uniqueness. She adds that any mother can prepare a similar sandwich. Chef Mouna lodges similar criticism at the dish Ammar presents in the ninth week, noticing that it is not impressive and that any amateur chef can produce a similar dish and it is not up to the level of *Top Chef*.

By criticising the collectivist values of selflessness, dependence on others and loyalty to the group and to tradition and associating them with failure and with corrosive results, *Top Chef 2* strives to establish a binary opposition between the individualist narrative of the American-based reality programme and the collectivist nature of Arabs. By presenting individualism as the thesis and collectivism as the antithesis, a type of conflict arises, which requires resolution or "mediation," (Messer, p. 13) in the form of the Lévi-Straussian synthesis.

5.3. *Embrace of Individualism as the Synthesis in Top Chef 2*

Describing the working of Lévi-Strauss's synthesis, Messer asserts that "oppositions, paradoxes and contradictions are mediated, appropriately enough by mediators …Their appearance signals that the contradiction being addressed has been defined in the form of an opposing relation and a resolution sought" (Messer, pp. 10-11). The resolution for the contradiction between the collectivist proclivities of Arabs and the individualism of the reality programme *Top Chef 2* is offered in the programme through the constant strife to accustom the Arab participants with the discourse of individualism by stressing the merits of possessing individualistic values.

Throughout the second season of *Top Chef*, the most successful Arab chefs prove to be the ones who embody the individualist principle of uniqueness. On the street food challenge, the participants who flourish at adding distinctive touches to their countries' traditional street food are congratulated by the judges. Chef George who serves Taouk sandwiches with Haloumi, chef Selma who mixes the Egyptian Taamiya with tahina and beetroot sauce and chef Mahmoud who, brilliantly, combines Chawarma and Kebba in one dish are the winners of the tenth week's elimination challenge and they are praised by the judges for their creative culinary skills. On episode twelve, the Egyptian chef Mustapha decides to prepare an "out-of-the-box" salad, which works quite well for him. The chef judge Maroun Chedid is impressed by Mustapha's creativity and he notes that Mustapha has managed to gather a few ingredients and present them in a unique way. Ultimately, Mustapha's creative salad earns him the first spot in the semi-finals.

Mustapha's success on *Top Chef 2* also results from his individualist mentality. Though when working in groups, "Arabs value teamwork and collaboration more [and] they are less likely to act independently," according to Frederick W. Rohm, Jr (p. 8). As a team leader Mustapha believes in giving his team mates independence and space to work on the dishes they prefer and they feel at ease with, which is mirrored in the ninth episode. On this episode, Mustapha tries to prioritise his mates' personal preferences and goals over team goals. He listens to his team mates' wishes. When Selma states that she wants to serve the first dish, he

grants her the permission of working on the appetiser. Mustapha similarly respects Chahrazed's wish of serving dessert, though she possesses no experience in the pastry domain. By allowing his team mates to pursue their personal preferences, Mustapha reflects the individualist mentality of valuing individual interests over group harmony. His trust in the individual capabilities of his team members and the independence he has granted them prove to be fruitful as both Selma and Chahrazed excel in the challenge and he actually manages, with his team mates, to win the restaurant-war challenge thanks to his individualist mindset.

Another highly individualist participant is George, from Lebanon. From day one, George has recognised that to flourish in the programme, he has to shun his collectivist orientations and focus on his personal interest. On episode ten, George refuses to lend Mahmoud his blender and when Mahmoud touches it, he screams at him and prevents him from using it. Prioritising the self has helped George reach the finale and during the final episode, he proudly talks about his individualist behaviour in the programme, saying I am on *Top Chef* to work alone, not to work in a team. On the baby shower, my team lost but my dish won. George's revelation proves well that George possesses no loyalty to the groups he has worked for; he cares only about the dishes he cooks and about furthering his personal goals, which qualifies him to be a finalist on *Top Chef 2*.

Actually, George and Mustapha who display individualist propensities and behaviours are able to earn their spots in the finale, which communicates the message that taming one's collectivism and embracing the individualist principles of creativity, independence and self-interest are the markers of success on *Top Chef 2*. The synthesis and resolution to the binary opposition between Arab collectivism and the programme's individualism is achieved through making the collectivist chefs abandon their cultural orientations and adopt the individualist values promulgated in the programme in order to achieve their top chef dream. Chef Mustapha who shows possession of several individualistic tenets is the one who becomes the second season's Top Chef.

6.   Conclusion

Through canvassing the duality between the cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism, the present paper has shown that on *Top Chef 2*, collectivism is presented as the antithesis in this culinary reality show and collectivist values are undervalued and associated with negative messages and outcomes. The thesis of individualism, which forms the basis of the narrative of *Top Chef*, is highly valued and the Arab participants' adoption of individualistic practices is tied to success and achievement. Resolution to the conflict and opposition between individualism and collectivism, this paper has revealed, requires the Arab participants' acceptance and display of individualist values such as uniqueness, self-interest, self-reliance and independence. Regardless of the Arab country they come from, the *Top Chef* contestants have to shun their collectivist natures and embrace the principle of individualism to guarantee continuity and survival in the *Top Chef* world. Hence, it can be suggested that the Arab version of *Top Chef*, like all American reality formats, seeks to promulgate the individualist mindset among the participants of the programme and, possibly, among Arab viewers. Therefore, a quantitative study of the influence of the Arab *Top Chef* on Arabs' orientation towards individualism could be a pertinent future research project.

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LANGUAGE TESTING AND ASSESSMENT LITERACY FOR PRE-SERVICE EFL TEACHERS: BETWEEN REALITY AND EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

The training that EFL pre-service teachers receive within the teacher-education programs in Algeria includes numerous aspects such as lesson planning, materials design, educational psychology, TEFL, and pedagogy. While they take in-depth training on items like lesson planning and the teaching of the macro-skills, components like assessment and evaluation remain remarkably missing from their curriculum. For observation, no module is specifically designated to assessment and evaluation along the five or four years of the training they undergo. EFL pre-service teachers are expected to graduate with adequate academic knowledge of the assessment and evaluation process; nevertheless, the reality can reveal to be contrasting. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the current situation of EFL pre-service teachers' assessment skills which partially disclose the level of their language assessment literacy (LAL). For this, an online survey with multiple items is posted to a sample of senior EFL students at the Teacher Training College, Bouzareah (ENSB), with the purpose of collecting their reflections and analyses about different dimensions of LAL. The findings indicate that there is a glaring incongruity between the status quo of student-teachers' assessment knowledge and the stakeholders' aspirations from the training. This discrepancy, which is due to not receiving sufficient practicum on how to assess, demonstrates that pre-service teachers are slightly knowledgeable about items like designing different types of tests, marking, giving feedback, assessing language skills, using assessment to motivate learners, and knowing what the latter feel about assessment, as well as other critical assessment parameters.

Keywords: Assessment; EFL; language assessment literacy (LAL); pre-service teachers; testing

1. Introduction

Assessment and evaluation are two chief operations within the pedagogical process. The latter remains incomplete without them and is often deficient when they are done inappropriately. Teaching language and evaluating the progress of the course go hand in hand. Wongwanich and Yamtim (2014) put assessment next to teachers, students, resources and context when counting the five major elements that determine the quality of instruction. This is what makes teachers' language assessment literacy (LAL) a vital skill to build. Stiggins (1995) defines assessment literacy as the skills and knowledge needed in the practice of assessment and testing. What is also often stated is that LAL implicates varied stakeholders (Harding & Pill, 2013; Taylor, 2013), among whom are language teachers.

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Scarino (2013) maintains that assessment is part and parcel of language learning and teaching curriculums and processes. Thereby, training teachers on how to assess and evaluate is probably as important as training them on how to teach. Novice teachers graduating from teacher training institutes are expected to be assessment literate, although the reality may be incompatible. Subsequently, the in-hand study accentuates the urgent need for training on assessment skills in order to meet expectations and reduce the inconsistency that may exist between the reality of teacher training on LAL and what is expected from its EFL graduates. The paper attempts to find out whether EFL pre-service teachers receive training on assessment and testing, whether they feel ready and skilled to assess, and how much knowledgeable they are in various aspects of LAL. In accordance with this rationale, the main research questions are:

RQ1: Do EFL pre-service teachers at ENSB receive training for LAL?

RQ2: Are ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers skilled in testing and assessment?

RQ3: How much do ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers know about different assessment areas and aspects?

The following hypotheses are provided as potential answers to the previous research questions:

RH1: EFL pre-service teachers at ENSB receive training to build and improve their Language Assessment Literacy.

RH2: By the end of the training, ENSB EFL pre-service teachers are skilled enough in testing and assessment.

RH3: ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers are moderately to quite knowledgeable about different assessment areas and aspects.

These hypotheses are going to be tested through a case study. By answering the aforementioned questions, we hope to discover whether the reality of teacher training on assessment meets with what is awaited from it. Notably, there is an evident lack of research on the place of LAL in Algerian EFL teacher training programs, its components, and the latter's development. This lack is considered as a serious research gap. Therefore, our paper seeks to address this gap by starting an examination of the status quo of training on assessment as well as the LAL skills of EFL senior pre-service teachers who are to become novice teachers.

2. Literature Review

Language assessment (LA), and specifically EFL assessment, has been more and more required in significant and tactful domains like immigration, diplomacy, citizenship and naturalisation, education, recruitment, as well as for other elemental certification decisions (Harding & Kremmel, 2020). For this, EFL teachers and testers are required to be "conversant and competent in the principles and practice of language assessment" (Harding & Kremmel, 2016, p. 415). The notion of Language Assessment Literacy (LAL) brings together three main classes of knowledge: theoretical and procedural, practical, and socio-historical or principled knowledge, knowing that the practical knowledge is the core of LAL (Fulcher, 2012). Similar to Fulcher, Giraldo and Murcia (2018) think that: "language assessment literacy (henceforth LAL) refers to the knowledge, skills, and principles for contextualizing, planning, developing, executing, evaluating, and interpreting language assessments".

Summative, formative, and diagnostic assessments are the three most known methods of language assessment. They are often taught within teacher education. Notwithstanding, there is much more that can be added to them in terms of LA knowledge. For instance, Brindley (2001)

suggested that training on assessment can incorporate the following three main modules about: the objectives of assessment (why), the manners of language assessment (how), and the significance of the assessment outcomes about language ability (what). This has resonance in the field, because it has been proved that testing and assessment training within professional development and/or teacher induction has "positive impact on participants" as it makes them aware of the why, how, and what of assessment (Giraldo & Murcia, 2018). LA knowledge, as traced by researchers, can include several dimensions. In general, Davies (2008), like Fulcher (2012) and Giraldo and Murcia (2018), sees that LAL encapsulates three main competences: knowledge, skills, and principles. Stiggins (1999) enumerates seven assessment sub-competences: (1) relating assessment to well-defined objectives, (2) making achievement expectations clear, (3) using appropriate assessment tools, (4) building good assessment activities and marking yardsticks, (5) avoiding bias and unfairness in assessment, (6) communicating student outcomes meritoriously, last but not least (7) applying assessment as an instructional means. On her side, Taylor (2013) proposes eight of them: "(1) knowledge of theory, (2) technical skills, (3) principles and concepts, (4) language pedagogy, (5) sociocultural values, (6) local practices, (7) personal beliefs/attitudes, and (8) scores and decision making" (as cited in Coombe et al., 2020). Ethical considerations, such as fairness, bias, and transparency, are also encapsulated within the competences of LAL. Furthermore, modern paradigms in the field embrace Web-Based Testing (WBT), which is, relatively, a newcomer to the collection of LA skills. This makes technological skills and mastery of some statistical appliances substantial in the map of assessment knowledge.

In contradiction with how much teachers need to learn about it, LA is scarce in pre-service teacher training. Novice teachers come into the domain with not much knowledge of LA, as argues Popham (2009), who also contemplates that, in general, teachers have little understanding of educational assessment. He points out that some of them see that exam or "test is a four-letter word, both literally and figuratively" (Ibid., p. 5). They think of examination and testing as simple operations, while they are complex and multi-layered.

In synopsis, it is inevitable to notice that the inclusion and design of a language assessment course within language teacher education programs is a necessity. Herrera Mosquera and Macías (2015), alongside Bernal and López (2009), substantiate that both pre-service and in-service teachers need to receive training on assessment. Likewise, Giraldo (2018) stresses the amelioration of language teachers' LAL as they are a fundamental stakeholder group in the language assessment process.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context and Setting

The study employs a quantitative approach in order to investigate EFL pre-service teachers' language assessment literacy (LAL). The study seeks mainly to find out the reality of teacher training on assessment and testing. Thus, the setting consists of an Algerian EFL teacher training program, that of the Teacher Training School, Bouzareah (ENSB). Briefly, the study is an exploratory analysis of EFL pre-service teachers' knowledge of assessment and their LAL skills.

3.2 Participants

The sample was involved through a convenience sampling technique. It was selected based on availability and accessibility. 36 female students at Ecole Normale Supérieure, Bouzareah, took place in the study. A population of 160 students was invited to participate, but only 36 of them replied to the research tool. Our focus is ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers, that is, fourth- and fifth-year students. This population was chosen because it is expected to

have received most of the training at ENSB, and is a few months away from starting to teach officially. They are expected to know how to test and assess, just as they are expected to be ready to teach. Their knowledge of assessment is supposed to be enough to begin teaching. Table 1 shows more details about the participants in relation to their age range, year of study, and level of English.

Table 1.

Delineation of Participants

Gender	Age Range	Year of Study	Level of English
100% Female	**18-24 years old**: 100%	**Fifth year**: 91.7% [33 participants] **Fourth year**: 8.3% [3 participants]	**Beginner**: 0% [none]
			Pre-intermediate: 5.6% [2 participants]
			Intermediate: 44.4% [16 participants]
			Upper-intermediate: 30.6% [11 participants]
			Advanced: 16.7% [6 participants]
			Proficient: 2.8% [1 participant]

3.3 Procedures and Tools

In January 2022, an online survey (Google Forms) was shared with the participants. After waiting for two weeks, 36 replies were received. The questionnaire is made up of eight (8) questions: four demographic information questions and four content ones. The content questions include two yes/no questions, one open-ended question, and the main question. The latter is an eighteen-point Likert scale with four measurement choices of knowledge: not knowledgeable, slightly knowledgeable, moderately knowledgeable, and very knowledgeable. The 18 items were adapted and/or adopted from Harding and Kremmel's LAL scale which was launched in May 2017 and published in 2020. In this empirical research, Harding and Kremmel (2020) explored the needs of multiple LAL stakeholder groups like teachers, test builders, administrators, and testing researchers, including overall 1086 respondents.

The data are processed through the descriptive analysis method. They are presented hereafter.

4. Results

In order to find out whether the EFL teacher induction program at ENSB provides training on assessment and testing, participants were asked the question demonstrated in Figure 1. The percentages are contradictory as 52.8% reported that they received training on assessment, whereas 47.2% said that they did not.

During your time at ENSB, have you received training on assessment and testing?
36 responses
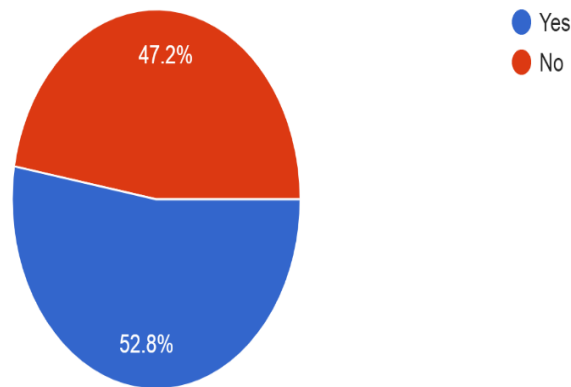
Figure 1: Percentages of Training on Assessment and Testing

Participants were then asked whether they considered themselves skilled enough to assess English learners. Based on the obtained data (Figure 2), there is fairness in choices as half of the participants, 50% ($n= 18$), deem themselves skilled, while the other half think they are not.

Do you consider yourself skilled enough to assess English learners?
36 responses
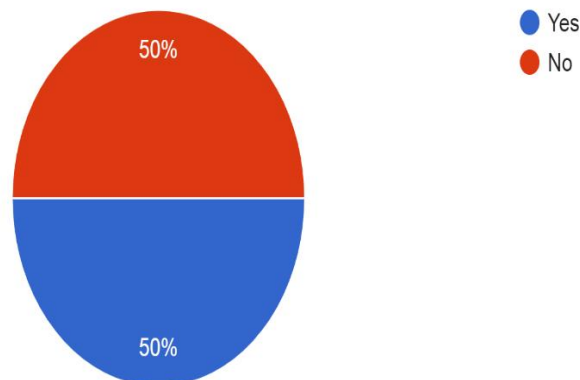
Figure 2: Are Participants Skilled in LAL?

For a deeper understanding, participants were invited to justify their choices in the previous question. As exhibited in Table 2, the replies that were inserted are classified based on the choice (skilled/not skilled). The researcher relied on the content analysis method to sort out the replies.

Table 2.

Participants' Justifications of Whether They Are Skilled in LAL or Not

| Skilled	Not Skilled
I feel myself skilled.	I am still improving my ability.
I am not sure, but from what I know, I think I will be able to assess effectively as a beginner teacher. There is yet much to learn, though.	So far, I did not have any direct contact with students in a classroom, so I will have to put myself in the situation first.
I am able to assess beginners only. I tried it with some of my family students, and they did well.	I am still learning.
I can maybe evaluate them on the obvious things.	Due to Covid, we were not able to study sufficiently, we do not feel ourselves prepared enough.
Throughout these four years of studying at ENSB, we were preparing ourselves to teach.	I do not have enough skills, patience, and good English.
I have learned many things about assessment and evaluation as a fifth-year student.	I need more training and practice in the field of teaching in order to gain experience, and till now we have just received the theoretical side.
With the help of the modules that we are studying now such as pedagogical trends and TEFL, I feel skilled enough to do it.	I am working on my skills so that I will be able to assess other learners.
I have received training to assess, but it was only for one semester and was not really enough.	I do not have any previous knowledge about it.
I think that I am skilled enough to assess English learners because I have enough knowledge about both the language and what to look for then take into consideration when assessing the students thanks to what I have studied at ENSB.	I need time and training!

/	I am also still an English learner. I do not have enough vocabulary and enough strategies.
/	I need to improve my level enough to do that.
/	My knowledge background is not enough to assess English learners. I am still working on it.
/	Lack of training on how to assess and test English learners left me without knowledge about this matter. I still do not know what kind of standards/measures are required in the process of testing and evaluating learners.
/	This is because I have never tried to assess an English learner, I did not receive any training on that, and I am not proficient in English to assess learners, but it still depends on the learners' level; I mean if he is a beginner, I can assess him/her, but in case he is in my level or higher, here I am not able to do that.
/	I have yet to know how to assess English learners since I received no training on the matter.

The last question was in regard to how much knowledgeable ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers are in 18 sub-areas of LAL. The question is a Likert scale with four measurement points. Figure 3 illustrates the details of the sample's replies.
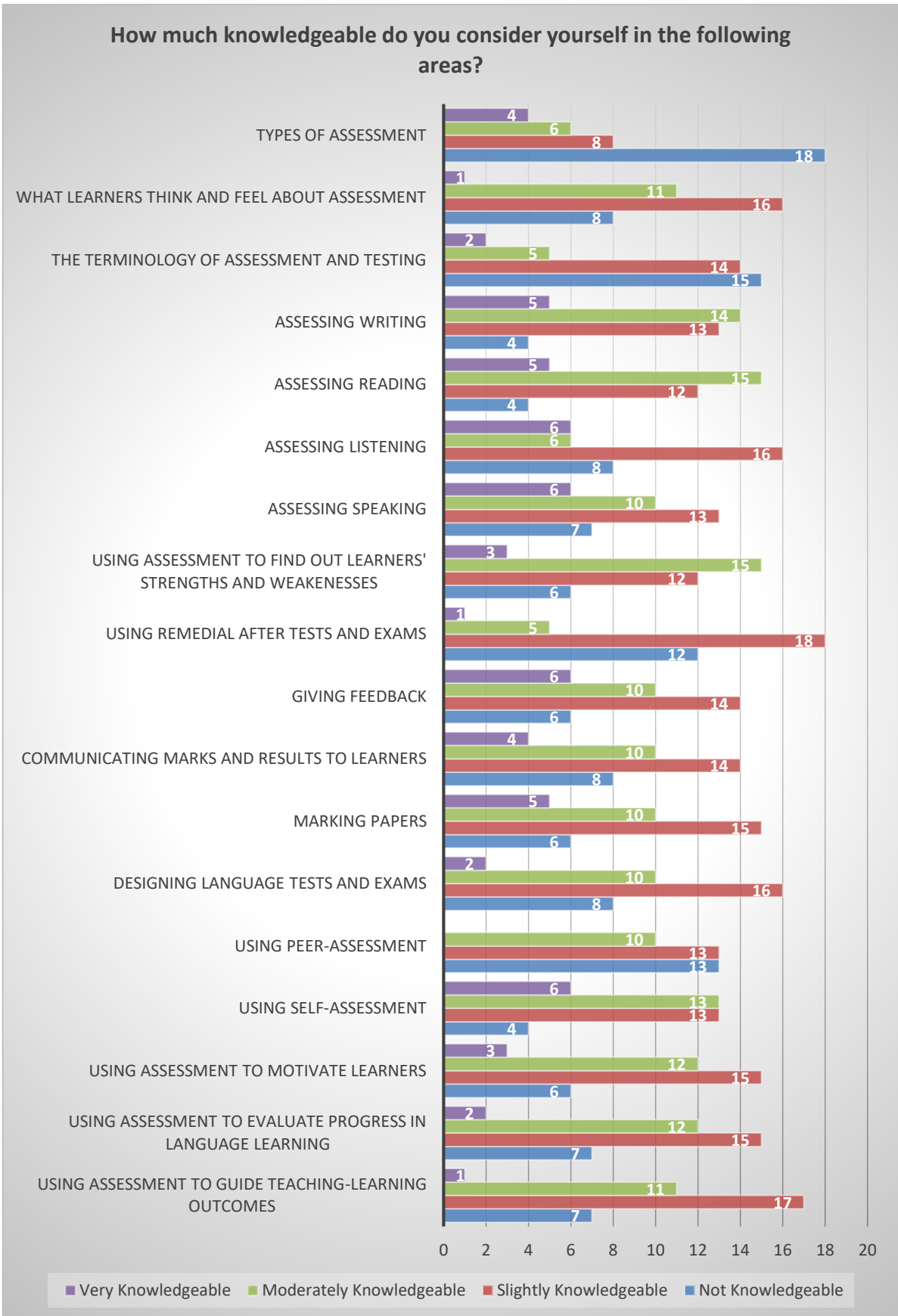
Figure 3: Participants' Knowledge of Different Aspects of Assessment

The rationale behind this question was to collect data about respondents' knowledge of 18 LAL factors. The factor analysis reveals that the majority of participants are slightly knowledgeable in eleven (11) aspects out of eighteen (18) (using assessment to guide teaching-learning outcomes; using assessment to evaluate progress in language learning; using assessment to motivate learners; designing language tests and exams; marking papers; communicating marks and results to learners; giving feedback; using remedial after tests and exams; assessing speaking; assessing listening; what learners think and feel about assessment), moderately knowledgeable in three (3) aspects (using assessment to find out students' strengths and weaknesses; assessing reading; assessing writing), and not knowledgeable in two (2) aspects (terminology of assessment and testing; types of assessment). In two factors, the same number of participants is shared between either slightly knowledgeable and moderately knowledgeable (using self-assessment, $n=$ 13 of participants), or not knowledgeable and slightly knowledgeable (using peer-assessment, $n=$ 13 of participants). This indicates the overall knowledge of senior EFL pre-service teachers, which can be described as slightly to moderately knowledgeable in LAL competences, but mostly slightly knowledgeable.

5. Discussion and Implications

Many practitioners and researchers reiterate that LAL is an important notion in applied linguistics. However, its working knowledge among the sample is not encouraging. In the following part, the main findings are discussed in relation to the research questions and hypotheses.

RQ1: Do EFL pre-service teachers at ENSB receive training for LAL?

The gathered data demonstrate that 52.8% of the respondents said that they received training on assessment, whereas 47.2% said that they did not. Meanwhile, our first hypothesis deemed that EFL pre-service teachers at ENSB receive training to build and improve their Language Assessment Literacy. The percentages obtained are close, yet surprisingly paradoxical and do not confirm the hypothesis. This might indicate that the offered assessment training is subtle, implicit, weak, limited, and/or inconsistent. Some teachers and trainers might have referred to it, but not enough for all participants to be sure they received training and be aware of LAL. It is weird to notice that in the same context, almost half of the participants said the opposite of what the other half attested. What this implies is that: "Assessment courses programs should be part of teachers' qualifications and requirements" (Coombe et al., 2020). It is highly recommended to classify the content about assessment and testing under one specific module that focuses only on LAL. The module can tackle the various dimensions and sub-skills of LAL with up-to-date knowledge. It can be taught in the last year of training or the last two years. It ought to be "long and sustainable enough to engage [pre-service] teachers in profound learning about assessment" (Ibid.). It also needs to involve student-teachers in practice, not just theory.

RQ2: Are ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers skilled in testing and assessment?

Earlier in this research, we postulated that ENSB EFL pre-service teachers (seniors) are skilled enough in testing and assessment, mainly by the end of the training. It is no surprise that teachers are expected to be professional in assessment (Csépes, 2021); yet, the findings display that half of the sample is not skilled in testing and assessment, which disconfirms the hypothesis (RH2). This can be due to the lack and inconsistency of training on LA, as seen above (RQ1). Some members of the sample stated it patently, as this one who wrote: "I have yet to know how to assess English learners since I received no training on the matter". Another one inserted: "Lack of training on how to assess and test English learners left me without knowledge about

this matter. I still do not know what kind of standards/measures are required in the process of testing and evaluating learners".

In a study conducted by Popham (2004), he found that several teachers do not know enough about assessment. He argued that they know "little" about educational assessment and compared assessment illiteracy to professional suicide (Popham, 2004). Other authors claim that: "assessment has been seen almost exclusively as an act of measurement that occurs after learning has been completed, not as a fundamental part of teaching and learning itself" (Bryan & Clegg, 2006, p. xviii). Viewing assessment as such, and without considering the backwash effect, can be proof of significant LA illiteracy. These findings entail that more efforts ought to be spent on improving teachers' and pre-service teachers' LAL principles, perceptions, and skills.

RQ3: How much do ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers know about different assessment areas and aspects?

Because this is what is hoped for and expected, it was hypothesised that ENSB senior EFL pre-service teachers are moderately, quite knowledgeable about different assessment areas and aspects. Conversely, the findings indicate that they are slightly knowledgeable about LA in general. Some studies have shown that this is valid almost everywhere as teachers, learners, and people, in general, seem to consider assessment as "giving students tests and using scores for sometimes unfair purposes and actions such as evaluating teachers' overall performance" (Herrera Mosquera & Macías, 2015, p. 303). Indeed, the process is often viewed as deciding who succeeds and who fails a course, "controlling discipline, or threatening students" (López, 2008, p. 56). In fact, there are teachers who, instead of using assessment to motivate learners, use it as a threat, disregarding students' needs and proving their illiteracy of what is dubbed "affective skills for assessment" (Giraldo, 2019).

What is encouraging is that teachers' LAL is not fixed, and can improve with time, learning, experience, and practice (Csépes, 2021). The author conceives that teachers' identity as "assessors develops gradually as a result of complex and deep learning about assessment", and can eventually result in alterations in their beliefs and practices about assessment (Ibid.). Hence, it is advisable for teacher training programs to provide assessment practice opportunities for pre-service teachers.

Taking all findings into consideration, we can perceive a discrepancy between the reality of student-teachers' assessment knowledge and what is awaited from them. The stakeholders' aspirations from the training in relation to LA are higher than its real outcomes. This disproportion is attributed to the insufficiency and/or inconsistency of training and practicum on how, what, and why to assess. It is, undeniably, extremely urgent to implement a LA course within the teacher induction program offered to EFL pre-service teachers in general, and to those at ENSB in particular.

6. Conclusion

The multi-dimensionality of LAL and its varied components and significance to relative stakeholders make it a complex variable to explore. In this study, we aimed to understand pre-service teachers' assessment literacy; however, it seems that this construct is not singular but plural, or as Inbar-Lourie (2017) discerns, it leads us to discuss assessment *literacies (LALs)*. The collected data underscore the lack of training on LA in the setting of the study, but this can be true in several other teacher training programs in Algeria and worldwide. As a baseline, there is an incompatibility between what is expected from teacher training about LA and the reality of its novice graduates' and senior under-graduates' LAL. The reality shows that they are slightly literate about LA, which insinuates and invites the inclusion of more training on

language assessment skills, competences, and literacies. The study and the adopted approach have limitations, namely the small sample and its non-representability. Nonetheless, the conclusions of this piece of research provide venues for further investigations on EFL novice teachers' LAL and the content of LA courses.

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THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, WORKING MEMORY , AND SELECTIVE ATTENTION ON READING COMPREHENSION OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN LEBANESE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence (EI) and executive functions (EFs) are constructs deemed vital for academic achievement. Selective attention and working memory as EF skills are relevant to the acquisition of reading comprehension. Social emotional learning (SEL) programs have a positive effect on EI competencies and academic achievement. There is little existing research on the effect of the relationship between EI and EF on reading comprehension of students with learning difficulties at the elementary level, particularly in the Lebanese context. This research investigates the effect of the MindUP SEL program on EI, working memory, and selective attention in students with learning difficulties, subsequently studying the impact of the relationship between EI and working memory, and EI and selective attention on reading comprehension. The experimental pre-test/post-test research design was employed utilizing experimental and control groups in random selection. The sample comprised all 63 fourth and fifth graders with learning difficulties enrolled at two Lebanese inclusive schools in Beirut area. Results suggest a huge effect for the MindUp program on emotional intelligence, working memory, and selective attention. The ANOVA results did not reveal a significant relationship between EI and working memory or between EI and selective attention on reading comprehension. However, working memory explained 15.1% of the variance in reading comprehension. Implications for future suggestions are discussed.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, learning difficulties, selective attention, social emotional learning, working memory

1. Introduction

Conceptualizations of emotional intelligence have entailed different related theories that can be clustered in frameworks that portray cognitive ability, competence, and mixed trait that includes personality and social emotional intelligence (Hughes & Evans, 2018). The ability model based on Mayer-Salovy (1999) stresses the notion that EI is an intellectual ability separate from intelligence quotient. The competency model draws on Goleman's theory that describes emotional intelligence as clusters of capabilities divided into four broad areas: "self-awareness," "self-management," awareness of others and empathy, and management of social relationships. His research has centred on the importance of emotional intelligence in the workplace and leadership (Goleman, 2001). The mixed trait model combines emotional abilities

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with personality characteristics that affect an individual's normal way of thinking, feelings, and behaviors (Punia, Dutta & Sharma, 2015).

The growing interest in research regarding emotional intelligence has impelled the inquiry for sound experiential studies linking the effect of social emotional learning training on emotional intelligence that in turn improve behavior and academic performance (Dhani, & Sharma, 2016; Gayathri & Meenakshi, 2013; Maul, 2011).

Concerning the field of learning difficulties, emotional intelligence is a crucial element that permits students with learning difficulties to face various challenges imposed by the difficulty (Singh, 2017). These challenges are exemplified by frustration, anxiety, low self-esteem, understanding of nonverbal cues, experiencing stress as a result of the difficulty in expressing emotions, and the inability to cope with the rigorous requirements of the regular curriculum (Genik, Millet & McMurtry, 2020; Singh, 2017).

1.1 Social Emotional Learning

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) organization has delineated a framework consisting of five social emotional learning proficiencies including intellectual, emotional, and behavioral skills that relate to emotional intelligence. The fundamental proficiencies are "self-awareness," "self-management," "social awareness," "relationship skills," and "responsible decision-making skills" (CASEL, 2020).

The same skills of emotional intelligence emerge by looking into the different social emotional learning outcomes. The social emotional learning outcomes for elementary and middle school children were classified into three main realms: cognitive control, emotional processing, and social skills (Jones, Barnes, Bailey, Doolittle, 2017).

Another pivotal point for researchers in the field has been to study the best way to enhance emotional intelligence through training. Social emotional learning programs emerged as the main vehicle to promote emotional intelligence with mindfulness as a construct to improve emotional and academic skills (Janz, Dawe & Wyllie, 2019; Jones, 2018; Ritter & Alvarez, 2020). Mindfulness was defined by Kabat-Zinn (2003) as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (p. 145). It is characterized by awareness of the current state of the mind and body without judgment, embellishment, or affection (Burke, 2010; Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012).

1.2 Executive Functions

Executive functions denote an array of cognitive skills such as working memory, attention, inhibition control, and planning, which are crucial to thought and cognitive management in the effort to realize directed aspirations (Friedman, & Miyake, 2017; Huizinga, Baeyens, & Burack, 2018). More specifically, executive function skills of working memory and selective attention are interlinked with reading comprehension. Role of working memory in reading comprehension is noted when students keep in mind text ideas from the beginning till the end to make sense and construct meaning. Selective attention is important to extract relevant information and discard irrelevant one during reading to give correct answers in reading comprehension (Borella, Carretti, & Pelegrina, 2010; Cartwright, 2012).

Reading comprehension is pivotal for the learning of all academic domains. It is a complex process that includes the interaction of many cognitive skills and affective factors (Sanford, 2015; Slattery et al., 2021). Research suggests that the foundations of comprehension deficit in students with learning difficulties is related to language based difficulties, and working memory as it impedes reading comprehension (Cartwright, 2012; Jacob & Parkinson, 2015). Other research proposes emotional intelligence as an affective factor that contributes to adequate comprehension (Hermawati, 2018).

In regard to students with learning difficulties, a scarcity of literature addresses the relationship between emotional intelligence and language in general, specifically reading comprehension. Most studies examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and

social competence for students with learning difficulties (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015; D'Amico & Guastaferro, 2017).

There is an extensive amount of published research describing executive functions and their role in the education of students with learning difficulties, in addition to the literature examining emotional intelligence (Watson, Gable, & Morin, 2016). Nonetheless, in general, there is limited research on the impact of the relation between these two concepts on academic performance, specifically reading comprehension.

As a result of this dearth of evidence, and because reading comprehension is a crucial factor for achievement in all content areas, it is essential to study the relationship between emotional intelligence, executive functions, and reading comprehension in students with learning difficulties. Additionally, it is warranted to mention the existence of scant information examining the relationship between these two constructs among students with learning difficulties in the Lebanese context.

Thus, this study aimed to investigate the effect of the MindUP social emotional program on emotional intelligence and executive functions and the effect of the relationship between them on the reading comprehension for children with learning difficulties.

The following hypotheses were posited to investigate the impact of the relationship between emotional intelligence and executive functions on reading comprehension of students with learning difficulties.

1. Students with learning difficulties trained on the MindUP social emotional learning program will score higher on emotional intelligence than students who were not trained on the MindUp social emotional learning program.
2. Students with learning difficulties trained on the MindUP social emotional learning program will score higher on working memory as one skill of executive functions than students who were not trained on the MindUp social emotional learning program.
3. Students with learning difficulties trained on the MindUP social emotional learning program will score higher on selective attention as one skill of executive functions than students who were not trained on the MindUp social emotional learning program.
4. There is an effect for the relationship between emotional intelligence and working memory on reading comprehension of students with learning difficulties.
5. There is an effect for the relationship between emotional intelligence and selective attention on reading comprehension of students with learning difficulties.

2. Literature Review

Diagnoses of mental health and students receiving special education services are the rising over the years. The number of students enrolled in special education increased from 6.4 million during the 2011-2012 scholastic years, to 7.1 million during 2018-2019 year (NCES, 2020). Children ages 6-17 showed an increased rate in depression and anxiety from 5.4% in 2003 to 8.4% in 2011-2012 (CDC, 2021).

The growing numbers in mental health cases and special education enrolment led schools to seek evidenced based programs to assist these students cope and succeed not only in school but in daily life. Social emotional learning and mindfulness have gotten to be progressively vital in accelerating the development of students who may be affected by these conditions.

According to the study by Faramarzi and Enayati (2021), emotional problems differ in relation to the type of learning difficulty. The authors found that students with reading difficulties revealed significant higher anger and anxiety levels than those with mathematics and writing difficulties. Whereas results indicated that the feeling of pleasure was the highest in students with writing difficulties.

Students with learning difficulties reveal a lower level of emotional intelligence in comparison to students without learning difficulties. The ex post facto study by Bahramiyan,

Maktabi, and Morovati (2014) indicated lower emotional intelligence for second and third grade students with learning difficulties (M = 114.80) compared to students without learning difficulties (M = 131.43) on the Emotional Quotient Inventory, Youth Version (EQ-i: YV).

Several studies have shown that SEL programs have a significant impact on the enhancement of EI skills in students with learning difficulties. The study by Filippelio, Marino, Spadaro, and Sorrenti, (2013) examined how students with LD react to speculative interpersonal conflicts by utilizing social stories in comparison to students without LD. Participants were 28 students from 8 to 10 years old, equally distributed between the experimental (LD students) and control groups (students without LD). Results of the ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of copying and using assertive strategies to deal with interpersonal conflicts. The experimental group revealed the use of assertive strategy (t (26) = -2.18, p < .05), versus aggressive strategy for the control group (t (26) = 2.14, p < .05).

McLean (2016) investigated the possible association between emotional intelligence and learning difficulties. Results indicated a positive association and especially support the proposition that there is a correlation between emotional expression and recognition of others' feelings, emotional management, and learning difficulties. Lower Pearson product-moment coefficient scores (r range = -.06 to -0.24, p < .05) were linked to more reading difficulty signs. Lower Pearson product-moment coefficient scores (r range = -.06 to -0.29, p < .001) were also associated with more mathematics difficulty signs.

A randomized controlled study examined the relationship between social emotional learning intervention and improvement of the indicators of learning difficulties (Keller, Ruthruff, & Keller, 2019). Independent t-tests were calculated on these differences to examine the effect of the experimental group on the control group. Results indicated progress in writing, reading, self-awareness, self-efficacy, and the use of metacognitive strategies.

The study by Nachshon and Horowitz-Kraus (2019) revealed a significant negative relationship between emotional intelligence and reading difficulties. The sample included 98 children ages 8-12 distributed between the reading difficulty group (N = 42) and the control group (N = 56). Results from the Pearson correlation indicated that reading difficulties were associated with greater emotional difficulties. Emotional ability was negatively correlated with spelling abilities ($r = -0.321$, $p < .01$), timetabled decoding ($r = -0.293$, $p < .01$), and reading comprehension ($r = -0.25$, $p < .05$) for both groups.

The results of the study by Bryant (2007) revealed a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and reading comprehension for secondary students with learning difficulties. Participants were 49 students ages 14 to 18 in the 10[th], 11[th], and 12[th] grades.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient results revealed a significant correlation (r = .90, p =.000), indicating a strong relationship between EI and reading comprehension.

2.1 Executive Functions

Many operational definitions of executive functions were conceived throughout the literature. However, all agreed that executive functions are responsible for emotion regulation as well as academic achievement (Ardila, 2018; Barkley, 2012; Diamond, 2013).

In the context of special education, executive functions are the processes underlying the interweaving between neuropsychology and neuroscience to better understand cognitive functions underlying academic achievement and emotion regulation (Friedman, & Miyake, 2017; Predescu, Sipos, Costescu, Ciocan, & Rus, 2020).

Executive function deficits are common in students with learning disabilities who struggle to organize assignments, set appropriate goals, and evaluate performance (Ness & Middleton, 2011). A deficit in self-control abilities can lead to an unremittingly low

achievement level, which can result in school resentment and exasperation (Korinek & deFur, 2016).

Students with learning disabilities lack the ability to coordinate a wide range of cognitive skills manifested in executive function skills while learning and studying in order to produce satisfactory results on a variety of academic tasks and social emotional situations (Predescu et al., 2020; Rozek1 & Stobäus, 2016). Precisely, they often have problems with organizing, arranging, and storing information for later retrieval from memory. Consequently, information may become blocked or jammed, and they cannot easily provide responses or shift attention between two or more tasks (Pullen, 2016). These difficulties, exemplified as executive function difficulties, become more apparent as the complexity and conceptual depth of the academic curriculum increase.

The impact of an executive function deficit on students with learning difficulties reflects on academic performance in different areas such as reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics, study skills, and test taking. For instance, written expression includes successive executive function skills ranging from identification of the mechanical skills to planning and jotting the outline, organization, and development of well-structured, cohesive topics (Graham & Harris, 2011; Schumaker & Deshler, 2009).

Working memory helps students with learning disabilities understand the syntactic structure of texts. The effect of intervention to improve syntactical ability and thus reading comprehension and the relationship to working memory capacity were investigated in the study by Standford and Delage (2019). The intervention targeted how students understood wh-questions and relative clauses. Results indicated that students with working memory deficit revealed more difficulty understanding syntactical structures, which affected comprehension level.

The causative relationship between working memory and learning difficulties was explored in the study by Zakopoulou, Sarris, Zaragkas, Tsampalas, and Vergou (2019). Correlational analysis by Pearson Chi-Square (34.737, $p = 0.000$) indicated that students with learning difficulties scored significantly lesser than typical students, suggesting a strong relation between working memory and learning difficulties.

A study examined the relationship between executive functions and reading comprehension for students with learning difficulties. The sample comprised 29 students from the third through ninth grades. Results revealed significant correlations between reading comprehension and executive function skills ranging from moderate to high. The highest performance was in selective attention and working memory (Porto Bovo, Franco de Lima, Pinto da Silva, & Ciasca, 2016).

The quasi-experimental pretest-posttest research design study with a control group by Bardideh, Bardideh, Sharif, and Abdekhodaei (2020) investigated the role of social emotional learning training in enhancing cognitive emotion regulation with students with learning difficulties. Participates included all females from fourth till sixth grades. The mindfulness sessions were carried over for 12 sessions of 90 minutes each. Results indicated a decrease in the means of the negative regulation strategies from pre-test ($M = 27.60$) to post-test ($M = 13.80$) for the experimental group. Whereas, the decrease was less for the control group from pre-test ($M = 27.13$) to post-test ($M = 26.33$). This implies that after training, the use of negative regulation strategies decreased for the experimental group. The means for using positive regulation strategies increased from pre-test ($M = 21.06$) to post-test ($M = 37.46$) for the experimental group, and there was a non-significant difference from pre-test ($M = 21.20$) to post-test ($M = 20.60$) for the control group. There was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups after controlling for pre-test on the use of negative strategies for emotion regulation ($F = 285.49$, $p < .001$), and ($F = 588.03$, $p < .001$) for the use of positive

emotion regulation strategies by utilizing one-way analysis of covariance. Simply put, mindfulness training significantly increased the deployment of positive cognitive regulation techniques, and decreased the use of negative emotion regulation strategies.

Felver, Felver, Margolis, Ravitch, Romer, and Horner (2017) examined the effectiveness of the Soles of the Feet (SOF) social emotional learning program among students receiving special education services. Students revealed a low academic engagement level and an elevated level of disruptive behavior. Participants were four students in the fourth, sixth, and seventh grades. The students spent half of the school day in an inclusive class, and the other half in a self-contained special education classroom.

The experimental design was a pre-test, post-test, single-subject research design. Behavior observation was conducted for one week to collect baseline data, and intervention was performed on an individual basis for every student. The intervention was carried out for 20–30 minute sessions each day. The SOF curriculum consists of mindful breathing, paying attention to the foot, activities to diminish robust emotional conditions, practices to maintain positive feelings, self-regulation to avoid negative feelings, and planning for practice to consider antecedent conditions that might lead to negative feelings and disruptive behavior.

The "non-overlap" of all pairs effect size statistic (NAP) before and after intervention was used to measure academic engagement. Results differed for every student ranging from 27.2% at baseline to 83.5% after SOF intervention. The NAP effect size ranged from 81% to 100%.

The social validity of SOF was established by both students and teachers. Students agreed with the statements in the questionnaire, such as "I liked doing Soles of the Feet" and "I think Soles of the Feet will help me do better in school." Teachers did not report any apparent difficulties in applying the SOF curriculum, and they would recommend the curriculum to other teachers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context

The study design is a true experimental pre-test/post-test design utilizing experimental and control groups. This experimental procedure allows for the study of the effect of a specific intervention on the outcomes. The intervention was implemented by employing the MindUp social emotional learning program to measure the change in the dependent variables, namely, emotional intelligence, working memory, selective attention, and reading comprehension, before and after the intervention. This design allows for random sampling to assure that both the experimental and control groups have an equal and objective opportunity to participate in the study.

3.2 Participants

The study sample was comprised of all fourth and fifth graders with learning difficulties in two inclusive schools in the Beirut area. The schools implement inclusive pedagogy for students with learning difficulties from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The schools have never systematically implemented a social emotional learning program. The total sample comprised 63 students, which constitutes ($n = 12.3\%$) of the total population.

Purposive sampling was used as a first sampling technique since the researcher deliberately selected all students with learning difficulties as they are all diagnosed with working memory, selective attention, and reading comprehension deficits. Random sampling was employed as a second sampling technique to divide the sample between the experimental and control groups. The sample of 63 students consisted of 32 fourth graders, and 31 fifth graders (45 boys, and 18 girls), ranging in age from 9years and 3months to 11years and 5months. The experimental group number was ($N = 30$, 20 males, and 10 females), and the control group number was ($N = 33$, 25 males, and 8 females). The mean age of fourth graders

was 9 years, 7 months, and that of fifth graders was 10 years, 5 months. Table 1 details the descriptive characteristics of the final sample.

Table 1

Descriptive Information of the Participating Students

Grade	Experimental N=30			Control N= 33		
	N **n(%)**	**Males**	**Females**	**N** **n(%)**	**Males**	**Females**
Fourth	14 (22.2)	**7**	**7**	18 (28.6)	**12**	**6**
Fifth	16 (25.4)	**13**	**3**	15 (23.8)	**13**	**2**

3.3 Procedures

The procedure consisted of three implementation phases. The first phase was the administration of the tests to collect data for pre-test scores at baseline before intervention.

The testing session started with explaining the purpose of the testing, and clarifying that the tests are not related to school work and are not graded. It was made clear that students could ask questions to ensure adequate understanding due to comprehension problems. The reading comprehension, selective attention, and Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) were administered to all students at the same time since they listened to and followed the same instructions. The reading comprehension test required students to complete sentences with the right word depending on the context of each sentence. During the selective attention test, students had to circle the two identical letters or strings of letters in rows of distracters. This test has a time limit of three minutes. The working memory test was individually administered because students needed to recall information according to specific instructions for each item. The average time to administer the working memory test was 15 minutes. The researcher corrected and scored the tests to obtain the raw scores for working memory and selective attention before entering the data on the online scoring program for the Wood-cock Johnson IV of Cognitive Ability and the Wood-cock Johnson IV Test of Achievement for reading comprehension. The online scoring programs convert the raw scores into standardized scores, age and grade equivalent levels, and percentile ranks. The percentile ranks describe the individual's performance relative to all individuals at the same age level in the population.

The SSEIT was manually corrected and scored, and the results were tabulated. After coding the response forms with numbers and removing any identifying information, the researcher gave the responses to the data analyst specialist for analysis on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The second phase was the implementation of the MindUp social emotional learning curriculum by the researcher. The 15 lessons were covered in 30 sessions of one hour and a half each, held twice weekly. Sessions included application of the activities as delineated in the lessons, and students engaged in several strategies such as brainstorming, role playing, and cooperative learning.

The third phase included the administration of the same tests to the experimental group to test the hypotheses. The same steps of administration and scoring were applied as in the first phase to collect the post-test data.

3.4 Instrumentations

Measurement tools included the MindUp social-emotional learning program, the Schutte Self Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), the Wood-cock Johnson IV Tests of Cognitive Abilities (WJ IV), and the Wood-cock Johnson IV Tests of Achievement.

The MindUP Program: The program was developed by renowned experts in the fields of neuroscience, social emotional learning, mindfulness, and positive psychology (Jones, Brush, Bailey, Brion-Meisels, McIntyre, Kahn, Nelson, & Stickle, 2017). It is based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) social emotional learning framework (CASEL, 2020). The program consists of four units comprised of 15 lessons.

The Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT): The test originated from the model proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990). The test included three discrete emotional intelligence factors: understanding and expression of emotions in oneself and others, emotion regulation in oneself and others, and emotion deployment in problem solving (Schutte, Malouff, & Bhullar, 2009). The test encompasses 33 items on a five-point Lickert type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree)* to 5 (*strongly agree).* Total scores are calculated for all items, with the scoring of items 5, 28, and 33 reversed. For instance, if the answer was 1 = *strongly disagree* for item 33, "It is difficult for me to understand why people feel the way they do," then it would be scored as 5 = *strongly agree*. Scores can range from 33 to 165; the higher the score, the greater the indication of more emotional intelligence characteristics.

The Woodcock-Johnson IV (WJ IV) Tests of Cognitive Abilities: The test includes 18 subtests that measure different cognitive abilities to determine general intellectual ability. Two subtests were utilized in this study. The Verbal Attention subtest was used to measure working memory. Tasks require students to store and manipulate information according to instructions. Students are exposed to a number of intertwined series of animal names and digits. They store the series in their immediate memory and work on the series in order to answer a specific question about each series. For example, the student may hear the sequence "Dog, 5, 2, Cat,..." and then respond to the question "What is the second number?" The test consists of 36 items, scoring 1 for the correct answer and 0 for the incorrect one. The series becomes increasingly difficult as the number of digits and names increases.

The Letter-Pattern matching subtest comprises 84 items. It measures the ability in selective attention. Students were given three minutes to circle the two identical letters or groups of letters among the distracters. For example, students circle "bl" in the series "bl va dl bl na." The items range from simple series with single letters and distracters to more difficult series of four-letter patterns.

The Wood-cock Johnson IV (WJ IV) Tests of Achievement: The test (Schrank & Mather, McGrew, 2014) includes 20 tests that cover reading, reading comprehension, mathematics, spelling, written language, science, social studies, humanities, and fluency in reading, mathematics, and writing. The tests can be used to determine performance level, diagnose specific learning difficulties, and inform educational planning (Schrank et al., 2014).

The passage comprehension test consists of 52 items. It requires students to recognize and write the missing word first in sentences and then in paragraphs. The items become more difficult in terms of increasing passage length, vocabulary level, and complexity of sentence structure. In this manner, performance reflects comprehension through the ability to utilize contextual cues to write down the correct word.

3.5 Data Analyses

The data obtained from scores on the pre-tests and post-tests of the different tests were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25). Descriptive statistical analysis was used to test the first three hypotheses to investigate the effect of the MindUP social emotional program on the experimental group in comparison to the control group on the dependent variables, namely,

emotional intelligence, selective attention, and working memory. The independent sample t-test was used to compare the means of the experimental and control groups with respect to the effect of the MindUP program. The paired sample test was used to further examine whether the individual characteristics of each student with learning difficulties might yield different outcomes.

Inferential statistics employed multiple regressions using ANOVA analysis to determine which of the variables, namely, selective attention and working memory, is a better predictor of reading comprehension achievement. It is used to answer hypotheses four and five.

4. Results

Independent sample t-test results indicated a significant huge effect for the MindUp social emotional learning program in comparison to the control group with respect to all the dependent variables, namely emotional intelligence, working memory, and selective attention at p < .05 (Table 1). Leven's test was used to test for equality of variance to determine the equivalency of the experimental and control groups. Accordingly, the t-tests and p values were computed. Table 2 provides the results of the first three hypotheses:

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Experimental and Control Groups

Measure	Experimental					Control				
	M	N	SD	Difference	SE	M	N	SD	Difference	SE
Emotional Intelligence	137.53	30	9.84	55.35	3.076	82.18	33	13.990	55.35	3.076
Selective Attention	98.93	30	9.62	19.81	4.031	79.12	33	20.074	19.81	4.031
Working Memory	112.00	30	6.07	28.12	1.975	83.88	33	9.134	28.12	1.975
Reading Comprehension	52.77	30	7.45	0.56	1.988	52.21	33	8.263	0.56	1.988

Results indicated that the experimental mean is greater than the control mean on reading comprehension, but the difference is not significant. The experimental mean ($M = 52.77$, $SD = 8.253$), in comparison to the control group ($M = 52.21$, $SD = 8.253$), $t (61) = 0.282$, d = 0.07, $P = .7792 > .05$

Paired sample t-test was used to measure the effect of the intervention at two separate times for the experimental group. It determines if there is a statistical proof that the mean difference between paired observations is substantially different from zero. Results indicated a statistically significant positive effect of training on the MindUp social emotional learning program on emotional intelligence, working memory, and selective attention.

The mean of emotional intelligence increased significantly from pretest to posttest at p <.05 (M = 82.20, SD = 22.43) to (M = 137.53, SD = 9.84). Similarly, there was an increase in the mean at p < .05 from ($M = 82.83$, $SD = 9.34$), to ($M = 98.93$, $SD = 9.62$) for selective attention, and from (M = 81.50, SD = 9.88), to ($M = 112.00$, $SD = 6.07$) for working memory at P < .05.

Multiple regression results indicated that the relationship between emotional intelligence and working memory had a significant effect on reading comprehension, $F (1, 28) = 6.16$, p = 0.019. Emotional intelligence was excluded because the effect was non-significant on reading comprehension, neither alone nor together with working memory. Table 3 shows

that the predictive variable working memory explains 15.1% of the variance in reading comprehension (adjusted R square = 15.1%).

Table 3

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimates
	4.25ᵃ	.180	.151	6.868

a. Predictors: (Constant), Working Memory

Emotional intelligence was excluded from the regression because its effect on the dependent variable, reading comprehension, is not significant, neither alone nor together with working memory (p = 0.128 > 0.05).

Regarding hypothesis five, there was a non-significant effect for emotional intelligence, neither alone nor in combination with selective attention, on reading comprehension. In addition, the effect of emotional intelligence on selective attention was not statistically significant $F (1, 28) = 0.15$, $p = .705 > .05$.

4. Discussion

The primary research objective of the study was to investigate the probable effect of the relationship between emotional intelligence and executive functions on reading comprehension for students with learning difficulties in the Lebanese context.

Overall findings revealed a significant effect of training on the MindUp social emotional learning on emotional intelligence and executive skills, namely working memory and selective attention. This can be deemed remarkable considering the small size of the students.

There was no effect of the relationship between emotional intelligence and executive functions on reading comprehension. However, ANOVA results revealed an effect for one predictable variable, which is working memory on reading comprehension. Similarly, emotional intelligence and selective attention had a non-significant effect on reading comprehension.

The findings support the first three hypotheses. The results resonate with the research on social emotional learning and emotional intelligence for students with learning difficulties (Hassani & Schwab, 2021; Malboeuf-Hurtubise Lacourse, Herba, Taylor & Amor, 2017; Olson, 2018; Shihadih, 2019). This is very encouraging since students reveal a lower emotional intelligence level than typical students (Bahramiyan, Maktabi, and Morovati, 2014).

The data supported the hypothesis that social-emotional learning interventions foster emotional intelligence, which in turn improves learned helplessness. Training on topics such as "mindful awareness," "focused awareness," and "mindful listening" changed students' responses on the Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SREIT). For instance, their rating scores increased on items such as "I expect that I will do well on most things I try," "I have control over my emotions," and "When I am faced with a challenge; I give up because I believe I will fail." This implies that emotional intelligence can contribute to enhancing learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is the result of an external locus of control because students attribute their success to external factors such as easy tests or kind teachers. For example, students with reading difficulty believe that their problems cannot be enhanced with practice and effort (Koles & Boyle, 2013).

Findings revealed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups on working memory. This is in accordance with the findings of Ghorbani & Jabbari (2020) study, which found that social emotional learning training reduced anxiety levels, which affected working memory capacity by increasing attention to one's own feelings and thoughts in students with learning difficulties.

The effect on selective attention is consistent with the study by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015), who found an increase in inhibitory control and selective attention after intervention through the MindUp social-emotional program with fourth and fifth grade students with learning difficulties. The effect of mindfulness training through a social emotional program on the impulsivity of students with learning disabilities suggests a benefit on attention processes, including selective attention (Alqarni & Hammad, 2021).

The result of the non-significant impact of emotional intelligence on reading comprehension can be explained by the relationship between the development of emotional intelligence and age. Emotional intelligence is nurtured through both informal interactions in life, and regular education to foster the use and understanding of emotion vocabulary, and learn effective emotion regulation strategies (Brackett, & Cipriano, 2021). The authors contend also that emotional intelligence takes time to develop and should be cultivated in all contexts, of home, school, and the workplace. From this perspective and the characteristics of students with learning difficulties, it can be extrapolated that the effect of emotional intelligence on performance requires more time.

The results were not in accord with expectations concerning the effect of emotional intelligence on reading comprehension, since previous studies indicated a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and reading comprehension at the secondary level (Bryant, 2007; Hermawati, 2018). Nachshon and Horowitz-Kraus (2019) found a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and reading comprehension. Nonetheless, this could be explained by the characteristics of the students at the elementary and secondary levels.

The extant research revealed partial support for the fourth hypothesis since only working memory had an effect on reading comprehension. The multiple regression conducted indicated that only working memory explained 15.1% of the variance in reading comprehension. Whereas, emotional intelligence was excluded from the model because, neither alone nor in combination with working memory, had an effect on reading comprehension.

The role of working memory in reading comprehension is depicted in this study, where working memory accounted for 18.1% of the variance in reading comprehension for the control group. Another explanation for the results is the effect of individual variations in working memory capacity and learning English as a second language, in accordance with the study by Shin (2020). The present results imply the feasibility to predicting reading comprehension problems by employing working memory because it facilitates early diagnosis and intervention.

The relationship between working memory and reading comprehension was established in the study by Swanson, Orosco, and Kudo (2017). The executive factor of working memory was significantly related to reading comprehension in students with reading difficulties in the first, second, and third grades for English as a second language. Implications from this research coincide with the results of this study as it relate to the sample of the study in terms of reading difficulty and learning English as a second language. Multiple regression analysis for factors affecting reading comprehension for secondary students with learning difficulties indicated a positive correlation between working memory and reading comprehension (Sanford, 2015).

The contribution of working memory to reading comprehension is supported by research delineating the effect of training on working memory and improvement in reading comprehension. Working memory intervention was conducted through different memory tasks such as repetition of digit sequences and pseudo words with fourth and fifth grade students with comprehension difficulties (Novaes, Zuanetti, & Fukuda, 2019). Furthermore, the results of the study by Nicolielo-Carrilho, Crenitte, Lopes-Herrera & Hage, (2018) were in consensus with the results of this study. The authors found an effective correlation between metacognitive skills, working memory, and reading comprehension for students with learning difficulties aged eight to 12 years. Working memory was the only significant predictor of reading comprehension in comparison to selective attention and cognitive flexibility.

The relationship between emotional intelligence and selective attention did not indicate an effect for any of the predictive variables on reading comprehension. This result conforms to some research and contradicts with the others. A variability of results was found by Follmer (2017) since some studies indicated a positive correlation between selective attention and reading comprehension, while other studies revealed a non-significant correlation.

The results of the study by Parker (2021) are in consensus with this research. The author examined whether selective attention and self-regulation contribute to the variance in reading comprehension beyond word recognition and language comprehension. According to the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analyses and moderation effects tests, selective attention contributed a greater percentage of variance in reading comprehension for students with normal language histories than for students with language difficulties.

It is doubtful that low ability to select relevant information from irrelevant one will not hinder reading comprehension. It is plausible that in this specific sample, students have delays in the underlying skills of reading comprehension, such as low fluency rate and poor vocabulary level (Kendeou, McMaster, & Christ, 2016). In addition, reading comprehension scores might be affected by the nature of the test used because it does not include connected texts to choose from. The results of this research could be explained by the indirect effect of inhibitory control on reading comprehension through decoding and text recall/inference abilities (Ober Brooks, Plass, & Homer, 2019), because of the deficits in these two skills in children with learning difficulties. In this research, students with learning difficulties were not directly assessed for text recall, but the assessment results from the preview reports indicated difficulty in recalling events.

The results of the paired t-tests revealed that social emotional learning had a significant impact on emotional intelligence, working memory, and selective attention, regardless of the students' individual differences. The practical implication is that social emotional learning can be implemented with all levels of learning difficulties.

An indirect but noteworthy implication is the viability of social emotional learning interventions to improve self-advocacy and self-determination, as depicted in previous research (Kurdi, Joussemet & Mageau, 2021).

Although the findings do not support all the hypotheses, they provide evidence on the effect of social emotional learning on emotional intelligence and executive functions and the predictive effect of working memory on reading comprehension. The outcomes of this study have the potential to make teachers of students with learning difficulties conscious of the importance of social emotional learning skills and their contribution to students' success. In addition, results would foster collaboration between special education and general education teachers to advocate for the needs of their shared students and to incorporate social emotional learning programs into pedagogical practices.

6. Conclusion

The role of the relationship between emotional intelligence, working memory, and selective attention as executive functions skills on reading comprehension of students with learning difficulties in the Lebanese context can be considered negligible in the experiential research. This study draws on the research about the impact of social emotional learning on emotional intelligence and executive functions as an essential step to examine the effect of the predicted variables of emotional intelligence and working memory, and emotional intelligence and selective attention, on reading comprehension.

The main hypothetical contribution of this study has been the association between social emotional learning, emotional intelligence, and executive functions and the relevance of the implementation of these practices in inclusive classrooms. It verified that social emotional learning can improve emotional intelligence and executive functions and subsequently, that the

relationship between these two constructs might have an effect on reading comprehension for students with learning difficulties.

The findings add to our understanding of the potency of social emotional learning for students with learning difficulties in reducing the stigma imposed by the learning difficulty and equipping students with copying skills to better perceive their difficulties and improve self-efficacy. Integration of emotional intelligence training would help foster self-determination when students realize that they are the causal agents of their success.

Findings support the notion that the ability to identify emotional clues is allied with enhanced social skills, as students are more apt to interpret social clues and react in a more appropriate manner. Improved empathy might lead to more enjoyable friendships and enhanced social relations in school for students with learning difficulties (Magaldi & Park-Taylor, 2016). Integration of social emotional learning programs in the general education curriculum can be a tremendously practical way to enhance students' social skills and behaviors, and provide teachers with tools for classroom management. Also, training is important for students without learning difficulties since it would increase empathy for example, which is necessary to know how to interact with students with learning difficulties in the inclusive classroom (Bratitsis & Ziannas, 2015).

Social emotional learning was effective in improving working memory and selective attention of students with learning difficulties. Thus, social emotional learning can be employed as a training program to improve working memory and selective attention for students with learning difficulties as they play an important role in academic achievement. One conclusion is the relation between emotions and working memory. This assumption is supported in the study by Mikels & Reuter-Lorenz (2019) who found that working memory can regulate emotions, and feelings can be the mental images preserved by working memory. In the same vein, we can deduce that assessing working memory is essential to predict reading comprehension problems since it facilitates early recognition of learning difficulty indicators and promotes early intervention practices.

The emphasis of future research would be to delve more deeply into the role of social emotional learning in the education of students with and without learning difficulties in the Lebanese context. As a result, it is recommended that professional development programs include social emotional and emotional intelligence skills training for both regular and special education teachers in order to use them in intervention plans, as both are accountable for teaching in the inclusive classroom. Another aspect is to weave social emotional learning programs into the intervention plans; thus, the individualized education programs of students with learning difficulties should include objectives to investigate the effect of intervention when applied through all content areas. Parent training is necessary to raise awareness about their role in the growth of social emotional skills because home is the first place where children explore emotions in their daily interactions.

It is proposed to conduct a longitudinal study on the students of this research to examine how they generalize the use of the skills to cope in middle and secondary cycles, to know if they utilize social emotional learning and emotional intelligence skills to achieve better, and to investigate if they maintain their skills in the absence of systematic implementation of social emotional learning programs. Concurrent with this, long term intervention across scholastic years to improve emotional intelligence is necessary to maintain good emotional levels, as suggested in the study by Cantero et al. (2020).

In the same vein, the evidence from this study endorses the importance of revisiting the Lebanese Curriculum to include social emotional learning and emotional intelligence skills since they help children to cope with certain raising issues. For example, issues related to the economic situation that triggers family discord and begot unmet needs as a result of the parents' incapability to meet all the children's demands as a result of the devaluation of the national

currency are considered factors that affect performance and behavior in schools (Lyu, Li & Xie, 2019). Also, the COVID-19 outbreak and its aftermath on psychological well-being, and the lack of students' connectedness with their friends and relatives justify the significance of the incorporation of social emotional learning, and emotional intelligence skills into the curriculum.

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